EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF GRADUATE STUDIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PARENTHOOD

by

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Abstract

This narrative journey explores the ways in which five parents and a researcher experienced the phenomenon of graduate studies within the context of parenthood. The study uses Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to examine, deconstruct, analyze, and gain insight into dominant themes and Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R narrative elements of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation to illustrate the researcher's own awakened perspective. The research question for exploration is *How do graduate student parents navigate lived experiences in both parenthood and graduate studies?* The inquiry broadens the field by focusing not only on motherhood (as is typically found in the research) but also parenthood, recognizing that while the experiences of parents are not identical, they likely share similar elements. It addresses how participants balance their lives as graduate students and parents simultaneously. It draws attention to participants' relationships both academic and personal, how their roles compete, and how their journeys have evolved over time. Personal, practical, and social recommendations are offered; these include establishing realistic expectations of parenting and school responsibilities, offering on-site childcare spaces, and providing more consistent and equitable access to financial supports may prompt positive change for graduate students and academic institutions.

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Thank you to each of my participants for your willingness to engage in research that I believe shares important insights into life as a graduate student parent.

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CHAPTER ONE

A HIGHER CALLING

> *Some days I do it well, other days I do not but I am largely happy trying to manage adequately all of my multiple rhythmic spaces as a woman, mother, teacher, and graduate student. In essence, I am becoming a whole person*. (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013, p. 147)

I am a mother, a graduate student, a daughter, a teacher, a colleague, a narrative researcher, and a research participant. Without a doubt, these roles and identities intersect, overlap, and weave together to make me whole. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore all of these roles despite their overwhelming significance; it is toward my identities as graduate student and parent that I now shift my gaze. Sharing this story serves as the portal through which I enter the world of graduate studies and parenthood, and a means by which my experience is "interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477), ultimately helping me to build relationships, enhance connections, and enrich and transform my life (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006).

I now understand that the themes that emerged throughout my initial narrative reveal (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, 2014)–the need for connection, home, authority, a question, self-care, authenticity, and support in my life–were guiding forces in my literature review, my methodology, my story gathering and representation, my thematic analysis, and even the way I approached the multiple revisions of this dissertation. That revelation, however (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, 2014), will have to wait for future chapters. To tell you what I have learned, I reveal my narrative beginnings (Clandinin & Caine, 2012): what initially led me to pursue a PhD and how I arrived at my dissertation topic.

Narrative Beginnings

I made the choice to apply for a PhD, and to my delight, I was accepted. As will become evident, I did not intend to research graduate studies within the context of parenthood. As my course work proceeded, however, I was increasingly motivated by the need to make visible my experience of graduate studies and parenthood, to find a legitimate space to tell my story, and to enrich and transform my experience of graduate studies within the context of parenthood. The further I reached into my own experiences, the more I realized that I could not do this in isolation, and that is ultimately how my inquiry was conceived.

Yearning for Connection

In January 2007, as a fourth-year undergraduate education student, I embarked on a life-changing journey to Kenya, East Africa. I was excited to teach in a rural school setting and to interact with children from another country. As a passionate and energetic Canadian teacher candidate, I imagined how much these young Kenyan children would learn from me. After two long flights and an off-road adventure, I quickly discovered that I would learn much more from the children in Kenya than they would ever learn from me. I will never forget the welcome we received from the entire community upon our arrival; in our honour, there was a joyous celebration including singing, dancing, and clapping. Never in my life have I felt so welcomed into a new environment; it was truly an emotional introduction to the Kenyan way of life. As I learned more about Kenyan culture, I came to respect and cherish the traditions held by the community. All monumental life events–birth, death, and marriage–were celebrated wholeheartedly by the community. If a baby was born, everyone in the community would stop what they were doing to bring food and acknowledge the new family

member. The connection between family and friends was palpable, and I yearned to bring this home with me. I was determined to learn from this experience and build my life on a foundation of meaningful relationships, dialogue, and mutual respect, both personally and professionally.

My time in Kenya reinforced the essence of family/love and reminded me about what truly matters in life. The close familial and community bonds I witnessed in Maasai Mara inspired me to continually make an effort to stay in touch with my own family and friends when I returned to Canada. Relationships are the essence of family and at the core of my individual identity; I value love demonstrated as interest, care, ongoing support through good and challenging times, and unwavering loyalty.

Yearning for Home

On December 8, 2009, my husband and I lost our house to a devastating house fire. Our neighbours saw smoke coming from our garage and called 911; by the time the volunteer fire department arrived, our house was fully engulfed in flames. It burned to the foundation. There was nothing left.

No one was in the house when the fire broke out; we did not yet have children or pets. To this day, I still get goosebumps looking at the fire photos. I truly believe that everything in life happens for a reason, but it took a long while to understand why we lost our house. I did not care much about the furniture, the clothes, the appliances, or even the walls. What I was most upset about was the loss of my journals and my photos–the stuff of life that could never be replaced. Our community stood behind us, and as we came to terms with being homeless, they brought food and well wishes. One co-worker brought us a pot of homemade

soup. When we tried to return the pot and say thank you, we were told, “No please, keep the pot.” To this day, I make soup every week. It is the most cherished and used pot we own.

Time has softened the angst and has helped me come to terms with the fire. Although devastating, the fire strengthened my relationship with my husband and confirmed the insignificance of material possessions, reaffirming the power of connection and relationships in my life. As we rebuilt our house, I often recalled the connection between family and friends in Kenya, and I came to understand that a house is simply a building, whereas a home is built on a foundation of meaningful relationships, dialogue, and mutual respect.

Yearning for Authority

When I started my career as an occasional teacher, I struggled with the difference between power and authority in the classroom. I mistakenly thought the key to success and getting students to listen and respect me was power, and I did not feel that I had authority with the students sitting in front of me. One day, I received a call to teach at a challenging rural school that had a reputation of intimidating occasional teachers due to the number of behavioural incidents reported and classroom management challenges. I hesitantly took the job and drove to the school. When I arrived, I was greeted by the principal who escorted me to the Grade 7/8 classroom at the back of the school. The principal discussed how difficult it was to find occasional teachers. Not teaching the second grade, as originally contracted, I was anxious and nervous.

When the bell rang, I could hear running in the hallways, and the students entered the classroom yelling and pushing one another. I calmly handed out the worksheets the teacher had left, knowing full well that the Grade 7/8 students would have limited interest. I struggled to maintain control of the classroom all morning and was counting down the

minutes until lunchtime. After lunch, the class was scheduled to learn about geography, so I decided to approach the lesson differently. Once everyone was sitting down, I began by telling the class about my trip to Kenya, East Africa, and my experience teaching there the year before. The students were so engaged! I was shocked. They asked questions and were genuinely interested in my experiences teaching abroad, and we spent the lesson discussing similarities and differences between education in Canada and Africa.

At the end of the day, the educational assistant who was in the classroom for the afternoon pulled me aside and said, "I have never seen those students sit and listen to someone like that before." That day, I realized that "Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out" (Palmer, 1998, p. 34). Instead of playing a scripted part, I opened myself up and used my own life in order to connect with students' hearts and gain attention, not power. "Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a capacity for connectedness" (Palmer, 1998, p.11). I learned that professional lives, like personal lives, are grounded in a foundation of care, trust, respect, and integrity (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016).

Eventually, I taught my own elementary school classroom. Teaching Grade 4 was the most exhausting, all-consuming, and challenging thing I had done to that point in my life. As a first-year teacher, I was sick all the time; I attracted whatever virus was going around. In addition, I had a lot of unanswered questions about assessment, how to involve families and caregivers, and how to support so many diverse needs in a single classroom.

In the end, I decided to enroll in a Master of Education program to delve deeper into the education system and develop my own thinking about what it means to be a teacher. I

wrote my thesis about my personal transformation while teaching in a developing nation (Anderson, 2009). My Master's program, while educative and enjoyable, left me with even more questions. I felt a calling that I could not ignore.

Yearning for a Question

An opportunity to teach at the university-level became available, and I decided that this would allow me to connect with hundreds of teacher candidates and support them as they explored their teaching identities and educational philosophies. Sharing my love of health and physical education with teacher candidates, I began to think about implementing this passion in my PhD work. My love of the outdoors, eating healthy, and being active was passed down from my parents. As I began to search for a question, I wondered if a PhD was the right fit for me. I reminisced about the lessons learned from Kenya, the house fire, and even my experiences in the classroom with children, all of which reminded me of the importance of connection and relationships in my life.

Teaching in the elementary system, I was unimpressed with the amount of time, resources, and significance assigned to health and physical education. I began to facilitate health and physical education courses at the university to support teacher candidates in creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces that facilitated learning. My first thoughts were to research childhood obesity from a qualitative point of view, but I was unsure how to obtain ethical approval. In retrospect, I realize that while this was a curiosity, it was not one that I felt would sustain me through years of research and writing. I can trace this doubt to my second-year PhD summer residency during which time I noted that, "The thought of writing a dissertation is daunting at times" (First-year PhD residency journal, July 2, 2014). I admitted that I was not passionate about this topic. The daunting nature of writing a

dissertation compelled me to keep searching for a topic that would sustain me. I knew the time commitment was intense, and required determination and stamina. My greatest fear was beginning a doctorate and not finishing. I did not want to contribute to the PhD statistics of those who start but are never awarded their degree. I was overwhelmed by the length and depth of a dissertation, not to mention, slightly intimidated by the writing.

I wanted to be like a tree, growing and setting down roots each year. I wanted "my dissertation to be an extension of myself and something that I feel incredibly invested in and passionate about" (1st-year PhD residency journal, July 2, 2014). Later that week, when I least expected it, I found inspiration and a powerful research curiosity:

> As I sit on the comfortable brown leather chair in our living room breastfeeding my three-month old son, my mind starts to wander. Staring off into the abyss, I am inundated with thoughts about what to research and how to develop my all-important question. My thoughts are turbulent as I try to make sense of where my paradigm fits and how to articulate it. Suddenly, my thoughts are brought back to the present, as I am interrupted by the reality of where I am and what I'm doing. I can see milk spraying in an arc formation and when I look down, my son is looking up at me smiling from ear to ear. As I relish in the moment, all I can do is laugh and tell my son that he is funny as I try to stop the milk from flowing. It is here, during this organized chaos, that my "aha" moment arrives, and my topic becomes crystal clear. My lived experience of motherhood had been lying in front of me the whole time, and it is time to acknowledge it and start writing. I can see the working title now: *Dirty Diapers and Dissertations: The Balancing Act of Female Professionals*. Questions

> flood my mind, but they will have to wait … as right now, I have other more important work to do. (Second-year PhD residency journal, July 4, 2015)

After experiencing this "aha" moment, I realized that I both wanted and needed to speak with other graduate student parents to listen, discuss, learn, reflect on, and recontextualize my own personal journey. My passion and emotions, not to mention lived experiences, led me to the topic of motherhood. I began with *How does motherhood affect the lived experiences of women in doctoral programs?* I allowed the idea of researching motherhood to percolate for a while until I discovered the extent to which the research literature represents mothers working in academia (Baker Sipes, 2010; Careless, 2012; Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Laney, Carruthers, Hall, & Anderson, 2014; Mills, 2008; Sallee, 2013; Sotirin, 2008). As I continued to write around and through my curiosity, my focus shifted to the experiences of mothers and fathers, recognizing that each has their own unique challenges and stories to share. I settled on *How do graduate student parents navigate lived experiences in both parenthood and graduate studies?* Again, I found myself recalling my life experiences; I realized that what I needed most was the connection and acceptance of community as I embarked on the graduate student parent journey. More importantly, I suspected there were others who felt the same way.

Yearning for Self-Care

During my second-year residency, I navigated life with a newborn while attending classes and learning to breastfeed. Self-care was in short supply; I was continually searching for sleep, physical nourishment, and emotional well-being. Self-care is prevalent in the graduate student literature (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008; Tiu Wu, 2013); increasingly my attention shifted from completing assignments to

nurturing my son and caring for my self as new mother. As I watched my son smile and crawl for the first time, I knew that I had a research question to love, and from that point, I never looked back. During my third year, my son and I took baby steps together (Parr, 2017). He navigated the hallways in our home while I navigated the library collection to complete my comprehensive exams. We took each day as it came and had a lot of fun along the way.

Being pregnant with my second baby proved exhausting; I found myself writing at different times, and my stress levels were high with a university strike and a heavy teaching load. As the baby continued kicking, I kept moving forward by applying for ethical approval so I could start interviewing parents. My son and I continued to take baby steps together; he continued to develop new relationships at childcare while I learned to revise my research proposal. We were both coming out of our shells and surrounding ourselves with supportive and positive people. In many ways, graduate school taught me to advocate for myself and speak up when I felt my needs were not being met–dispositions I knew that I would one day share with my children.

Giving birth to my daughter was a much better experience overall, because I self-advocated, and she was delivered at home where I was more comfortable. Life with one child was busy, but life with two children changed everything, and I had not anticipated the conflict of napping and feeding schedules. The time I once devoted to school work when my son napped was now replaced with feeding my daughter. The challenge of surviving life with a colicky baby impacted every aspect of my life. Sneaking interviews with graduate student parents into the quiet times helped me focus on something beyond the crying. And there was lots of it–mine and hers.

Eventually, my daughter and I progressed together; she learned to nap during the day while I transcribed interviews. After eight months of little-to-no sleep, she finally slept through the night while I drafted each chapter in small increments of time. Although my graduate school experience did not line up perfectly with parenthood or vice versa, I would not change a thing.

Yearning for Authenticity

Throughout both of my pregnancies, I read many books. I read books about how to be the very best mother, how to do graduate research, how to be a graduate student. I even read books completely unrelated to my current topic.[1] I found myself nodding in agreement, laughing out loud, shaking my head with disapproval, tearing up, and feeling discouraged at how many stories focused on the sacrifices and challenges of being a working parent in academia.

I then jumped into the research literature in order to understand the field globally. I began by reading books about men and women in academia, graduate school, and parenthood.[2] Armed with this new knowledge, I branched out to review dissertations and journal articles. And then, as new books became available, I engaged in the slow iterative process of reading again, checking references, always returning to the literature.[3]

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[1] *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books* by Ann Douglas; *Composing a Life* by Mary Catherine Bateson; *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* by Ellyn Satter; *Girl With a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier; *Sarah's Key* by Tatiana De Rosnay; *All Joy and No Fun: The Modern Paradox of Modern Parenthood* by Jennifer Senior; and *The M Word: Conversations About Motherhood* edited by Kerry Clare

[2] *Mothers in Academia* edited by Mari Castaneda and Kirsten Isgro; *Professor Mommy* by Rachel Connelly and Kristen Ghodsee; *Mothers on the Fast Track: How a New Generation Can Balance Family and Careers* by Mary Ann Mason and Eve Mason Ekman; *Academic Motherhood: How Faculty Manage Work and Family* by Kelly Warn and Lisa Wolf-Wendel

[3] *The Parent Track: Timing, Balance, and Choice in Academia* edited by DeRoche and Berger; *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life* edited by Evans and Grant; *Papa PhD: Essays on Fatherhood by Men in the Academy* edited by Marotte, Reynolds, and Savarese; *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower* by Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden.

Writing my literature review was more difficult than I imagined, but I refused to allow myself to be daunted by the literature (Becker, 2007). Much like building a house and a home, building a literature review is intensely messy at times. I learned that organization, structure, and routine were key factors to parenting success, so I applied the same approach to my literature review. I catalogued each piece of writing into a matrix, which was printed, cut apart, and grouped back together, ultimately arriving at a workable outline (see Appendix A). Eventually, each piece fit where it belonged, and I learned how to use various texts effectively, continually drawing on what I had learned from other parents I encountered in the literature and in real life. In the beginning, it was a definite struggle to make connections.

Yearning for Support

My family support system changed before enrolling in the PhD program. Within a one-year period, I lost my mother-in-law, my grandfather, and my dog. Family we had living in North Bay moved elsewhere, leaving just my husband and I in North Bay. Once we started a family, the loss of family close by loomed over me daily and consumed much of my energy. I quickly realized my husband would be the constant and unwavering support in my life and this PhD journey; he stood by me, challenged me, provided me with space, and has never judged me. His continual emotional, tangible, informational, and companionship support contributed to my success.

My PhD colleagues were a source of support throughout both summer residencies; as I became comfortable with other graduate student parents in my cohort, I began to ask them about their experiences raising children while pursuing graduate studies. I found it reassuring to hear stories of other graduate student parents who were struggling with some of the same things I experienced. I continued to listen in, seeking validation, comfort, and support within

their stories. As the summer residencies came to a close, I found myself alone and isolated, and I began to search for a legitimate space to explore and share my story without judgment or criticism (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010). I began to dig into the literature and reached out to other graduate student parents informally. The more I read and shared stories, the more I saw myself in the topic and I could relate to many of the common tensions and struggles. Hearing graduate student parents reflect on the choice between having a family and having a career, my determination kicked in. While I knew that it would be difficult to parent and attend graduate school simultaneously, I was not willing to give up.

I secured a supervisor who lived locally and was always available by email. From the beginning, we shared a mutual understanding that life happens, timelines needed to be adjusted, and goals broken into baby steps (Parr, 2016). I felt that her empathy as a former graduate student parent would serve me well, and I respected her expertise. Rounding out my supervisory committee, we reached out to individuals who were grounded in their own stories, and in the methods of narrative researchers.

Yearning for Meaning

I have always believed in the vital importance of story as told through lived experience (Clandinin, 2013). Some of my fondest childhood memories involve listening to my grandfather share stories about what life was like for him growing up. I specifically remember asking him, “How did the cottage come to be?” His face was illuminated as he spoke for two hours; after listening to his story, my brother and I had a greater understanding and appreciation for the place we were fortunate to visit each summer. The cottage was no longer just a place, it had deep personal meaning. Each time my grandfather retold the story, his eyes would light up with pride, and his lived and recalled experience changed (Dewey,

1916). In my search for meaning, I reached for Dewey (1916), Connelly and Clandinin (2006), and Ciuffetelli Parker (2013, 2014) to understand the complex interaction between story, experience, communication with others, and personal transformation. And that is where this story begins.

Research Question and Purpose of the Inquiry

Exploring and illuminating how graduate students experience graduate studies within the context of parenthood, I was guided by the following research question: *How do graduate student parents navigate lived experiences in both parenthood and graduate studies?* This narrative inquiry broadens the field by focusing not only on motherhood (as is typically found in the research) but also parenthood, recognizing that while the experiences of parents are not identical, they likely share similar elements. It addresses how participants balance their lives as graduate students and parents simultaneously. It draws attention to participants' relationships both academic and personal, how their roles compete, and how their journeys have evolved over time. It is my hope that this research can be used to promote understanding among the university community as well as to encourage others to share their stories acknowledging that the nature of graduate work can be isolating and lonely. This thesis may contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of graduate student parents, which may in turn improve the emotional and social supports offered by family and friends and the mental health and financial supports provided by universities.

In an article published by *University Affairs,* Jakubiec (2017), a graduate student parent, described the role conflict and guilt she felt: "Regardless of how hard we try, graduate student parents often feel at odds while trying to mend the gap between academia and parenthood, all while reconciling family and career goals" (para. 3). Finally, this inquiry

builds on current research literature that discusses the topics of negotiation/flexibility, compromise/challenges, and narratives of hope and possibility in graduate studies and parenthood (Baker Sipes, 2010; Black, 2017; Churchill, 2011, Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

Narrative Justifications for the Inquiry

As an emerging narrative researcher, I am called to offer three types of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Kim, 2016). The personal justification for narrative links this inquiry to my personal lived experiences and interests, and why this particular inquiry matters to me. The practical justification outlines how research can be "insightful to changing or thinking differently about a subject" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 25). Social justification focuses on the "*So what* and *who cares* questions important in all research undertakings" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 8).

The Personal

"For narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one's personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 122). I have learned that narrative inquiry, similar to graduate studies and parenthood, is not for the faint of heart, and it is most definitely "not a set of prescriptive skills or tasks to be carried out but rather as a mind-set–a set of attitudes, what Dewey (1933) called open-mindedness (seek alternatives), responsibility (recognizing consequences), and wholeheartedness (continual self-examination) (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 5). Intentionally placed at the beginning of my dissertation, my narrative beginnings offer personal justification for this inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Being a graduate student parent has been my lived reality from the first day I walked on campus and experienced my first graduate course. Being a parent has sustained me throughout my studies and being a graduate student has helped me through some difficult

parenting challenges. Parenthood and graduate school brought me to where I am today. On my own, the sharing of my story is just one voice; it is for this reason that I turn to the practical and social justifications for narrative inquiry.

The Practical

Practical justifications emphasize why an inquiry is important; the graduate student experience is significant to post-secondary institutions for issues related to recruitment, retention, reputation–the better the experience, the better the learning, and therefore, the better the reputation and the greater the likelihood of student retention and success. In addition to offering a deeper understanding of the graduate student experience, Clandinin (2013) suggests that part of the practical justification is to consider "the possibility of shifting or changing practice" (p. 36). Working toward more positive and personalized student experiences is part of almost every university's core values. For example, my host institution includes the following declaration at the beginning of their mission statement, "Nipissing University will provide an exceptional and personalized student experience within a collegial and diverse learning community" (Nipissing University, 2015, np).

My inquiry, along with other narrative inquiries (Brooks, 2013; Carter et al., 2013; Eisenbach, 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2015), embraces the experiences that parents bring to graduate school and advances conversations of sustaining and supporting this population throughout their scholarly journeys. Through my doctoral research, I contribute to the emerging discussion of sustaining graduate student parents rather than merely retaining them (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Peterson Brus, 2006; Sanders, 2008; Sotirin, 2008). My doctoral research might be used to strengthen the graduate student experience at both my host institution and beyond; the power of reflection and participating in graduate student culture are but two examples.

The Social

Social justification can be thought of in two ways: i) socially, or the way that an inquiry impacts social policies and social change; and ii) theoretically, in how the inquiry might contribute to new methodological and disciplinary knowledge (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). My doctoral research offers theoretical insight into the gendered experience of academic parenting that continues to prevail in the literature (Careless, 2012; Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Mills, 2008; Sallee, 2013; Sotirin, 2008). It contributes to the discussions of social, cultural, and physical differences that are discussed in the literature alongside tensions of care and career (Aubrey et al., 2008; Sotirin, 2008) and addresses issues of equity and social justice with regard to graduate student funding, family-welcoming spaces, and university policies and practices.

Overview of the Dissertation

My dissertation is organized into six chapters. This chapter opened with my narrative reveal (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, 2014) that situated me as both researcher and participant, followed by the purpose and significance of researching the experience of graduate student parents.

Chapter Two discusses the literature I reviewed and provides an overview of the topics related to parenthood and graduate studies for both men and women in academia. Four main topics were discovered in the literature, which include negotiation/flexibility, compromise/challenges/guilt, narratives of hope and possibility, and gendered experiences.

Chapter Three explores narrative inquiry as a research method and describes the theoretical frameworks for my inquiry. As a qualitative method, Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry influenced my research design and their three-dimensional framework

influenced my methodology, and data analysis. Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R narrative elements of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation provided a better understanding of the researcher's assumptions and mindset during graduate school and also offered a theoretical method and analysis of my own lived experience as a graduate student parent. Ethical considerations and complexities of narrative inquiry are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents the storied narratives of five graduate student parents and the researcher. I use narrative inquiry to illustrate the lived stories of graduate student parents as they negotiated their roles.

Chapter Five explores three cross-participant themes that emerged from the participants and the researcher in Chapter Four. The themes include the need for identity, self-efficacy, and support systems.

Chapter Six revisits the aims and objectives of the study and discusses implications for future research. Recommendations for graduate student parents and institutions of higher education are included.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter began with my narrative beginnings (Clandinin & Caine, 2012), the story of what brought me to graduate studies and this particular topic. Ciuffetelli Parker (2013, 2014) would refer to this as part of my narrative reveal whereas Clandinin and Connelly (2000) would suggest that this is my personal justification for the inquiry. Practical and social justifications were then offered in an effort to shed light on why this inquiry is important to post-secondary institutions as well as to research contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

> *Parenting, like writing, depends on the slow and iterative process of arranging values, words, and ideas into independent, synchronized beings. Call it the syntax of sons and daughters, the grammar of incipient selves. Writing may be an act of perpetual becoming, but like rambunctious kindergartners, we academic parents struggle to keep our hands to ourselves.* (Haven Blake, 2011, p. 54)

My literature review explores diverse views of the graduate student parent experience and differences experienced by men and women. Some studies conclude that academia and parenthood do not merge well (Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Churchill, 2011; McAllister, 2008), while others describe how parenthood expands the self (Baker Sipes, 2010; Carver, 2005; Laney et al., 2014; Pillay, 2009). Yet other literature discusses the guilt and challenges associated with being a parent, specifically a mother, in academia (Fothergill & Feltey, 2003; Gilbert, 2008; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009; Home, 1998; Vancour, 2005). Graduate student fathers, as will become evident in this literature review, are largely underrepresented in the literature (Reddick et al., 2012; Sallee, 2012; Sallee, 2014). Literature discussing the academic pursuit of tenure and working in academia is included and relevant to the study; becoming a university professor remains one of the main reasons for pursing doctoral studies in Canada (Desjardins, 2012). I begin with Dewey's (1938) theory of experience in order to contextualize my literature and situate this inquiry into the graduate student parent experience as heard, told, and retold through stories.

Dewey's Theory of Experience

To Dewey (1938), sound educational experiences involve both continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned. The principle of continuity suggests that all experiences, past and present, have a direct impact on future experiences and decisions; continuity is involved in every attempt to "discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not" (p. 33). Continuity extends into the formation of our attitudes, both intellectual and emotional, as well as our basic sensitivities, ways of being, points of view; in essence, "the principle of continuity means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Dewey discusses growth as one example of continuity but recognizes that because it can take different directions, we must specify in which direction growth takes place and the end to which it tends. In the case of this inquiry, growth is to take place throughout graduate school with the ultimate end being the granting of a PhD. Every experience, good or bad, helps to determine the quality of further experiences, establishing preferences, aversions, aptitudes, sensitivities, responses, curiosities, and strengths. The more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) mediates the experience by organizing the conditions of the experience, moderating the direction in which the experience is headed, and maintaining the social conditions of contact and communication.

"Experience does not go on simply inside a person" but "every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had" (p. 39). Dewey's principle of interaction recognizes that "experience does not occur in a vacuum" and that "there are sources outside an individual that give rise to

experience" (p. 40). In sum, the experience is shaped by its surroundings and whether they are conducive to growth or not. Experiences should be connected, linked cumulatively, and made relevant within the context of the surroundings, physical and social, to maximize growth. Conditions of the local community, for example, familial, physical, historical, economic, occupational, gender are all considered educational both educational resources and contexts for growth. Both internal and objective conditions are viewed as equal and inseparable in the learning situation; "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between and individual and the environment" or "whatever condition

Graduate School Within the Context of Parenting: A Complex and Delicate Balance

A review of the literature suggested that the experience of graduate studies while parenting is complex, delicate, and characterized by negotiation and flexibility, challenges, gendered experiences, and the creation of narratives of hope and possibility.

Negotiation and Flexibility

Dewey (1916) suggested that "life is development, and that developing, growing, is life." He believed "(i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (p. 54). Like life, graduate studies and parenthood require continual negotiation of the ups and downs, the positives and negatives, the predictable and the unanticipated of life; Dewey would suggest that both, much like life, are in fact a journey of their own end. Dewey argued that experience in and of itself is not enough; the experience must also be formulated, by "getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form" so that its meaning can be communicated (p. 10). Taking up the challenge of

formulation, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) offer narrative as a solution, whereby, "Narrative is the story of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p. 24).

The literature is filled with such formulations and narrative accounts, many of which discuss the need for continual negotiation and flexibility: *Papa PhD* by Marotte, Reynolds, and Savarese (2011), Irvine (2011), *Mama PhD* by Evans and Grant (2008), Gruner (2008), *The Parent Track* by DeRoche and Berger (2017), Barker (2017), Long (2017), Eisenbach (2013) and Brooks (2013). The flexibility afforded by academia is discussed as both a positive and negative. Positive flexibility allows parents to prioritize what needs to be done (Campbell, 2011; Long, 2017; Reeve, 2011). Negative flexibility, however, has the potential to interfere with home life such as when a new research project or opportunity to travel arises (Brookfield, 2017; Osteen, 2011; Wells, 2011).

In *Papa PhD*, Irvine (2011) shares his tale of trying to be in two places at once; he states, "To be an effective academic, a caring father and an aspiring writer, one apparently has to choose at times between living life with family and re-living it, alone" (p. 209). He explains that he could write his dissertation and take care of his infant son at the same time and how he "wanted to find and beat the person who coined the phrase sleeping like a baby" (p. 210). After a tough journey, he finished his dissertation and began his pursuit of tenure. He reflects, "What was most surprising about the move into the academy was the way that my work so often positioned me against my wife and our son and soon to be daughter" (p. 215). He experienced the stress associated with pursuing tenure while meeting the demands

and expectations of home life. He remained flexible by negotiating his time and after six years of going back and forth between work and family decisions, Irvine was granted tenure.

Success in academia means continual negotiation and renegotiation. In *Mama PhD*, Gruner (2008) recounts her experience of walking into her history professor's office to secure the final signature for her completed dissertation with her two-year-old daughter on her hip. She remembers, "For months afterward, when my husband and I asked my daughter what she wanted to be when she grew up, she'd answer, 'A teacher and a doctor and a mommy'" (p. 124). Gruner admits that her journey was "damned hard" but credits a flexible schedule, adequate pay, and a supportive spouse as the keys to her success (p. 125). After having her second child, negotiation continued, and her husband gave up his aspirations of an academic career so she could pursue hers. She mused, "As a mother I have finished a dissertation; found an academic job; written academic articles; and coedited an academic journal. I've added two subspecialties to my teaching that arise directly out of parenting; children's literature and creative non-fiction writing" (p. 127). She concludes by saying, "I want us to refuse to perform childlessness, to make visible the strains and the costs of our striving for balance as we also insist on the centrality of our families to our work" (p. 128).

Negotiation and renegotiation also surfaces in *The Parent Track* (DeRoche & Berger, 2017). Berger (2017) discusses identity negotiation as a constant internal and external struggle to be a productive academic and a good mother. She provides the following advice to other young female academics: "They need to do what is right for them and not listen to comments from others about waiting until a certain point in their academic journey to have children" (p. 24). She reflects on the ups and downs of negotiating pregnancy, health issues, commuting three and a half hours each way to work, and career progression. She is grateful

for the flexibility academia provides such as the ability to mark papers at home, do research in her home office, and stay home with a sick child on a non-teaching day. She further discusses that achieving balance between work and family is a continual challenge. She concludes by saying, "I only hope that choosing to have fewer publications, grants, service, and so forth than others in my cohort in exchange for having more time with my family will ultimately be the right choice for me" (p. 27).

Barker (2017) points out the role conflict and negotiation she encountered while working in a tenure-track position at a small Canadian university. Role conflict for Barker meant that she viewed both her role as mother and her role as female academic as being of similar importance. Balancing the demands of both roles proved difficult and her mantra to her daughter became "You will get used to it" (p. 204). Negotiating childcare was difficult and during the first year of her appointment, her daughter attended three different licensed daycares. When Barker was pregnant with her second child, she had to negotiate her maternity leave in order to ensure she was available to teach during the winter term. She found out from Human Resources that not many faculty had taken maternity leave at the university; as she recounts, "According to their records, I was the third assistant professor and the fourth maternity leave by faculty (one person took two leaves) at the university since 1994" (p. 208). Barker was not surprised given the lack of family-friendly policies at institutions of higher learning (Baker, 2010; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Palepu & Herbert, 2002).

Long (2017) refers to his children's involvement in his professional life as "Hopeful Intrusions." He shares an example of when he brought his daughters with him to teach a university class. While he was engaged in conversation with his students, his daughter

managed to get her hand stuck in a VCR. He immediately sprang into action to help his daughter and admitted later that "my daughter's awkward moment of vulnerability and need to be immediately cared for humanized the somewhat taken for granted formality of our classroom and our academic conversation" (p. 241). His children taught him about the power of love, what it means to be human, and inviting his children on campus has taught him how to engage and be a better teacher.

Using autoethnography, Eisenbach (2013) investigated the causes of tension and stress as she worked on finding a balance between her role as mother, graduate student, and wife. Her piece contains personal journal entries that detail how she navigated her life as a graduate student parent. Having her family close by to take care of her baby made the transition back to school more manageable. Eisenbach mentions how taking a break from school and work to go out for her birthday did not translate into an escape from reality. At the restaurant, she recalls, "My mind continued to wander and drift towards the papers, laundry, dishes, and emails awaiting my return home" (p. 5). While she focused on being a great mommy and a successful student, she forgot to be a wife and carve out time for her husband. Her husband said, "You don't spend time with me anymore. Things would be so much easier for us if you weren't in school" (p. 7). Eisenbach's goal in revealing her story was to encourage discussion and generate understanding for graduate student mothers as they attempt to negotiate balance between family and academia.

Brooks (2013) conducted a study across four institutions that focused on how student parents negotiate time and space. A comparison was made between two institutions in the U.K. and two institutions in Denmark. The author interviewed 68 student parents to explore the strategies students with dependent children use to pursue their studies. Both men and

women described the most significant benefit of being a student parent as the flexibility it afforded them to spend more time with their children. The author found, "A majority of interviewees believed that both childcare and domestic chores should be shared equally between parents–even if one was in paid employment and the other was a student" (p. 451).

The commonality that binds these studies together is that graduate student parents, like most other parents, typically do the best they can with the resources they have at their disposal; they were all motivated by their passion and a desire to make their families' lives better than how they viewed their own. Fisher et al. (1983) state, "Like it or not, you are a negotiator. Negotiation is a fact of life" (p. xvii). Attending graduate school and having children are life. Like it or not, graduate student parents are negotiators. Most of the literature I reviewed was written as a retrospective, once the tensions of graduate school had eased, the degree had been earned, and the demands of scholarly review, as evidenced by publication, were met. In a sense, published research provides us with a glimpse into the end product of continual negotiation and flexibility.

This inquiry enters participants' stories in the midst of their graduate school journeys as they come to terms with what graduate studies entails and what it requires of them. Telling and retelling stories may offer participants enhanced understanding of how their roles compete with and complement each other, the impact of graduate school on their personal and professional lives, and the way in which they conceptualize their journeys. As participants move backward and forward in time, exploring the roots of their perspectives, motivations, and passions, it is possible that they may experience negotiation and flexibility in the midst of present experience.

Challenges Faced by Graduate Student Parents

Although Dewey did not write about the experience of graduate school, he offered many lessons about higher education. Understanding the scope of one's life is important in order to overcome and deal with challenges. Dewey (1938) believed that the skills and knowledge learned in one situation help individuals understand and deal with future situations. Graduate student parents have taken up the call to pursue graduate studies and raise children simultaneously. At times, they will find themselves in situations in which the demands of graduate school and parenting compete. Dewey (1938) suggested, "We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future" (p. 49). The feelings of guilt, inadequacy, vulnerability, and stress that graduate student parents face should be explored in order to prepare for future relationships and communication. Narrative inquiry is offered as a way to understand experience since it "attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 13).

Without a doubt, the quest to succeed in graduate studies and to be the very best parent tests not only the graduate student parents' abilities but likely also their patience, commitment, and resolve. In the end, many succeed in order to meet the challenge and prove their value to their children and families, their supervisory committees and institutions, and most importantly, to themselves. This returns to Dewey's (1916) notion that not all experiences are equally educative. Graduate student parents who view the challenges in their lives as opportunities may discover educative experiences while those who identify the challenges of being a parent and working in academia as patchwork and incompatible may

encounter miseducative experiences that distort the growth of further experience (Castenda & Isgro, 2013). *Mothers in Academia* (Castenda & Isgro, 2013) features the voices of mothers who are students, administrators, and faculty. Detailing the struggles that professional females in academia face, these authors identify the need for an academic community dedicated to a discussion of the work–life balance, the need to question the tone of media portrayals of working women, and to challenge one another's notions of feminism. They further discuss the unexpected challenges mothers in academia have encountered, including "cultural relocation and acculturation, terminal illness and disabilities, and overt and covert forms of heterosexism, racism, sexism, and classism" (p. 13). Finally, they offer ways in which academia can become more family friendly in order to change the so-called ivory tower. Suggestions are offered such as asking for help, not making excuses, cultivating a support network, making a schedule and planning ahead, becoming a connector to learn valuable networking skills, brainstorming creative ways to combine research and parenting, and creating a work environment with choices.

Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden (2013) conducted research spanning a decade that details the effects of graduate school on graduate students, assistant professors, midcareer years, and finally, retirement. They conclude by providing recommendations to improve the working conditions of parents in academia. Their research found that "The lack of accommodations for family obligations is a key reason the new generation of scholars view an academic career as unappealing" (p. 7). Their proposal toward a better model highlighted changes such as "family-friendly policies for faculty including tenure-clock stoppage, paid parental leave, subsidized and emergency child care, and part-time tenure-track appointments" (p. 113). A substantial amount of literature highlights the sacrifices parents

had to make such as negotiating pregnancy, health issues, and career progression (Augspurger, 2011; Berger, 2017; Careless, 2017; Irvine, 2011; Milmine, 2017; Sutherland, 2008) along with recommendations to make universities more family-friendly. Family-friendly university strategies include paid parental leave, childcare support, health insurance for dependents, mentoring, and faculty and graduate student training and support (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009; Williams, 2007). Cultural changes to re-envision academia include offering dignified part-time positions, campus-wide conferences to support work-life balance, building networks of graduate students, and more flexible career paths (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Peterson Brus, 2006; Sanders, 2008; Sotirin, 2008).

The remaining literature recounts the guilt and challenges that come with being a parent, specifically a mother, in academia (Fothergill & Feltey, 2003; Gilbert, 2008; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009; Home, 1998; Vancour, 2005). Feeling inadequate, overwhelmed, vulnerable, compromised, disappointed, and stressed captures the themes found in the interviews with academic mothers. "I haven't had time to write about balancing motherhood and academe because I've been too busy doing it!" (Gilbert, 2008, p. 203). Fothergill and Feltey (2003) found that "One third of women indicated that they delayed starting a family due to their career, while another third delayed beginning their academic career in order to start a family" (p. 11). I relate to the women I had encountered in the literature, particularly those who felt pressure and vulnerability in the academic culture of research, teaching, and service (Careless, 2012; Fothergill & Feltey, 2003; Home, 1998; O'Connor, 2009), often wondering how many teaching assignments I could turn down before the university administration stopped offering.

Some studies conclude that academia and motherhood do not merge well (Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Churchill, 2011; McAllister, 2008). The ability to collaborate with others changes when one becomes a parent, leaving academic parents searching for others who understand the dual role of caring for children while staying actively involved in research and publication. Castle and Woloshyn (2003) discuss how academic parents often redefine their academic role: "My notion of scholarship had changed to one more consistent with my role as mother, nurturer, caregiver" (p. 39). Writing projects that might have appealed prior to having children may be replaced by initiatives that benefit the community or children such as obtaining literacy funding. As they reflected on their time working in academia, Castle and Woloshyn (2003) observed,

> When we encountered conflict connecting our public and private responsibilities, it was our mothering role that received priority. So despite our claims to cherish the independence and intellectual stimulation associated with our academic role, we were unwilling to sacrifice the connectedness with our mothering role to allow us to achieve more in academia. Have we, after all, simply fallen into the trap of viewing gender through a traditional male model of separation? (p. 43)

A narrative account by Hoben (2017) echoes this sentiment when he reflects on the culture of academia as a place "where people are used up rather than valued" (p. 251). He discusses the difficulty of negotiating the competitive career ladder while trying to be present for his family,

> Now that my daughter is eight years old, as I write this I feel not only a sense of failure and shame, but also resentment at a system that tries to convince us that this is the just and necessary price for admission into the academic monastery. (p. 255)

Using McCluksy's (1963) Theory of Margin, which describes the impact of increasing demands and pressures on adult learning over time, Grenier and Burke (2008) and Tiu Wu (2013) investigate the sources of power and load that graduate student mothers encounter during doctoral studies. Grenier and Burke (2008) discuss the support of faculty, spouses, and friends as sources of power while naming stress and time as sources of load. The authors state that "The increasing number of women in graduate school choosing to have children calls for deeper understanding of the unique experience and needs of this population" (p. 599). It is important that graduate student parents create structures to sustain themselves through stressful situations and create ways to overcome the challenges of graduate school. Tiu Wu (2013) echoes this sentiment by identifying finances, personal time, dealing with young children, family dynamics, and career as sources of external load while role conflicts, physical self-care, and mommy guilt as sources of internal load. Strategies mentioned throughout the literature to achieve balance included compartmentalization, delegation, role integration, finding support, seeking well-being, and making trade-offs (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Martinez, Ordu, Della Sala, & McFarlane, 2013; Tiu Wu, 2013; Younes & Asay, 1998).

The literature surrounding mental health suggests there is evidence of a mental health crisis in graduate school education (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss & Vanderford, 2018; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety when compared to the general population (Evans et al., 2018). Current university and graduate students are seeking campus mental health services at increased rates (Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer & Zivin, 2011). Although poor mental health is being highlighted among graduate students, this reflects how poorly we take care of mental health

issues in society. Practicing self-care can help graduate students nurture a positive emotional state and also helps prevent burnout (Barton, Ramclam & Meinert, 2019). Nelson, Delloliver, Koch, and Buckler (2001) found that more successful graduate students were likely to be women and they reported increased use of focus on and venting emotion as a coping style, increased use of medical care, and increased stress regarding scholastic coursework. There is no distinction in the self-care literature between those who identify as graduate students and those who are graduate student parents. It is safe to extrapolate that parenting adds to the challenge of practicing self-care however everyone must be flexible and negotiate their well-being, both inside academia and beyond.

The research discusses many negative aspects of being a graduate student parent, which included inner conflicts, the chilly academic climate, work–life balance issues, and the sacrifices involved (Gardner, 2008; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Mason et al., 2009; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Peterson Brus, 2006; Springer et al., 2009; Williams, 2007). Williams (2007) found the primary needs voiced by participants included flexible and affordable childcare along with support from departments, family, and advisors. Each study provides similar intervention points and recommendations to retain graduate student parents. Popular recommendations include paid parental leave, childcare support, health insurance for dependents, and family-friendly policies and university culture—for example, bulletin boards, parent resource centres, change tables in bathrooms, space for breastfeeding, parent-friendly campus maps (Mason et al., 2009; Peterson Brus, 2006; Springer et al., 2009).

There are some who question whether academia is different from other professions. Some argue it is the culture of academia that sets it apart from other careers because it encourages employees “to live the life of the mind at the expense of the life of the body”

(McAllister, 2008, p. 218). Parents often speak of yearning for connectedness among colleagues to create a collaborative environment while also seeking separateness to ensure work does not affect family life.

The research literature I reviewed effectively presented the pitfalls, challenges, and the guilt often experienced by those in academia. And while I felt it was important to listen to stories that demonstrated challenges, costs, and regrets, I also wanted (and understandably needed) to hear stories about the good, the benefits, and the celebrations. The literature left me wanting and curious to hear more about self-care, sense of self, and well-being throughout graduate school, how participants made time for all that was required of them, and the strategies used to manage workload, stress, and family responsibilities, both self-directed and those offered by their host institutions.

Gendered Experiences

Dewey (1916) believed that individuals need to have common aims, beliefs, aspirations and knowledge, "a common understanding" (p. 8) in order to form a community and that this was best facilitated by communication where "Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession" (p. 14). Further, Dewey believed that part of the purpose of school was to ensure that "each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment" (p. 25). Retelling, reliving, recontextualizing, and reconstructing stories within the context of prevalent societal expectations is one solution to address these limitations and allow the necessary escape from gendered expectations.

Originally developed by scholars such as Plato and Aristotle, universities were designed for an elite few, typically men, not the public masses. Describing the American experience, Parker (2015) states,

> In the 1830s and 1840s, women's desire to attend higher educational institutions created a great debate that lasted a century (Gordon, 1997). Conservatives claimed it would destroy the role of women in the household as homemakers, wives, and mothers. Liberals, on the other hand, claimed that a college educated woman would be a better homemaker, wife, and mother. (p. 6)

The gendered nature of higher education can be traced back to these early origins where, in some institutions, male students were encouraged to study languages, and women were released from study to do the male students' laundry (Parker, 2015). "At the turn of this century, Canadian higher education was predominantly, although not exclusively, the preserve of upper class, Anglo-Canadian males" (Guppy, 1984, p. 79), making the history of Canadian higher education institutions not a whole lot different than our American counterparts. The gendered experience of academic mothering is prevalent in the research literature (Careless, 2012; Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Mills, 2008; Sallee, 2013; Sotirin, 2008). Social, cultural, and physical differences are discussed alongside tension of care and career (Aubrey et al., 2008; Sotirin, 2008). Mills (2008), in a journal article detailing her experience as the first tenure-track woman in the history of her department to become pregnant, remembers,

> What was frustrating to me was that my husband became a more credible and reliable employee at the point of pregnancy (after all, he'll be more responsible now that he has a family to provide for, right?), and I became less so (after all, she'll be less

reliable now that she has a baby to take care of, right?). (p. 213)

Mills challenged the binary assumption that you are either a good parent or a good professional by setting up a playpen and a children's corner in her office. She concludes by saying, "This conversation and commentary is a good place to (re)consider how we can socially construct workplaces that value families, scholarship, and the intersections between them" (p. 217). In her study, Sallee interviewed 70 faculty fathers to explore the tension men feel when focusing on fulfilling their responsibilities at home while also being a good worker: "Many of the fathers reported receiving negative feedback about their desire to take an extended leave following the birth of a child, though reported that women making such a choice would be expected and accepted" (p. 797).

Parenthood offers different challenges, roles, and sources of support for mothers and fathers; it is important to listen and discuss both experiences with understanding and compassion (Doucet, 2006; Steinberg, 2005). Universities have the opportunity to change traditional gender norms on campus and beyond, which starts with dialogue and continues with action.

A powerful article written by Slaughter (2012) titled "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" describes her career in academia as demanding but flexible. She took a two-year public service leave from Princeton University to pursue a job as the first woman director of policy planning in Washington, DC. In her new high-powered position, Slaughter felt she could no longer be the parent and professional she wanted to be. She had no control over her schedule and was not able to be there for her two teenage sons. She states, "The decision to step down from a position of power—to value family over professional advancement, even

for a time—is directly at odds with the prevailing social pressures on career professionals in the United States (p. 3).

Many authors speak of the leaking pipeline (Springer et al., 2009; van Anders, 2004; White, 2004; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008) when referring to women in academia. The pipeline refers to the journey through academia to a tenured professor position. "Reductions in group representation (e.g., women, ethnic/racial minorities) at succeeding stages in academia are referred to as leaks" (van Anders, 2004, p. 511). White (2004) identifies three key issues women face in postgraduate studies: money, mentoring, and a strong research culture. In her study, women found little financial support to do research which is also reinforced by the view that part-time research students were less committed. Culturally, women mentioned a lack of family role models and women researchers, which contributes to a weak research culture.

van Anders (2004) demonstrates that more women than men choose to leave academia, largely due to issues of parenting and mobility. Women were more concerned about staying in one geographic location to raise their children. Marital status and presence of young children has deep implications for women graduate students (Brown & Watson, 2010; Nerad & Cerny, 1999; Wolfinger et al., 2008). Attending conferences is an integral part of being an academic because it provides the opportunity to network and present work. Familial constraints such as childcare, geography, and spousal support are among the reasons why women do not attend. Travelling with young children is difficult; the planning and packing that goes into a simple weekend trip is overwhelming, and the planning involved in order to leave children and attend a conference is no different.

Research documenting the experiences of faculty fathers is limited (Reddick et al., 2012; Sallee, 2012; Sallee, 2014), perhaps because traditional gender norms remain entrenched in the structure and culture of universities. “Men are generally praised when they are involved parents, yet simultaneously penalized if they prioritize family over work” (Sallee, 2014). Sallee (2012) found that traditional gender roles discriminate against fathers who want to be involved parents. Male participants were concerned that being an involved father or taking a leave would indicate they were not serious academics or breadwinners: “over 25% of the sample shared stories about ways in which they or other male colleagues had been penalized for making use of accommodations” (Sallee, 2012, p. 798). Sallee (2012) calls for changes in academic organizational culture and societal practices order to promote a better work–life balance for men and women. His main suggestions include training for department chairs and senior faculty members and ongoing discussion about the importance of work–life policies. Cultural change takes time, and this prompted me to ask my participants their views about what their institutions and employers could do to better support them as graduate student parents.

The book *Papa PhD* (Marotte et al., 2011) differentiates itself from *Mama PhD* (Evans & Grant, 2008) by focusing on merging work and fatherhood rather than discussing the disappointments of academia specifically. “Many of the contributors reflect less on how to do it all than on how to do both simultaneously” (Marotte et al., 2011, p. xii). One chapter in particular drew my attention because of the dual perspective offered. Walker (2011) started by saying, “When my wife, Brenda, was a graduate student, she was warned by a male professor to not have children if she intended to be a serious academic, or, put another way, an academic who would be taken seriously” (p. 29). Walker recognized how female

academics with babies were stigmatized by watching his wife go through the various stages of academia. When they both secured teaching positions, his wife avoided taking their children to the office unless it was absolutely necessary. Walker indicated that he had never been warned not to have children and explained how having children impacts his academic life,

> I, on the other hand, experienced no anxiety about having the boys with me at work. Several times a week, I could be found sitting in my office, my two-year-old on the floor happily yanking books from my shelves, or scribbling on stacks of ungraded exams, while my infant cooed in my arms. (p. 32)

Reflecting on the difference between his experiences as a faculty member and his wife's experiences, Walker states, "I know of no male peers whose funding was reduced at the announcement of impending parenthood. I have never had to fear that lactation would cost me a job" (p. 33).

Brown and Watson (2010) suggest that gender does not affect women's academic careers, but instead, it is their decision to get married and have children that affects their careers. Getting married and having children are important considerations for both men and women when they start thinking about academic careers (Mason et al., 2013). "Although fathers are more likely to get tenure than mothers, they still experience tension between work and family" (p. 58). As Baker Sipes (2010) concludes, "Further research is needed to understand the experiences of men on the tenure track with children and their needs for family friendly work environments" (p. 202). This was verified by Mason (2012) who explored extensively how family formation affects the academic careers of men and women:

> Too few universities are paying attention to the needs of graduate-student parents or providing mentoring on how to balance family and career in a stressful profession in which, arguably, the most serious stress—obtaining tenure—also occurs during the years when women will have children. (p. 4)

Since Mason's (2012) study, Sallee (2013) conducted further research to identify how academic culture promotes or hinders men's involvement in the home. As Sallee (2013) notes, "In some ways, this lack of scholarship is surprising, as male faculty are more likely than female faculty to be parents" (p. 364). Institutions need to create the conditions for men to be good fathers and academics by creating programs that challenge the old notions of productivity.

The impact of gender in graduate studies is a prominent theme. Conflicts and challenges for women in doctoral studies include timing, tension between work and home responsibilities, and the logistical challenges of attending conferences (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Cohenmiller, 2014; Crabb & Ekberg, 2014; Kurtz-Costes, Andrews Helmke, & Ulku-Steeiner, 2006; Medina, 2007; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Murphy & Cloutier-Fisher, 2002; Myers, 1996; Wall, 2008). Lynch (2008) discusses the strategic practices that graduate student mothers use to deal with their dilemma, such as "maternal invisibility" and "academic invisibility" (p. 595). Maternal invisibility refers to downplaying the role of mother in the academic setting, while academic invisibility is downplaying the role of student outside the university. An example of maternal invisibility includes refraining from hanging family photos in an office or bringing family members to department gatherings. "This strategy allows student mothers to appear to be just students, preserving a cultural form in which a graduate student is 100% committed to their work, 100% of the time" (Lynch, 2008, p. 596). Mothers also utilize academic invisibility by

working on school obligations at night after children are in bed, hiding that part of their identity. They appear to be full-time mothers both privately and publicly while downplaying their academic identity in the outside world.

Recurring issues among the gendered experiences of graduate student mothers include family commitments, relationship problems, time commitments, support, and guilt (Brooks, 2013; Carter et al., 2013; Eisenbach, 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). The importance of having a support system is mentioned frequently in the literature (Cohenmiller, 2014; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006; Medina, 2007; Murphy & Cloutier-Fisher, 2002; Wall; 2008). “While there are barriers, the flexibility and support provided by our advisors and department, which helped us to pursue motherhood and graduate school simultaneously, was highly valued” (Murphy & Cloutier-Fisher, 2002, p. 45).

The fact that there were few studies that referenced graduate student fathers and the advice offered to women was often not to have children, and that women continued to have fewer role models than men left me feeling genuinely uncomfortable. It is possible that the gendered experience that we see in contemporary research is an academic inheritance that exists alongside women’s ongoing quest for gender equality and balance in the workplace and home. Given our current social context that aims for gender equity, and that I was reviewing studies relevant to academia, I was genuinely surprised to see only a glimmer of hope. I would have expected far greater gender balance in academia, but I have now come to understand there is still significant work to do in order to ensure equitable experiences for all graduate student parents. This begins with the selection and relationship-building of supervisory committees to the types of support offered by both families and institutions. It is important that potential students have this type of information in advance and are able to

explore graduate programs that offer the best fit to their personal goals and expectations for the simultaneous experience of graduate studies and parenting.

Narratives of Hope and Possibility

These narratives offer hope and possibility to graduate student parents; they inspire confidence that it is possible to simultaneously negotiate graduate school and parenting. Dewey (1916) referred to the ability to learn from experience as plasticity, "the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation" (p. 49); this retention might include skills related to negotiation, flexibility, meeting challenges, and finding a way to balance activities and readjust to meet new conditions. These attempts to reconstruct and reformulate "a more fluid identity rooted in experiential knowledge" (Martin, 2017, p. 45) may very well be what is most powerful about graduate school. Perhaps it is through the experience of graduate school and parenting that students learn the knowledge, skills, and values that will serve them throughout their lifetime. The ability to reconceptualize the experience of parenting within the context of graduate school provides an opportunity for improvement and expansion. The power to learn from experience was evident in the literature: researchers demonstrated that despite the numerous challenges, compromises, and incompatibilities of combining parenthood and academia, graduate student parenting is indeed attainable with a balance of positive role models, effective time management skills, and quality childcare (Connelly & Ghodsee, 2014; Mason & Mason Ekman, 2008; Seth, 2014; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

The Mom Shift (Seth, 2014) describes the successful professional careers of women who have had children. One of the mothers—Donna Bishop, the founder and CEO of a beauty-products firm—compared her journey to riding a ferris wheel where "each seat is an

element in a woman's life," equally weighted but addressed at different times (as cited in Seth, 2014, p. 93). For many women, children enhance their work and make them more efficient with their time (Martin, 2017; Parr, 2017; Seth, 2014). Martin (2017) coined the term conduit thinking "as a process by which mothers justify projects of self-improvement that they view as having potential to advance their children's best interests" (p. 161). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) in *Academic Motherhood* state that "For many, balancing their work and family lives meant becoming more efficient in their work habits, and, in many cases, moderating their expectations for their productivity" (p. 115). Their study interviewed 120 female faculty members with the goal of capturing the stories of those who succeeded in the academic environment. Ward and Wolf-Wendell note that "the findings from this project suggest that family plays a role in how people develop in their academic careers, just as careers play a role in how people evolve in their family" (p. 212). They end with the message that it is possible to have both work and family.

Mothers on the Fast Track (Mason & Mason Ekman, 2008) found that "Women who had children during graduate school or within five years afterward and continued in their careers had as high as success rate as women without children" (p. 122); strategies utilized by these successful mothers include time management skills, knowing when to say no, and controlling mother guilt. Their research informs young professional women in any profession and helps them understand the struggles that exist and how they can make choices to find career success. Many studies state that motherhood expands the self and is a positive partnership (Baker Sipes, 2010; Carver, 2005; Laney et al., 2014; Pillay, 2009). "Maybe the appearance of babies on campus brings out the human in humanities" (Carver, 2005, p. 85). Laney et al. (2014) found that having children expands the self personally, relationally,

generationally, and vocationally; “motherhood allowed the women to develop greater capacities within themselves and these capacities were extended to others in relationship and through the women’s careers” (p. 1245). Hirakata and Daniluk (2009) call for greater flexibility within academia such as creating a part-time tenure-track option for parents where “women can be encouraged to bridge their roles as mother and academic and develop some practical strategies that will enable them to successfully exist in both worlds” (p. 293).

The cost of graduate school is prohibitive for many graduate student parents. Environmental contexts have an influence on their expectations, preferences, and enrolment choices (Bedard & Herman, 2008; Malcom & Dowd, 2012; Perna, 2004). Possible barriers include access to financial information, students’ lack of financial literacy, lack of trust in resources and services, and lack of reliable online resources (Eichelberger, Mattioli, & Foxhoven, 2017).

Connelly and Ghodsee’s (2014) *Professor Mommy* is a positive guide for women interested in combining academia and motherhood. The authors’ goal “is not only to explain how it can be done, but how it can be done well, with the minimum amount of guilt and compromise and a maximum amount of sanity and satisfaction” (p. 3). The book contains advice and addresses questions such as when to have children and what kind of institutions are the most family friendly. They state, “One thing that the vast majority of women we surveyed have in common is this: they are very careful with their time. They don’t do anything that doesn’t directly benefit their scholarship, teaching, or family life” (p. 181). They conclude the book by reviewing five main points, (a) academia is hard; (b) academia is hard for everyone, both men and women, with or without children; (c) it is still a proven empirical reality that it is harder for women with children to achieve tenure; (d) it is possible

to be both a successful academic and a mother; and (e) although it will require a lot of hard work, it is worth it (p. 182). The book concludes by noting that:

> Both motherhood and academia can be incredibly fulfilling vocations despite the many challenges you will face in trying to combine the two of them. Know the realities, but don't be discouraged. There are plenty of women who have done this, and it is our sincere hope that there will be plenty more of them in the future. Good luck! (p. 185)

Motherhood is often reformulated as positive and inspirational in the graduate parent literature; Myers (1996) said, "What I found to be most useful as a mother of three young children and a doctoral student were the words that said to me, keep writing, keep believing! I am forever indebted to women who have shared their story so that I could share mine" (p. 225). Grassetti (2013) offers the insight that motherhood provides opportunities to develop agency, authenticity, autonomy, and authority. Similarly, Carver (2005) provides a positive message about being a new mother and working in academia by staging her life as a performance: "By hearing my story, it seemed that my new colleague realized that she could rewrite the way her own life performance was being scripted" (p. 11). In graduate school, she was encouraged to choose between an academic career and having children; after hearing about Carver's new daughter and job, however, her outlook on life changed. Her account of how she gave birth simultaneously to two babies—which she refers to as her academic career and the crying kind, both without an epidural—provides a comical rendition of her experiences. Carver has since given birth to a second child and concludes her recount by saying, "I had two babies and never skipped a beat, nor did I ask to. . . . I guess my twins just turned into triplets" (p. 88). Kulp (2016) published a study focusing on how mothers are

looking to “have it all” with family and work responsibilities: “This study found that recent cohorts of PhD mothers attain tenure-track jobs in higher percentages and at earlier points than men and women without children” (p. 92). The mothers in the study are finding success, but it is important to note that 84.6% did not have children during graduate school (p. 84).

Narratives of hope and possibility demonstrate that it is possible to merge parenthood with graduate school, and while these stories offered inspiration, they were also a little intimidating. I needed to hear more about the capacities that these authors developed to negotiate the dual challenges of graduate school and parenting. I was inspired by these writers’ capacities to transfer the agency, authenticity, autonomy, and authority they developed as mothers to their work, and I was curious whether this was an after-effect of earning a PhD or something experienced during their academic journeys. “Keep writing and keep believing” was offered as a motivator with very little reference to what this required amidst the competing roles and multiple demands of both graduate school and parenting. Exploring the reciprocal benefits and keys to success in graduate student parenting complements the existing literature; the more stories we gather and hear, the closer we get to a sense of being connected to something that is larger than our own experience, and the more we come to understand our own experiences within the larger context of graduate school.

The Experience of Graduate Student Parenting

According to Dewey (1938), effective education should have both a societal purpose and a purpose for the individual student. For Dewey, the longer-term matters but so too does the short-term quality of the educational experience itself. For graduate student parents, longer-term goals might include making an original contribution, graduating at a particular time, or being a role model for their children. Allowing these to be the driving

force of graduate studies, however, might negatively impact the short-term quality of the experience and, therefore, personal well-being, time management, need for support, or their ability to negotiate the process graduate studies independently, all the while being the very best parent they can be. In order to be professionally and personally successful, graduate student parents need to be able to recognize the experiences that have immediate value, those that might have shorter-term stress for longer-term gain, and those that will enable them to contribute to the greater good of society. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that successful educative experiences require strong support systems and significant others who can support students as they negotiate the complexities of the graduate studies journey and parenthood (i.e., family, a supportive supervisory team, institutional supports).

Like any other educational journey, negotiating graduate studies and parenthood requires a holistic understanding of self that balances content and process in a way that contributes to the well-being of students and society while offering students freedom to achieve their goals, and pursue their own passions, interests, and research curiosities.

For graduate student parents to fully understand their journey, they must first come to terms with the nature of human experience. Dewey (1938) suggests that no single experience has a predetermined value; in other words, the experience of graduate student parenting for one student is not the same as for another and what may be rewarding for one, may have detrimental consequences to another: “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25). Graduate student parents who view their stressors as unique or who cannot contextualize their experiences within the greater context of graduate school may find that their experience becomes mis-educative to the extent that their personal goals and/or expectations interfere

with their personal and professional progress. On the other hand, graduate student parents who find connection and contextualize their experiences within the larger graduate school and parenting experience may be better positioned to see the privileges provided by simultaneously engaging in graduate school and parenting.

Dewey places strong value on the subjective quality of an experience. Entering graduate student parenting in the midst of the journey offers the narrative researcher and participants the opportunity to articulate and discuss the subjective qualities of their journey as they are happening in an effort to negotiate and or renegotiate, tell or retell their present reality.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented research that demonstrates that parenting within the context of graduate school is a complex and delicate balance characterized by negotiation and flexibility, challenges, gendered experiences, and hope and possibility. Challenges can test a person's ability and in this study challenges refer to a demanding or stimulating situation. Research questions emerged from the literature review and highlighted themes worthy of further dialogue. When viewed through a Deweyan lens, graduate school mirrors life because our responsibility to society is connected to our responsibility to ourselves and our families. Perhaps it is time to challenge the dominant narrative in academia that suggests that graduate school is any different than life.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

> *One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted–knowingly or unknowingly–in ourselves.* (Okri, 1997, p. 46)

Why Narrative?

As a research methodology, narrative inquiry focuses on participants' lived experience and the stories told and retold about those experiences in an effort to make meaning. This study explores, through narrative, how six graduate student parents, including myself, navigated lived experiences of parenthood within the context of graduate studies. I begin this section with a historical description of narrative inquiry as an established research practice. I then explain Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R narrative elements of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation. Next, I describe the methods I used for the study; the chapter concludes with a discussion of important ethical considerations for narrative inquiry research.

Narrative Inquiry as Research Methodology

The historical turn toward narrative inquiry was largely a result of the relationship between participants and researcher, the shift from quantitative data to qualitative data, recognition of the local, specific, and particular instead of the general, and growing acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). As space in the research community opened up, the emergence of narrative methodologies in the social sciences began. While Connelly and Clandinin (1990) are often credited with the

development of narrative inquiry as a methodology to understand the experience of individuals in schools, it is also important to recognize the contributions of Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1988), who situated narrative as a particular way of knowing and validated its use in the social sciences. Narrative inquiry, as method, built on Dewey's (1938) transactional theory of experience that recognized that people are always in relationship, that experience changes as it unfolds through time, and that through communication and reformulation, experience grows "out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Narrative inquirers view experience as a narrative construction and believe that people live storied lives:

> People shape their daily stories of who they are and others are as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 375)

Stories are a natural way of thinking about experience: each time a story is told or retold, lived or relived, even within the context of interruption, it provides an opportunity to unpack situations between people in particular places with attention to each story having a past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narrative, we come to understand ourselves and others (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Using narrative inquiry as a method, I hoped to dig deeper into the experiences of graduate student parents as I invited them to "bring related stories of their past forward and

lay them alongside field texts to make connections between their personal experiences and their research observations and interpretations" (Iannacci, 2007, p. 60).

Narrative Commonplaces

Building on Dewey's transactional theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2006) developed a three-dimensional narrative space including temporality, sociality, and place.

Temporality

Our stories are not frozen in time; as inquirers, we study ourselves in relation to different times and phases in our lives recognizing that our understandings and perspectives are ever-evolving (Clandinin, 2013). Temporality recognizes that every event or situation has a past, present, and future and that experiences are situated in a continuum over time. The meaning of experience is made and remade through reflection over time and can be viewed as beginning, middle, and end. Locating experiences in time (past, present, or future) extends Dewey's (1938) notion of continuity. Narrative inquiry allowed me to draw attention to the "relational composition of people's lived experiences and . . . to imagine the future possibilities of these lives" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 3). As Bree attempts to re-story her experiences and locate her experiences in past, present, or future, she demonstrates the commonplace of temporality (see 84).

Sociality

Cultural, social, institutional, and familial narratives represent the social context in which experiences take place and may cause tension when personal ideologies collide with mainstream or dominant narratives. In Dewey's theory, sociality was viewed as interaction.

Our stories do not take place in a vacuum, and it is, therefore, necessary to understand how our personal stories and narratives are situated within the dominant narratives and contexts.

> Turning inward, we attend to our emotions, our aesthetic reactions, our moral responses. We attend to how these are shaped by familial narratives, family stories, as well as institutional narratives, such as stories of school, as well as by cultural and social narratives. Turning outward, we attend to what is happening, to the events and people in our experiences. (Clandinin, 2013, pp. 40-41)

Narrative inquiry provided an opportunity to focus on the personal and social conditions in order to build a more holistic view of the social context of individual experiences. Sociality also recognizes the relationship between the participant and the narrative inquirer which is grounded in the researcher's worldview and beliefs about research as a relational process (Clandinin, 2013). Sociality is evident in the way that Daniel describes his graduate school journey (see page 69).

Place

Every story takes place somewhere and can change over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Place is akin to what Dewey (1938) refers to as situation, which is the location or context in which an experience takes place. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) recognize that the "specificity of location is crucial. When narrative inquirers write about the relevance of their work for others, they need to acknowledge the qualities of place and the impact of the places on the study" (p. 481). The environment in which an experience takes place may change over time, which may impact our views of self, and, therefore, the inquiry. It is important to locate stories within the different landscapes that shape their stories and the multiple locations of significance (Clandinin, 2006). The impact of place is evident in Sloane's graduate school experience (see page 108The three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place allow

researchers and participants, better grounding themselves in the temporal, social, and emotional contexts in which their experiences, meanings, and stories emerge. Understanding the experience of graduate student parents requires paying attention to scholars and parents as both individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and the stories they tell about their lives, and supporting them as they situate their experiences and stories within the grander narrative of life and academia.

3R Narrative Elements

Referring to Connelly and Clandinin's theory of narrative inquiry, Ciuffetelli Parker (2013) wrote,

> Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) inquiry terms living, telling, retelling, and reliving are useful terms to help describe the process of how teachers can burrow deeply into narratives of experience, as stories are told and retold, in order to make new meaning of their knowledge-in-practice and ultimately to use narratives as a way to help reveal hidden biases, as well as to help make newly formed narrative revelations worthy of further interrogation for future practice. (pp. 1118-1119)

Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013) 3R framework extends and builds upon narrative inquiry by engaging a recursive process of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation.

Narrative Reveal

Multiple tellings of the same story through narrative reveal can bring unconscious assumptions to the surface of a narrative (Pushor & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Individuals hold their own bias and assumptions based on their prior life experiences. Narrative reveal helps us uncover "excavated assumptions that surface in stories" (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2014, p. 245). In Chapter One, I offered a glimpse into my narrative beginnings: what I was searching

for and my assumptions about what being a graduate student parent entailed. My ongoing reveal of the PhD Journey is described on page 179).

Narrative Revelation

Narrative revelation exposes how experiences can be interrogated further to lead to an awakened perspective (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013), a process that Dewey (1938) referred to as reformulation. As feelings, biases, assumptions, and values are continually "excavated through lived and storied experience—the living and telling" (p. 1119), the intricacies of experiences can be understood with more depth. Narrative revelation means extending narrative reveal, looking for "newly formed narrative revelations worthy of further interrogation for future practice" (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, p. 1119).. In this inquiry, being conscious of my unconscious ways of interpreting my experiences helped me to discover a new re-awakened way of seeing my story; page 184 contains evidence of my narrative revelation.

Narrative Reformation

Narrative reformation involves taking action toward a new kind of practice and looking at gained insights that have come about as a result of reliving a narrative in a new way. "Much like reliving, the element of narrative reformation implies, too, that we must live on edge amidst intersecting narrative threads" (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, p. 1122). Reliving highlights the importance of how we enact our education in the world: the way in which we enact our re-awakening of our patterns in life, our assumptions, and our practices. Narrative reformation makes resistance in thinking and practice visible while illuminating stories that push against the narrative grain (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Narrative reformation offers the opportunity to transform beliefs and put them into practice in order to better understand the stories lived and relived and their stories told and retold (Pushor & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013).

While I acknowledge that I am not yet at the stage of narrative reformation, I do offer a vision of what this might look like in my future (see page 188).

Considerations for Narrative Inquirers

Narrative inquiry carries relational responsibilities that require respectful entrance into the midst of lives in motion (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). The negotiation of relationships, including a negotiated entry into the field, is vital throughout the research study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that narrative inquiry begins and ends with an embodied knowledge of relational practice.

Narrative inquiry is a methodology which takes place in relationship between people where the researcher honours the participant as a co-composer (Clandinin, 2013). Co-composing is relational work that is negotiated throughout each phase of the inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a journey both researcher and participants take together. Narrative inquiry spaces are "spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants- spaces that are marked always by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 200). As a researcher, I was intentional about sustaining an ethical attitude of relationship and accepting responsibility throughout the research process.

I assumed this stance of responsibility with each participant during each research conversation and throughout the process. As I gathered their stories, I listened to how I was shaping the inquiry space with my own responses and presence. I was careful to "learn an attitude of empathic listening, of not being judgmental and of suspending disbelief" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 647). I listened with care and respect. As I reflected on conversations and began to write research texts, I inquired with empathy. Graduate student parents continued to be co-composers as I checked back and forth through email with what I wrote, providing opportunities for clarification and further exploration. Throughout the process, I kept in mind

the importance of how this research project might benefit each participant. Relational responsibility requires that the researcher be attentive to how stories are framed and re-constructed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and how research texts respectfully represent participants lived and told stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Methodological Procedures

Five graduate student parents and I (as both researcher and co-participant) shared stories of parenting, learning, schooling, and living.

Participants

I began with purposeful sampling and ultimately used snowball sampling (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 1994, 2000) as more graduate student parents heard about my research and wanted to share their stories. My search commenced with recruiting colleagues and then I extended the recruitment by sending an electronic recruitment invitation and flyer (Appendix B) to the graduate departments of two universities. I also posted Appendix B on a university graduate student Facebook group. My selection criteria were broad because I wanted to include a variety of different graduate student parents who were dealing with diverse circumstances (Glesne, 2006).

Sixteen graduate student parents, ranging in age from 28 to 46, responded to my recruitment notice; they represented five publicly-funded universities, four of which were in Canada. Not wanting to deny any interested graduate student parent the opportunity to share their story, I interviewed all 16 graduate student parents twice.

Early drafts of my dissertation included a detailed introduction of each participant and it was my original intention to write 16 full narratives. My supervisor and committee members felt that 16 full narratives would be overwhelming for the reader and may lead to limited depth. While I struggled ethically with the thought of focusing on a smaller group of

participants, I agreed with the advice offered by my supervisor and committee members. I returned to the interview data and created charts to assist me in compiling general themes that existed across the majority of participants' stories. As I engaged in this comparative work, I found a smaller group of participants who identified feelings, experiences or sentiment that captured what the majority of graduate student parents said. Ultimately, the voices of five participants effectively captured themes and perspectives shared by the entire group, and it is with these five participants that I further engaged the process of narrative inquiry. Details regarding each participant, including their pseudonyms, ages, status in program, number and age of children, marital status, and work status are included in Appendix G.

Data Collection

Stories and data were gathered using an entry survey, conversational interviews, a research journal, and email correspondence (Brown & Watson, 2010; Careless, 2012; Laney et al., 2014). Data collection methods were designed to clarify and form a deeper understanding of words, thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. The total record of contacts for each participant and their preferred methods of communication are included in Appendix G. All participants signed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix C) that explained the purpose of the research, relevant ethical issues, and procedures to address confidentiality, anonymity, and participation. The letter of informed consent clearly indicated that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice. After consent forms were collected and outstanding questions were addressed, I emailed each participant an entry survey (see Appendix D).

Interview data were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher shortly after each interview took place. An electronic copy of each transcript was emailed to participants who were invited to make any changes/edits they felt were necessary to capture their experiences. Participants were asked to check the accuracy of the accounts and to confirm that the representations were genuine and fair. A follow-up email was sent to participants after each interview to thank them for graciously sharing their time and stories. The email also encouraged participants to reflect on our conversation and to email any thoughts/feelings that emerged as a result of our discussion together.

Data collected from interviews was coded with numbers that corresponded to individual participants. A master sheet with participant-chosen pseudonyms and corresponding codes were kept in a secure location only available to me and my research supervisor. A locked filing cabinet contained raw data; all data will be destroyed five years following the publication of this study.

Entry survey. The entry survey was modified from Tiu Wu (2013) and the purpose was to gather information regarding parental, educational, and professional background in order to establish a general starting point for the first interview (Merriam, 2009). The entry survey gathered information such as preferred pseudonym, marital status, area of academic concentration, length of time in the current program and occupation (see Appendix D for the complete survey).

Conversational interviews. Two semi-structured, conversational interviews with each graduate student parent provided opportunities to share their experiences and unfold the meaning of these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Currivan, 2008; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991). Conversations entailed listening and reinforcing the importance of developing a relationship among researchers and participants (Clandinin &

Connelly, 1994). As a researcher and parent, I listened empathetically as participants spoke about their experiences in graduate school and parenthood**.**

Interview 1. The first interview began with an initial briefing explaining the purpose of the interview and the use of a sound recorder, and I asked each participant if they had any questions before beginning (Glesne, 2006). I also shared part of my own personal journey with participants in order to create a trusting and comfortable relationship (Josselson, 2007). I was open and honest with participants about what brought me to research this topic (see Chapter One). Sharing my story established rapport with my participants with the goal of achieving understanding and connection, and creating meaning (Atkinson, 1995). I used a guide with an outline of topics and possible questions, keeping in mind that my goal was to provide graduate student parents with freedom and time to unfold their experiences. The first interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Face-to-face interviews took place in a quiet, comfortable, and mutually agreed upon location. While listening to parents, I made observations in a field notebook regarding body language, gestures, and tone of voice (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).

Topics of interest during the first interview included what motivated participants to enroll in graduate school, coursework, supervisor relationship, parenting during graduate school, childcare, role conflict, support, challenges, and keys to success. Questions for Interview 1 included some of the following, what brought you to graduate studies, tell me about your coursework, and how has parenting impacted your academic journey (see appendix E for a complete list of questions).

Each interview concluded with a debrief asking if the participant had anything else to say and checking to see how the interview was experienced by the graduate student parent (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). After informing participants that the recording device was

turned off, I spoke confidentially with each participant at the end of each conversational interview to candidly discuss life, children, and school; these conversations are not recorded in the data. This approach reinforced equity in my relationships with participants and provided a greater human connection moving forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Interview 2. I conducted follow-up interviews that lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. The time lapse between participants varied according to each situation. I was flexible and accommodating to different work/school schedules and invited participants to choose a day and time that worked best for them. I interviewed my first participant on August 25, 2016 and completed my final interview on April 12, 2017. The pause between interviews provided parents with an opportunity to reflect on their previous responses and to consider how one snapshot in time changes. I received an email from one participant who reviewed our first conversation together; upon reflection, she did not feel it captured her experience. She had focused on the positive aspects of being a graduate student parent, leaving out personal details she did not feel comfortable sharing. These personal details emerged during our second conversation together.

I was open to stories about home life, school experiences, childhood, work, personal hardships, spouses, and many other topics. Being invitational to the stories of graduate student parents allowed me to explore the themes identified in the literature review such as gender, timing, tension between work and home responsibilities, and the logistical challenges of attending conferences (Brown & Watson 2010; Carter et al., 2013; Hirakata & Daniluk 2009).

During the second conversational interview, I asked participants about their research, how things were going since we last spoke, life after their degree, lessons learned, finances, suggestions for other graduate student parents, well-being, institutional support, and a description of their dream job (if they had one). Questions for the second interview included;

an update since we last spoke, emergent feelings, hopes, and dreams once the PhD is complete (see Appendix F for a complete list of questions).

I concluded by asking participants if they had anything to add from our first or second conversation together. I intentionally left communication open by inviting participants to email me if they remembered anything or wanted to revise their responses. As with the first interview, I emailed participants a copy of their transcript to invite member-checking (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).

The interactions with each participant were unique and situated in different contexts depending on the needs of the participant. Some participants were interviewed face-to-face and some through Video-Skype; most were phone conversations with no visual interaction. I honoured the various interactions by noting in a research journal such things as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, pauses, and cadence of participants' voices (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). I did my best to assign equal rights to both the objective and internal conditions of my interactions with participants (Dewey, 1938). When I organized face-to-face meetings with participants, I kept the social set-up of the situation in mind by sitting in a low traffic area to allow more privacy for conversation. I brought homemade muffins in case participants were hungry and wanted to eat while we conversed.

Email correspondence. I emailed each participant in June 2017 and December 2017 to follow-up on previous interviews with the intention of clarifying specific information and pursuing deeper meaning. After data collection, I noticed a few details missing from my conversational interviews so in June 2017, as a result, I asked each participant some follow-up questions. At the end of my email, I stated, "I hope your graduate journey is going well since we last spoke. If there is anything you want to add or discuss regarding your experiences to date, I am happy to chat anytime." Each participant responded and many

offered to clarify further if needed. In December 2017, even as I was working on writing a draft of my dissertation, I was reminded of the importance of relationship in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The continuous nature of experience prompted me to email each participant to check in and see how their journey had progressed since we last spoke 9 months earlier. "Collaborative research constitutes a relationship… which requires a close relationship akin to friendship" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, p. 281). I felt the need to provide each participant with an update on my research and life in general. Each participant graciously invited me into their life; I wanted to reciprocate their generosity by providing a snapshot of my own life. The responses I received to my December 2017 correspondence surprised me because I know it is a busy time of year. Some participants shared their joy of being finished their degree while others described the journey as taking longer than they expected. Participants were happy to hear from me and thanked me for the opportunity to reflect. A few participants even requested follow-up phone conversations to talk in more detail, which I willingly arranged.

Storied Narratives and Analysis

Transcribing each interview allowed me to get closer to the data and my participants' stories. I noticed and picked up on details that were missed while I was engaged in meaningful conversation. After I finished transcribing every interview, I printed all transcripts so I could tangibly hold, read, interact, highlight, and re-read what my participants had said. In total I had 230 single-spaced transcribed pages, 32 pages of field notes, 126 pages in my reflective journal, and I emailed each participant between 10-20 times which generated approximately 35 pages of email data. While creating each field text, I reminded myself of the relationship of researcher to participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I made notes at the beginning of each text detailing the relational circumstances I shared or did not

share with each participant. It was at this stage that I began to realize the complexity of working with sixteen participants.

To move from field texts to research texts, I read and reread my field texts. I grouped together all the stories, observations, email correspondence, entry surveys, and conversational interviews for participants giving each participant their own folder. I spent hours reading and rereading each piece of information, making comments in the margin to position experiences within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space which includes temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). After reading each field text, I asked myself questions about the meaning and significance of the experiences shared by my participants. I also kept a reflective journal to facilitate reflexivity over the course of the research process (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). In this journal, I utilized the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social to accurately represent memories and continue to reflect on my experiences. I found relationships between the stories of my participants and my experience of graduate school.

Tensions emerged surrounding voice, signature, and audience as I composed my research texts (Clandinin, 2013, p. 205). Recognizing that my first responsibility was, and is, to my participants, I ensured that their voices were represented individually and collectively, with limited insertion of my voice and my connections. Some participants presented rich narrative data that effectively captured themes and perspectives shared by the other participants. I looked for similarities and differences among participants, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) label the “constant comparison method” (p. 101). I also coded for patterns, which involved searching for repetitive words and phrases utilized more than twice by participants (Saldana, 2009).

Coding for patterns helped solidify my observations into meaningful themes and allowed me to confirm my "descriptions of people's Five Rs: routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships" (Saldana, 2015, p. 6). After determining that participants' stories were closely aligned with Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, I started rereading participants' stories, underlining the data using different colours: the commonplace of temporality was yellow, sociality was pink, and place was blue. The patterns and themes I uncovered during the first set of interviews influenced some of the follow-up questions utilized during the second set of interviews. This helped participants to explore and make sense of their stories in different times and places, reinforcing the fact that,

> Narrative research is a lens into how humans understand their lives within particular cultures and time. The process of telling, recording, and interpreting personal life stories can be a poignant vehicle in understanding how we create meaning of our existence and is well suited to research professional practices. (Hoschmand, 2005, p. 302)

Themes were established by revisiting between each participant's stories and cross-referencing words and phrases that were common across multiple graduate student parents. As I unearthed the tensions and commonalities experienced by graduate student parents, themes started to emerge and gained clarity over time. Throughout the analysis process, I returned to Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to ensure that I presented a meaningful, accurate, and authentic picture of each participant's experience. "The analysis of the transcribed interviews is a continuation of the conversation that started in the interview situation, unfolding its horizon of possible meanings" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 219). As themes and tensions emerged from the stories, I provided graduate student parents with multiple opportunities to member check and to ensure that their voice

was accurately and authentically reflected (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).

After analyzing participants' stories using Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, it became clear that my narrative beginnings, my lived experience, and my storied narrative required a deeper level of reformulation and reflection; it is for this reason that I turned to Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) framework of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation. This process allowed me to deconstruct my assumptions in order to better understand, and with deeper meaning, the tensions I was experiencing over time.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Much has been written about the validation process in qualitative research (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018; Iannacci, 2007; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). After reviewing the literature, I could find no agreed-upon set of criteria that a researcher must follow. Participants were involved in member-checking each interview and were provided multiple opportunities to reflect on prior conversations. I offered each participant the opportunity to email additional reflections or stories that came to mind. Four participants in total made minor changes to their first and second interview transcripts to provide further clarification. I respected all revisions that participants made and ensured this was reflected in my final drafts. After receiving my follow-up email in December 2017, 12 participants offered further reflection about their experiences as graduate student parents. Three participants preferred follow-up phone conversations; one occurred in December 2017 while the other two took place in February 2018. All participants reviewed their personal narratives and made minor revisions to further clarify their thoughts.

There are many ways of knowing and understanding experience. My desire to understand the experiences of graduate student parents rather than predict or control what I thought they might say is why I was drawn to narrative inquiry. My findings were established through authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), which was accomplished by highlighting the contextual nature of graduate student parents' experiences and focusing on their struggles, successes, motivations, barriers, and supports. I did not seek to put a broken mirror back together; my goal was to tell the story of each piece on the floor (Downey & Clandinin, 2010). I was open to the fact that my participants had alternative views and alternative ways of coming to know. Narrative research has an interpretive quality that nurtures reflection and restorying for everyone involved (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

I wanted to remain wakeful of my own experiences alongside that of participants' stories. Ciuffetelli Parker (2013) reminded me that,

> To be awake, to wonder about, to push to the boundary, to go to the place less travelled, is to have courage to see what awaits, what new discoveries can be made about the research, about findings, about predisposed assumptions too. (p. 20)

I continued to come back to the field texts in order to create meaning. Slowly over time, I layered patterns to create themes and they eventually became research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I experienced tension as I thought about my participants and their voices; I wanted to ensure I captured their stories accurately and allow the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social to shape the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006).

Ethical Considerations for Narrative Inquiry

Relationships are complicated, beautiful, messy, and joyful. I took my role as researcher seriously and I valued the relationship I developed with each of my participants. My priority was to create an open, respectful, and trusting dialogue with participants. I focused on empathetic listening while being nonjudgmental as lives continued to unfold (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). "Ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000. p. 170). I maintained the original words and voices of the participants, choosing not to retouch any of their original words in an attempt to create "free spirited authenticity" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 134).

I was aware of a variety of ethical concerns before embarking on qualitative research involving humans. I followed the three core principles stated in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. I completed the TCPS2 online tutorial and my research project was approved by the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board (NUREB) in accordance with their terms of reference. My focus was on respect for persons, and concern for welfare and justice. In order to respect the participants' autonomy in my study I sought their free, informed, and ongoing consent. The letter of consent was clear and concise so graduate parents participating in my study understood the purpose for my research.

Concern for welfare was incorporated into my study by ensuring the privacy of participants' shared stories. Data remained in a securely locked filing cabinet and each participant chose a pseudonym for anonymity. The relationship I developed with participants was important; to ensure anonymity, I did not name children, academic institutions, or my participants' employers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I anticipated minimal risk to

participants and myself during the research process, as the probability of harm was no greater than in our everyday lives. Participants benefited from the study by having the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences of being a parent while pursuing graduate studies. I treated all participants fairly and equitably in my study by meeting them in a location and at a time they selected. No incentives were offered in my research and I did not experience a power imbalance between researcher and participants.

My participants graciously shared their time, stories, laughter, and tears while engaging in mindful reflection. Many graduate student parents sent emails or discussed at the end of each interview how much they appreciated the opportunity to discuss their experiences. For example, one participant said, "I think it is important work, what you're going to share is going to help people understand what parents experience. Everybody experiences it differently so we need to have an understanding of that. Thank you for allowing me to share" (Email correspondence with Sloane, February 7, 2018). The reciprocity I experienced with graduate student parents was unanticipated. One parent, in particular, looked inward at how our first dialogue together did not represent her true journey. She became wakeful and shared more intimate details of her life during our second conversation together, and I could almost feel a weight being lifted off her shoulders (Grenville & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Sometimes it is easier to focus on the positive aspects of an experience because it is less painful than delving into the part you want to forget. As Connelly (2011) admits, "Reliving the untold story is easier said than done" (p. xi). Her honesty and willingness to be vulnerable prompted me to do the same, which left me changed in the process.

I remained cognizant that certain memories from the past may implicate or create hurt feelings for those involved. Being respectful of the values and relationships in my life was at

the forefront during my personal inquiry. I often called my mother to verify details from my childhood and she remained an important reader throughout my journey. My research supervisor also helped me to remain aware of wakefulness throughout my journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Utilizing the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social allowed me to accurately represent memories and continue to reflect on my experiences.

The importance of life experience and meaning-making is a thread that runs throughout my theoretical framework and methodology. I tried to recognize the difference it made for me to be inside the graduate student parent culture by making sense of the tensions I was experiencing. Instead of interrupting participants to agree, disagree, or share a similar story, I held back in order to give their experience the attention it deserved. I worked to ensure a democratic and participant-centered approach to the inquiry by understanding narrative inquiry as research with participants rather than *on* participants (Clandinin & Connnelly, 2000; O'Donoghue, 2012). This approach ensured that the quality of observations and interpretations I made were consistent and represented the multiple voices, including my own, captured in my narrative study (Iannacci, 2007). According to Josselson (2007), ethics in narrative research should focus on the responsibility in human relationships. The letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) is an explicit contract while an implicit contract develops over time in response to meaningful interaction with participants. The researcher must balance the stories of her participants, while respecting the direction of research and the demands of the academic community in which the research will be examined. I considered myself both internal (through participation) and external (through analysis and interpretation) to the process of inquiry. I carefully negotiated the tension between an insider, and outsider by reminding each participant of my dual role (Clandinin, 2006).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter detailed Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R framework of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation. It also carefully considered the ethics surrounding narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry helped to uncover aspects of myself, both personally and professionally. Exploring my participants' graduate school experiences, along with my own provided insights into my development as a teacher, mother, and student. Chapter Four details the experiences of my participants and myself as researcher and co-participant as we negotiate graduate school and parenthood, while Chapter Five discusses and deconstructs cross-participant themes using the theoretical frameworks of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

STORIED NARRATIVES OF GRADUATE STUDENT PARENTS

> *The definition of what it means to be a good student-parent is fluid and subject to stability or change. This is a snapshot of these parents' lives.* (Estes, 2011, p. 216)

Sixteen participants demonstrated interest in continuing throughout the study, offering insights into how they simultaneously navigated life as a graduate student and parent. Reading and rereading the conversational interviews, field notes, and emails for 16 participants was a daunting task, and while I struggled with the decision, supported by my committee, I did give myself permission to focus in depth on the rich narratives offered by Daniel, Bree, Ashley, Sloane, Bob, and my own storied narrative.

Daniel's Narrative: Unearthing the Tension

Daniel went back to school when he was 27 years old; his son was two-weeks old at the time. He is currently a second-year Master of Education student in the process of working on his PhD applications. He is married and credits his partner as being very supportive of his academic pursuit. Working as an early childhood educator prompted him to research the social and cultural contexts of education with a focus on power relations. His son started kindergarten this year, which increased his empathy for the families with whom he works. His dream job is "a professorship somewhere hot and southern" (Email correspondence, June 6, 2017).

From the very beginning of our correspondence, Daniel demonstrated interest in the study, asking quite a few technical questions: How many participants are you hoping for? What grade do you teach? Will you be done your PhD this year? Is your supervisor understanding? At one point, Daniel said, "I am interviewing you!" (Skype interview,

September 1, 2016). With initial certification in Early Childhood Education (ECE), Daniel enrolled in the Master of Education program to open personal and professional doors; he credits encouraging professors as his inspiration to pursue graduate work. He has worked full-time as an early childhood educator for the past ten years and describes his employer as "somewhat supportive and somewhat flexible" during the pursuit of his Master's degree (Entry survey, August 18, 2016).

Daniel's story reveals how he navigated his lived experiences in both parenthood and graduate studies. Noble procrastination was described as specific to his graduate school experience while compartmentalization was discussed on multiple occasions as a way to deal with the competing roles in his life. Since becoming a parent, Daniel's view as a teacher has changed to include more empathy and engagement as he lives alongside the parents of his students. Daniel's support system includes his wife, best friend, colleagues, and supervisor who each contributed to his success as a graduate student parent. Although tension was not apparent on the surface of his experiences, in the end his vulnerability surfaced through the song lyrics he chose to share.

Graduate Studies Experience

An experience of noble procrastination. Daniel admits that the Master of Education program was a lot more challenging than he expected and that the goals he had set for himself were somewhat unrealistic. Despite the accountability schedule he had set for himself, he confesses, "I blew the first deadline!" He then adds, "I wouldn't say the workload was too much, because it was paced appropriately. It was the mental energy it took to wrap my head around how to learn at that level" (Skype interview, September 1, 2016). Completing his Master of Education degree and recognizing the ongoing demands of

graduate studies, Daniel secured a leave of absence from work to pursue his doctoral degree. His email outlines his rationale for this decision:

> During the upcoming winter term, I was able to secure an instructor contract for two university courses, and that's enough to replace my school board salary. I'll be taking a leave from the school board, going to the university on Mondays and Tuesdays for class, then again on Wednesday for my research assistant position. Thursday I'm off at home to read and write, then teaching on Fridays. My employer has been flexible; I've had both leaves approved without incident. (January 25, 2018)

Daniel's background in ECE prompted him to pursue education because, "it felt right, it felt like a good thing to do" (Skype interview, September 1, 2016). His vision was to take the connections he made during his undergraduate degree and extend them through his Master of Education degree. Not accomplishing his goals over the summer months is how his graduate school experience morphed into what Daniel termed noble procrastination.

Revisiting his Master of Education journey, Daniel explains that, in the beginning, he took on tasks that he felt would make him look good as a graduate student,

> I planned to write a paper with a classmate, and I have continued being a research assistant. I am also presenting a paper that I got my name on, which is good, but it doesn't really matter if I don't complete my thesis. I have also started PhD applications. Everything that takes away from the time I am actually spending on my thesis has been hard to manage. (Skype interview, November 24, 2016)

Daniel further explores the concept of looking good, saying,

> One of the biggest adjustments in starting doctoral studies is managing what I can and cannot say yes to taking on above and beyond my coursework. By this I mean some

> of the extra tasks or opportunities that are extended to us, alongside some of the extra things we should be doing as grad students. These extras aren't mandatory, but just this week alone for example; it was an hour-long impromptu group Skype meeting to collaboratively plan a presentation. Similarly, just this week I submitted my first collaborative paper to a journal for consideration and started an abstract for another call for papers that's due next week. Just to be clear, I want to do these things, and I don't begrudge them, but they are extra tasks, and I'm always aware that it's simultaneously personally rewarding, and "looks good" professionally. If I had to define "looks good" I'm not sure I could. I don't think it's as simple as saying yes to everything, but it's saying yes to a lot of things. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Daniel offhandedly labels his desire to look good as noble procrastination*,* a term he defines as,

> Avoiding a task that needs to be done (usually because it's hard, or stressful) by putting time and energy into a task that is less (mentally, temporally) strenuous. I nobly procrastinate frequently, but as mentioned previously, I am getting better at it. That said, I am nobly procrastinating as I type this. I have an allotment of hours form to fill out and return to my teaching assistant, but I've never done one before, and I don't particularly want to do it. It involves math and planning and frankly, it's annoying, but it needs to be done by some point tomorrow. I don't tend to nobly procrastinate in other areas of my life, except for the doors I promised I'd paint in the summer, I really don't want to paint those doors. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Daniel views graduate student opportunities paradoxically, as both extras and expectations. Managing his noble procrastination and figuring out better time management habits, he states,

> I've learned that I don't actually love the endorphin rush of turning a paper in just minutes before the deadline, and that pacing myself when it comes to approaching my workload is better for overall physical and family health. Not perfect at it, but I'm trying harder. (Email correspondence, January 18, 2018)

It's hard. Reflecting on his graduate school experience, Daniel states, "Time with my wife goes away; it's hard" (Skype interview, September 1, 2016). As he maintains a personal countdown for the term, his wife chides him, "You keep saying six more weeks, but the goal posts keep getting moved, and the end of that six weeks never comes." "She is right, it doesn't," Daniel agrees (Skype interview, September 1, 2016). He discusses how sometimes when he goes to bed he has not seen his wife all night: "Sometimes if we are in the same room together and she is watching a movie behind me, I stick headphones in so I can concentrate on my research assistant work" (Skype interview, November 24, 2016). Daniel credits his wife with helping him manage the competing roles in his life. He describes how she takes on a lot,

> That typically involves her doing things that we would otherwise be doing together. I try to minimize these things as much as possible, where I can. One example is on Mondays and Tuesdays now I have to leave the house before my wife and our son even wake up, so getting him dressed and out the door to school becomes her responsibility. I try to find ways to help—I prepare lunches before I leave, have coffee ready for her, get breakfast set out for them—whereas on the days where I

> don't have to leave early, I'm much more available to get our son moving through the morning routine so she can get ready for work. Similarly, on Tuesday nights I don't get home until he's just about ready to go to bed, so she has to do dinner, playtime, bath time, story time, and bedtime routines solo. Whereas on the nights I'm home, I make dinner, and we go through the remaining routines together. Again, I try to minimize the hassle for her as much as possible, I have leftovers ready in the fridge so she doesn't have to cook, but I know that it's still extra work for her to have to do those things solo. (Email correspondence, January 18, 2018)

Revisiting his beliefs, Daniel offers,

> I think, for the most part, that I am well-suited for academia. I have zero problems with large periods of uninterrupted time alone, but time with family is equally enjoyable and prioritized. It just feels good to do things together. I like being with them, I like the things we do together and the ways we spend time together. I don't like the way our house feels when I'm stressed out and too busy to spend time with my wife and son. That said, they're understanding when perhaps I need to stay home every once in a while because I'm on a deadline. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Daniel cherishes the time he spends with his son after school and looks forward to the two hours they spend together before his wife comes home from work. There is unmistakable pride in his father–son relationship: "Our relationship has been awesome lately. He's easy to be around. He was sad to go back to school after Christmas break because he didn't know when we'd have more time off with just the two of us" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018).

Parenting takes priority most of the time. Daniel values the time he spends with his family, indicating that "We've gone to the library nearly every Saturday morning since my son was an infant. I don't want to give that up, and it wouldn't contribute to a healthy family if I had to start rearranging our time together" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018). Daniel writes that,

> Active parenthood means continual engagement with my son as a learner, a moral being, and a person in the ever-continuing process of becoming an individual. I try to model a love for learning, we read a lot, I talk about the news (as much as I can with a four-year old) we, in general, stay busy together. I am fortunate to have a job with the public school board, so I have summers off with him. We hike, we go to the library, museums, and art galleries and we go to parks. I realize this doesn't necessarily answer your question, what does parenthood mean, but rather offers a glimpse of what parenthood looks like. As far as making my own meaning out of parenthood, I'm not sure I'm at that point yet, but I do want him to experience life as a meaningful process, so we talk a lot about memories, and our experiences. We try to end each day with a recap, we ask him to share something he liked about the day, or sometimes he shares something he didn't like about the day. One thing that is crucial for my role in parenthood is my desire for him to understand that he has agency. My hope is that in modelling respect toward him as an individual, this will grow outward in his interactions with others. He begins school in a few weeks, I suppose this will be the first big test to see how he interprets and enacts the values we've modeled outside of our family context. (Entry survey, August 18, 2016)

Daniel states that the most gratifying part of being a parent is:

> The connection I can make with [my son], just the relationship we can build and seeing the difference between how he relates to me and to my wife. It makes me see him as a person, and I watch how he interacts with the world. (Skype interview, September 1, 2016)

Daniel believes that his son has only ever known him as a parent and graduate student simultaneously. He does not apologize for this, stating emphatically, "I want to be a good role model for my son, I want him to see that learning is good and that school is exciting and can lead to interesting opportunities" (Skype interview, September 1, 2016).

Intention without guilt. Daniel is intentional about when and where he works on school-related projects, reflecting his desire to not sacrifice time with his son and family. He explains, "When I go pick him up from school until I put him to bed, I don't think about graduate work at all. It wouldn't be fair to be distracted with that" (Skype interview, November 24, 2016). He feels no guilt dedicating his weekend time to his wife and son. Despite his desire to be a role model for his son, Daniel is determined to keep his son and his graduate work separate, recognizing that going back to school was his choice, not his son's. On multiple occasions, he mentions,

> It's hard to compartmentalize everything, I'm sure something has been lost in every area. I don't work when my son is awake; it makes for a lot of 1:00 in the morning nights, which is hard when I have to get up at 6:00 for work. I don't work when he is awake, and I don't work on the weekends during the day. (Skype interview, September 1, 2016)

> I really do try to keep my son away from it as much as I can. He is still affected by it but I still try to minimize those effects as much as I can. I know in the

> next couple weeks I am going to have to probably kick them out of the house on a Saturday so that I can get something done that I just don't have the time for at night. (Skype interview, November 24, 2016)

He further explains,

> I don't want him to feel the effects of my time commitments. I don't want him to feel pushed aside because I have work to do, but at the same time, I want him to understand, as best he can, what it is I'm doing and why I'm doing it. A story: My son HATES swimming lessons. He cries, he's scared, every week is a nightmare. Last week a new session began, and predictably, he started crying the minute I picked him up from school, because he knew it was swimming night. As we drove to the pool, I was asking him to explain why he was so upset, asking him to try and explain his fears. One thing he said was that he's worried he's never going to get better, and that he's never going to learn to swim properly. I used my school (and my writing, specifically) as an analogy as a time where I've experienced similar feelings, but that by continuing to write, even when it was challenging or scary, I began to notice ways that I could improve. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Empathetic teaching and ethical responsibilities. Daniel recognizes that as a parent, he is living alongside the parents of his students, which allows him to better understand their perspective and feel more empathy:

> Transitioning to school you lose the connection you had during childcare, when you go pick up your child you can go and talk and spend some time with the teachers about how they are doing, but school is kind of naturally set up to try and eliminate that. (Skype interview, November 24, 2016)

He intentionally makes his classroom open and engages with parents, realizing that there needs to be a home–school connection and that he missed this when his son was enrolled in childcare. He explains,

> We do parent observations where parents are able to come in for an hour, and I have been talking with a lot of parents just understanding their perspective a little bit more. I try to make my classroom as open as I can and I like to engage with parents. I really like parents, I think they are all just doing their best, if we can work together then kids will hopefully have a good time at school. (Skype interview, November 24, 2016)

Daniel is drawn to revisiting how the work of philosophers can inform teaching practice; in particular, he is interested in Emmanuel Levinas's work on the ethical obligation to the Other. "His idea of an ethical responsibility to others is something that rings very true for me, and that in my work in the classroom, an ethical responsibility to the children is central" (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018). He views the school system differently because of his positionality as a teacher, a graduate student, and a parent. Daniel explains,

> At the moment I don't have a lot of great feelings toward the school system, both as an educator, and as a parent. Having time off from the board has given me some space to think about it with some distance from daily life in the classroom, and mostly I think about all the ways that schools fail children who don't learn how to play the game of school. I suspect that most teachers are people who figured out the game of school. This isn't meant to be a personal criticism, I think there are wonderful teachers, and I'm happy to say that I enjoy being around most of my co-workers, but

> it's only a handful of the 50 or so in my school who I would categorize as critical thinkers about pedagogy and philosophy. (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018)

Daniel is thankful that his son has had an easy transition to school but is aware that it could go the other way very easily. He mentions, "Historically schools are abjectly terrible at supporting children who deviate from normative behaviour" (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018). The focus in his Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree was on critical self/societal reflection whereas in graduate studies, the focus is more on critical pedagogy and philosophy to improve ECE in school.

Daniel views family involvement as a way to ease into the transition between home and school and ensures that children and families have seamless supports. To highlight the importance of home-school connection, Daniel described his four favourite times of the school year,

> Welcome to Kindergarten orientation night happens each May, when our future JK students come to school with their families and tour their classrooms. We get to meet the children and families, and I can always see that it's such a relief for the families to connect with us and ask us their flurry of questions. The first day of kindergarten is an hour-long visit where the families and children come into the classroom in small groups. The children explore the classroom while families ask more questions. A Night at the Museum, typically in May, transforms the gym into a gallery for each class to show off their current projects. The children are so proud to have their families come in and see their hard work, and we get a chance to connect with families. Finally, Eid Lunch celebrates the end of Ramadan. One family at school prepares a humungous lunch for our staff. It is incredibly warm and generous of them

> to share their culture and customs with us, and I look forward to it every year. The food is AMAZING! (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018)

Given his positive family–school experiences, Daniel is eager to volunteer in his son's classroom and gather first-hand experience. His son is looking forward to this as well, as evidenced by an overheard statement from his son to his wife: "I think I'm going to play close to the door so I'm the first one to see Dad when he gets to school" (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018).

Support Systems

Just as elementary education is a collective effort, so too are graduate studies. Daniel fully recognizes that pursuing graduate studies is not an individual endeavour and that his wife, best friend, supervisor, and colleagues each contribute to his success. He wonders,

> Have I used the term support system? I haven't really thought about this, much, to be honest. Again, I try to be as little an imposition on others as I can. I try not to put my school stress on my family. Group texts with two colleagues in my cohort are helpful. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Ever-present wife. Daniel recognizes that his wife takes on many responsibilities when he is away for school or teaching, ensuring that play time, dinner, bath time, story time, and bed time routines run smoothly. He more than appreciates his wife's support:

> My wife is always there to listen and to offer suggestions when I can't work something through on my own. I don't think of my son as part of a support system. I wouldn't want him to feel like there are emotional needs or expectations placed on him. He does not necessarily view the people in his life as his support system because

> he doesn't want to impose expectations or stress on others. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Since enrolling in the PhD program, Daniel acknowledges,

> [My wife's] support hasn't necessarily changed. She still wants me to do well and is happy for me that I am doing something that I love, but I know it's frustrating when I have to focus on work. It's a sacrifice for her; she spends a lot of time alone that in a normal marriage, not afflicted by grad school problems, would otherwise be spent together. I am making a more concerted effort to spend more quality time together. The shift in my schedule has helped make that possible. Where before our son would go to bed at 7:00 and I'd begin work immediately, now with more time in my schedule during the day, I get more work done, and she and I can watch a movie after he's in bed without me having to rush off and work. After a term, family life is sort of settling down. We're still trying to figure out how to manage our days and all the responsibilities with my need to perform at a much higher level. Some weeks are really stressful and I know I'm not the best partner or parent. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

Friend as willing listener. While Daniel's best friend is not a graduate student, he is a willing listener. He confesses, "I call or text my best friend daily and we make a point to ask one another how things are going. There are a lot of 2:00 a.m. phone calls" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018).

Encouraging and empathetic supervisor. Daniel maintains continual contact with his supervisor and indicates that she is supportive of all her graduate students. He enjoys the extra opportunities she extends. For example, he planned a presentation for a group of

educators working with him on his supervisor's research project, and he submitted an abstract for a call for papers. He finds that negotiating deadlines with his supervisor and recognizing the workload of others helps to keep him on track. He reflects,

> In the MEd, it was really helpful to have my supervisor say you need to have things done; as much as you think you are self-motivated, sometimes having someone else tell you they need to see this by this time is necessary if you want to finish. My supervisor has a tremendous workload so she wants me to be done by June. She goes away for the summer to research and be with family so my work also impacts others. (Skype interview, November 24, 2016)

Daniel chose a university in Ontario to pursue his PhD, predominantly because of the relationship he shares with his supervisor. He explains,

> She is incredibly busy, she currently has five first-year PhD students, two second-year, plus a few MA students, and I believe a few students still at her previous institution. She understands family commitments, but I sometimes worry about letting her in on that, because I don't want her to think I'm not dedicated to school, or to miss out on opportunities because she thinks I don't have time. (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)

In good company. There are many other parents in Daniel's program; some are mature students with teenagers while others have young children at home. Daniel said, "In my little group of friends, the five of us who work with the same supervisor, two of us have children and it's nice to have someone who is experiencing similar struggles between school and parenthood" (Email correspondence, December 17, 2018).

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

Keeping the two worlds separate. Reflecting on whether his doctoral program was structured to allow for family life, Daniel confesses,

> I'm not sure. That's a hard question. Does it need to be? I think I can see both sides. I think the long-held stigma about grad school and academia is "Don't have kids and don't get married," but I bet if you surveyed most professors, that is not really how life works out. We're social animals and lots of us find love and have children, not all, but enough to keep the population alive, and some of us end up in academia. I try to keep the two worlds separate. The grad program assistant doesn't need to know I'm flying into her office right before the 4:30 deadline for the SSHRC application because there's a lot going on in my life. There's a lot going on in her life too! I don't really look to work/school peers as needing to accommodate me because I'm a parent. I try to be as little an imposition on others as I can, including making my struggles between studying and parenthood not something for them to worry about. I try to work those things out behind the scenes.
>
> What's the term, emotional labour? I don't need to foist that on others. At the same time, sometimes I need to leave one of those open-ended, impromptu meetings when it's dragging on and there's no end in sight, because I have a 2-hour drive back home and I want to see my son, or we need to go to swimming lessons. It isn't the coursework that is so time-consuming, or not-family-friendly. It's the extras—the conference proposals and conferences, the weekend symposium, the monthly reading group, the research group meetings, and the impromptu meetings. (Email correspondence, December 17, 2017)

As Daniel bridges the seemingly long distance between home and school, he listens to music in the car: “It’s a big help to turn to art to help process some of the intense feelings that come with grad school. A band called The Worriers has a song called *WTF Is Sleep?* that sums up grad school nicely” (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018):

> Set no alarm cause I am totally guaranteed to
>
> wake to my chest beating for miles ahead of me
>
> I lie awake as sleep escapes me.
>
> Breathing through an infinite hum of anxiety. (Worriers, 2017, Track 10)

While Daniel did not appear to struggle with the tensions of being a graduate student parent, and appeared to take it all in stride, tension began to surface the deeper he delved into his situation. In the end, when asked about the tension in his life, he stated, “It’s more a constant state of tension than any one time, I’m frequently worried that one part of my life is going to interrupt another” (Email correspondence, February 6, 2018). While not necessarily vocal throughout the process of these tensions, his choice of music offers a glimpse into how I think he truly feels about being a graduate student parent.

Bree’s Narrative: The Power of Re-Storying

Bree is a second-year doctoral candidate researching gender at a public liberal arts and science university. She is in a common-law relationship and has a six-year-old son. She describes parenthood as “an evolving piece of my identity and the meaning of the term, for me, has changed over time and as I’ve gotten to know my child’s needs” (Entry survey, August 17, 2016). She is the first one in her family to attend university and the promise of increased employability drew her into graduate studies. Working as a doctoral research associate and transcriptionist will help Bree reach her goal of becoming a professor.

I first met Bree in 2015 at the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences conference in Ottawa, Ontario. She presented her research to an intimate audience, her passion and knowledge for her thesis drew me in, and I approached her afterwards. We had a short conversation about life as graduate student parents, and we exchanged contact information. We continued email correspondence over the next year with full intention of co-authoring a paper; this never came to fruition. In the beginning, I was unaware that Bree experiences chronic illness and pain that impact her day-to-day functioning; this was discovered through ongoing conversation.

Bree's journey highlights what it is like to be a first-generation student, which means that no one else in her family has a university degree. She revisits her personal experiences and the importance of supportive relationships to understand the connection between the events in her life. Embracing vulnerability, Bree presents her struggles with what it means to be both a good parent and a good graduate student and how she balances both roles. As Brown (2012) reminds us, "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness" (p. 37). She expresses frustration at the lack of understanding that exists surrounding what it means to be a parent and an academic. Self-care continues to be a daily reminder about the importance of managing chronic illness and pain.

Graduate Studies Experience

Carving her path as a first-generation student. Postsecondary education was something Bree always wanted to do, but as a first-generation student, support and encouragement from home was limited. She explains matter-of-factly that her family has "fixed mindsets, seeing their capabilities as limited and with borders (Email correspondence,

January 30, 2018). She was actively encouraged to pursue postsecondary studies by a few high school teachers. She recalls their support: “I can think of a handful of teachers that made me feel like I had something to contribute to the world, and that made me feel smart. I always looked up to those teachers” (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018).

Bree applied to university, gained admission, and started her undergraduate degree. Her first-generation status affected her undergraduate experience because, in effect, she was unaware of the demands. She states, “I had no one to talk to about it in my family. I struggled quite a bit in year 1 and 2 because I just felt lost” (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). She admits, “I do feel that many people going to university had so many more advantages than I did, such as supportive families, higher socio-economic statuses, etc.” (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018). Throughout her undergraduate degree, Bree held herself to high standards; her goal was to compete with her peers, and to one day be as smart and talented as her professors. And then, university life took a bit of a turn. She confesses,

> I got pregnant with someone I didn’t have a future with so that kind of derailed a lot of my plans. I didn’t know if I would continue in graduate studies. I took a year off for maternity, and I came to university as a visiting student still in my undergrad. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Finishing her undergraduate degree, Bree set her sights on a Master’s degree. She admits, “During my undergraduate degree, I always knew I’d pursue graduate studies of some kind because I was really influenced by my professors at my institution. They inspired me so much” (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). She was not sure what graduate studies meant in terms of jobs, but she knew it would increase her employability. As she describes,

> I started befriending people I looked up to, and volunteering with professors who had something to teach me. I surrounded myself with people I could learn from, and who could give me the skills I needed to get where I wanted to go. (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018)

Bree wanted a career in higher education as a researcher and professor and she knew getting a Master's and PhD would lead her to that career. She writes,

> My vision of graduate studies was a means to that goal. What I didn't know was the amount of work that goes in behind the scenes; what I didn't realize was that a lot of your success in graduate school comes down to your ability to persist through challenges and to deal with issues (i.e., bad supervisor fit) and get through them intact. (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018)

During her Master's degree, Bree worked part-time as a research associate and transcriptionist. She offers this explanation for how her course work progressed:

> The course work for the Master's program wasn't easy, it certainly pushed me to think in a different way. When I moved into the PhD, I felt as though the courses were my favourite part. Our cohort was small. There was course work, the readings, the writing but just having other people to talk with every single week about what we were thinking and where we saw our research going. Having that constant companionship was a highlight which I kind of lacked in my Master's program. The PhD courses were very strong, but it was those discussions with classmates that really made it special. I liked someone challenging you in a very supportive way, you're open to it, it's kind of difficult to have to explain how you think or feel on a particular theory or perspective but when they're a peer in your program you kind of appreciate

> them giving you that opportunity to challenge yourself. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Her parents tell her frequently that they are proud of her, but she indicates, "My siblings don't understand what I'm doing, I think what is more important for me now is that my son sees that I am pursuing my PhD. I want him to value higher education as much as I do" (Email correspondence, January, 30, 2018). On multiple occasions, Bree reached out through email, evidence of her desire to understand or re-story her experiences:

> A few things have come up since our interview, like the toll graduate studies and parenthood has taken on me mentally and physically (e.g., depression, anxiety, weight gain). But that is something we can address next time. It came to me because I realized how happy my interview sounded in my head, where it generally has been, but it's taken a huge toll on my body, physically and mentally, because I always put myself last (son first, partner, family, house, grad studies, work, volunteering, and then me and my needs). Anyway, that's what I am currently ruminating on. (Email correspondence, September 11, 2016)

Another time, she wrote,

> I took the time to reflect a little more on your questions and my response to them, I realized that in listening to it I sounded really positive. Not that I am not positive but I think that a lot of things were not said that I just didn't think about saying. I really enjoy my time as a grad student and as a parent but there are things like the fact that my son's biological Dad is not the one raising him. He isn't paying child support, and that puts an extra financial strain on me. The fact that I have a lot of chronic illnesses and chronic pain really negatively impact my day-to-day functioning. Sometimes, I'm

> good but there are times when I'm really bad. I think it's great that you're doing more than one interview because I think that interview really caught me on a good day but it didn't reveal the full picture of my experience so I am quite excited to have another opportunity. (Skype interview, December 13, 2016)

Support Systems

Bree recognizes that pursuing graduate studies is not an individual endeavor, and that her partner, colleagues, supervisor, and parents each contribute to her success.

Dad by choice. Bree describes her current partner as a great dad by choice and emphatically states,

> I am really thankful for the support he provides to me and my son. In terms of my academic work, he's always willing to parent solo if I am away at a conference. He doesn't ever guilt me for it; he might not be the happiest to be on full parent mode for 5 days but who would be, right? Credit to single parents, he doesn't guilt me; he's always willing to pick up the slack at home like if something needs to be done I just have to ask. We also have a pretty strong routine at home, so every night one person is on bed time duty, one person is on cleaning duty so that there aren't nights where one person is doing everything. So that you don't have to carry that annoyed feeling with your partner because we both worked all day. We just know that one night I am bathing our son and that night he is cleaning the house. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

A close cohort. When talking about the other PhD students in her program, Bree admits,

> We're all really close, we're always emailing each other; we always get together on

> campus. We do little mini socials where we'll have wine and food and so we always have each other's backs. Everyone in my program except for one person has kids so you have that implicit understanding already in your body of what people are going through balancing it all with kids and family and work and school and PhD. You can just get down to the meat of it and say this really sucks and people without kids don't really give you the same pep talk [laughing out loud] that someone with kids does. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Revisiting her PhD journey, Bree explains that now that her course work is complete and she is left to focus on her research, important relationships have formed:

> Something that has changed for me since we spoke is that I've now got a strong group of graduate student friends. There are about six to eight of us who meet weekly, and we paint with wine and food, or go to a board game café, the movies, community events, concerts, and comedy shows. While no one is in my faculty or program they still understand the struggles of being graduate students, and how important it is to have a network of people around you. This has significantly improved my mental health! I have noticed a change in my overall levels of happiness and life satisfaction because of my new friends. It has made my academic work more rewarding too. I say this because before I had friends, I spent most of my time doing academic work and stressing about academic work. Now, I feel I have balance. (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018)

Never a perfect student–supervisor match. Bree spoke highly of her Master's supervisor. Her experience with her first PhD supervisor was less positive, as she describes,

> The relationship with my [PhD] supervisor is non-existent. This first year, things have

> happened in my life that were unexpected. When I tell him, he is very understanding. He and I don't often see eye-to-eye theoretically or in terms of our methods or our approaches to research, which is okay. I know that it is not always going to be a perfect match especially in a small faculty but I am definitely still grieving the "loss" of my Master's supervisor; she is still alive just not my supervisor in my PhD. The relationship is different and the hardest thing in my program right now is starting fresh and building that relationship. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Realizing that this disconnect would not serve her well, Bree undertook the task of changing supervisors; she explains,

> It was a very long process with the grad coordinator in my program. We had a lot of conversations about what my options were and I was reminded to take it quite seriously because it's a small faculty and not that there would be hard feelings but just take the decision really seriously. In the end, I decided that I would formally request a supervisor change. I am very happy. Again, it's not a perfect match methods-wise or research area-wise, it's more a match in terms of our personalities and our relationship. In the end, I asked him to be my supervisor because we had such good rapport. I really needed someone who was direct and grounded and would tell me things the way they were. That is what my new supervisor is like, so our conversations are more to the point and that makes them meatier. I am now a productive student again. I am progressing as normal, whereas before I felt very delayed and frustrated. I am very happy that I have a new supervisor so that is a really major change since we last spoke. (Skype interview, December 13, 2016)

Proud parents. Bree does not have extended family nearby, which impacts her day-to-day support. The emotional support that she receives is grounded in a limited understanding of the demands of graduate studies as evidenced in the following reflection:

> My parents don't know at all of what it means to be a grad student but my Mom and Dad are proud of me. They say it all the time but when I talk about my work [their eyes] glaze over, they're like okay and same thing with my siblings they don't know what it means to be a grad student. People don't understand at all what I mean when I talk about my work. So it's kind of a little frustrating when I want to talk about something that I am proud of, or work that I'm doing, or when I secure funding they don't see how important those things are necessarily. They know they're important to me which I guess is as much as I'm going to be able to get from my family. They cheer me on, which is all I need. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

An intentional balancing act. Despite Bree's desire to be a role model for her son, she is determined not to let graduate school take away from her parenting. Being a parent means always being there mentally and emotionally for her son, and as much as possible being there physically. Bree describes,

> It is important for me to be actively involved in his life, his schooling, and his growth. It is important for me to spend time with him in enriching settings, like art classes, the community library, the pool, parks, the beach etc. so that we can play and learn together. It's also important that he's involved in my life, and sees what mommy does—so I like bringing him to campus sometimes, and I like telling him about my

> day teaching, and what I research or what I'm learning. (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018)

She intentionally involves herself in things that are flexible that she can do at her own pace. She points out,

> I always try to be there for supper time, bed times, I try to be there on weekends all the time and that is just something I commit to so everything else has to happen between that 8:30-4:00ish time period or I don't really get myself involved in it because I know that I can't put 100% of me into. I have made very deliberate choices and it doesn't mean I am not overwhelmed sometimes or overloaded or busy some weeks but overall he comes first and sometimes I have to miss a bed time or a weekend but he is always number one in my mind. There are some days where I am more stressed than others and maybe I am a little more grumpy than usual but I think any parent no matter if you are a PhD student or not just has those days so I try not to be too hard on myself. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Balancing the different roles in her life is a significant challenge for Bree as she explains:

> I feel grad students are made to feel like we have to say yes to everything. It's expected that we do all these things for free or do this committee work. I feel like we say yes to things because it might look good on our CVs. That's generally what I can say for the last four or five years of my grad studies career. A lot of times I will say yes because it will go on my CV and that's not great because you end up with 10 things that you're balancing in maybe a given week and you have very little time to do so. Then your PhD work which for me kind of falls to the end, so the bottom of that list is read this article and think about it for a while. It is easy to put that aside

> and say I can read that anytime but then by the end of the week or the end of the day you're mentally exhausted and you haven't had that time to think critically about a really important piece. As a parent and a grad student, there comes a point in your day when you're mentally exhausted. Some people say "work in the evenings on your PhD." I can do about 30 minutes of email work in the evenings and that's it. In the evenings I'm exhausted and need to take time for myself; I can't do intellectually stimulating work in the evening because I will fall asleep or I just want to go to bed so I think my time is split in a really funny way that people without children don't experience. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Exploring her need to say yes to everything, Bree comments,

> For me, it's fear of missing out on something that I could add to my CV, or fear of saying no to someone who I might need a reference from, for example. Sometimes there's also a power imbalance, too, when I am asked to do something by a dean or a professor and I feel I just can't say no. I fear that would lead to no more doors opening for me. So, I mostly continue to say yes to everything. I do think if I wasn't a full-time funded student, I would be saying no a lot more because I would simply not have the time! (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018)

Bree does not view the roles in her life as compatible as indicated below:

> I know that parents working any kind of job would have similar conflicts and similar competing expectations and time constraints on them. I don't want to say that PhD students who are parents are necessarily different from people who are working and are also parents. However, I think that there is a lack of understanding in academia pretty much across the board about what it means to be a parent and an academic despite a lot of us having children and families. I don't know if it's unspoken or if I

> don't know the root of it but there is a lack of understanding that sometimes when your kid is sick you might have to miss a class or you might not be able to come into work that day and there is a bit of pressure. I know I have asked my partner to take a sick day from his job even though he's not sick to take care of our son because I felt so guilty saying no to a really important meeting or missing a class. That's my own guilt right, my own perception that there are expectations of me that even if my kid is sick you know I kind of still have to be there and there are times when I brought my son in with me because I have to but it's so distracting. When my son is with me, I am Mom, I am in Mommy mode, and at a meeting, I can't get out of that mode where I am like watching him or giving him snacks, pulling out the colouring book and crayons, I'm not engaged in that meeting. It's like at those moments I feel like it's most unfair, it's like how come these two worlds clash so much, like why aren't campuses more child friendly? Why don't campuses have a drop center or something to support students in general who are parents, like grad students and undergrad students? (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Bree mentions feeling guilty about saying no to extra graduate school commitments and how the guilt compounds each time and does not go away. After discussing the internal conflict she feels, Bree expands by saying,

> And then, externally, there are all these pressures and expectations when you see your colleagues who don't have kids and they're just like ploughing through, or your faculty member or supervisor or mentor doesn't have kids. No one understands and they expect the same out of you as someone without a kid and it's like no, I can't perform that way. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

Attending to self. Bree's physical and mental health and her own sense of well-being has been affected by graduate studies, and she does not know how to change her pattern of self-care. She explains,

> I feel like I don't have a good sense of well-being primarily because I don't take time for myself. That would include getting enough sleep and exercising and doing things outside of parenthood and grad studies. I used to want to join book clubs and learn how to watercolour. All of those things are at the bottom of the list, and I never get to the bottom of the list. I have never completed a "to do" list because things always get added. I am in year 2 of my PhD. I went right from my Master's into my PhD. I feel that over the last 4 years that include my Master's, I have neglected my mental health and my physical health; I know that eventually that needs to change, but I just don't know how to change the routine that I have gotten into. I think it's good for people to say, "Well I will try again tomorrow" and I am always thinking that, but it's that every day. Every day it's like, "Oh today is finished, and I have no energy left. I can go to the gym now or I can go to bed and catch up on sleep, or I can do the dishes." If I did those things for myself, I feel like I would just be adding more to my plate the next day. The dishes would still have to be done, and I would still be sleep deprived. It's really hard to take that time for myself. (Skype interview, December 13, 2016)

Bree plans to address her chronic illness and pain by going to the gym with her partner and seeing a chiropractor multiple times a month. This, however, is not always manageable, as she discusses,

> There are some days, or weeks, where I find myself putting everything (and everyone else) first. Sometimes there is so much happening in my family, with friends, at

> school, that I just can't focus on myself first. There are days, and maybe weeks here and there, where my health, well-being, and mental health come first. Embarrassingly, this often happens when I start to feel sick or in pain, and I tell myself that I have to rest, take time off, and rejuvenate. I do think, though, that by scheduling in friend time, gym time, play time with my son, meal planning, etc. I've been able to keep my mental health in check and my physical health on the forefront. For some reason, I don't see this as putting myself first, but they are small changes I've made to lower my stress levels and find more happiness in life. (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018)

Bree appreciates the funding she has secured for three years that enables her to pursue her PhD full-time. Her partner works full-time putting their family in a position of financial stability. Bree explains that having "a kid means you have other expenses" (Skype interview, September 8, 2016). Without funding, she was unsure whether she would be able to complete her PhD. Childcare costs add up quickly. Now that her son is school-aged, Bree states,

> This year I am cutting back a little on after-school care because it's expensive. I am trying to let the scholarship money go to good use and actually have that time to work on my PhD and not all that daytime spent on paid work. So I am cutting back to only 3 days a week versus 5 so I am a little nervous if I'll have enough time to get all my work done not having full-time care every day. (Skype interview, September 8, 2016)

In terms of financial support, Bree notes that her institution offers one small, competitive scholarship per semester for parents; "Without SSHRC funding in my Master's and PhD, I am not sure I would be financially able to do graduate studies" (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018). To help other first-generation students, Bree advises them to look into

financial supports that are not governmental loans or bank loans. She writes,

> The burden of student debt is scary and looming and never goes away. With that said, I would never discourage anyone from getting higher education in any field. Possibly take time off to work first. Consider part-time studies so you can work and study and perhaps not go as far into debt as a student on a full government loan." (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018)

Powerful teaching connections. Bree has been teaching part-time for two years now, one sessional course in the fall and one sessional course in the winter. In her teaching, Bree identifies as a critical pedagogue quoting bell hooks (1994): "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility" (p. 207). Bree describes her experience,

> Teaching is immensely satisfying. I realized that I am actually quite skilled at teaching because I make an effort to connect with each and every student. The last day of class is always emotional. It was like saying goodbye to dozens of amazing young people, who I may or may not see again. It tears me to shreds. In the past I've received thank-you cards, small gifts, hugs, and requests for pictures. It makes my heart feel full. (Email correspondence, December 15, 2017)

Bree engages in reflective practice and continues to actively work on her teaching philosophy. She connects with each of her students by being honest about her high expectations for each of them; she summarizes,

> I tell them I expect their best every time, and will support them in any means possible to help them be their best. I'll review their work at any stage to give feedback. I create syllabi that have assignments with formative and summative assessments, and

> always include self-reflection, so that they can grow. I always give opportunities for redoing an assignment if I can tell they struggled. I point them in the direction of university supports and will facilitate those first introductions if needed. I care about each student deeply and try my best to learn their name as soon as possible, and to know why they are at the institution and why my class, what do they want to get out of it? I treat them as adults, and I treat them with respect. (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018)

Bree indicates that graduate school confirms that being a professor is what she is meant to do. She continues to take things one day at a time. She admits that balancing a chronic illness, parenthood, and graduate studies has not gotten any easier. She is unsure how academia and her family will fit together moving forward. Her partner has a career in a town where she has no roots, and she wonders what this will mean for her family when she starts job hunting,

> I want a career in academia, and this could very well mean I have to move for a job. Will my family come with me? Will I live in two cities and travel back and forth? This conversation is very hard to have with my partner; we have no idea what the future brings. Right now, the future is very, very precarious. (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018)

Moving after graduate school is a touchy subject in Bree's household; she notes, "I would move, and it's an eventuality for me" (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). Her partner is not ready to leave his current job or where they live and has jokingly made comments like, "You can go, our son and I will stay here" (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). Bree realizes that,

> When it comes time for a move, and it will come time for it, it will be a large conversation over a period of time with all options explored before any decisions are made. I can't be too hurt by his unwillingness at the moment because he's worked really hard for his career. I don't know enough about how academics do this sort of negotiating! (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018)

Bree remains hopeful moving forward despite feeling trepidation thinking about the future and pursuing a job in higher education. She has a feeling that everything will work out. In the end, when asked about what the future holds post-PhD completion, she states,

> I've applied for a professorship and a post-doc (haven't heard back from either) and I've spoken to PhD grads about the torturous task of finding meaningful employment after graduation. I am not naïve in thinking it will be easy; I know it's going to be an uphill battle to get hired as a professor (my dream job). (Email correspondence, April 16, 2018)

Sloane's Narrative: The Ebb and Flow of Life

Sloane is married with a ten-year old daughter. After completing two Master's degrees, having a baby, and fighting cancer, she decided to refocus and apply for a PhD. She is currently a fifth-year doctoral candidate focusing on teacher leadership in classroom assessment. A system level educator by profession, Sloane works 60 hours per week and describes her employer as "somewhat supportive and flexible" of her academic pursuit (Entry survey, August 17, 2016). She loves her job and wants to be the voice for her colleagues; her goal is "to move successful practices forward and work towards improving student learning" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016).

Sloane's curiosity brought her to graduate work. She completed a Master of Literature degree in Women's Studies followed by a Master of Education degree. She explains,

> I was really interested in exploring informal teacher leadership and how teachers can lead from within the classroom and I started digging that into my Master's. Then my supervisor said, "Why don't you do your PhD?" and I said, "I just had a baby. Why don't I take a few years of a break?" I took a couple years of a break and then I got cancer. Toward the end of dealing with that, I needed something to refocus me. I decided to apply for my PhD. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Applying for a PhD was a big decision that prompted many conversations with different people. Sloane explains,

> We had been trying to get pregnant and had a bunch of miscarriages. I had decided to carry on and I remember sitting in my endocrinologist's office and saying, "I think I might do a PhD." She said, "I think you should try to get pregnant again." I said, "I really don't think I can continue trying this." She said, "Well, you know a PhD isn't going to take care of you when you're old." (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Sloane successfully got pregnant after meeting with her endocrinologist. She took time off school while trying to get pregnant after having her daughter. Sloane decided to apply for a PhD to refocus her energy. She felt it was the right thing to do and that her daughter needed a role model. Her email outlined her rationale for this decision: "I wanted my daughter to see that one kid is great and a PhD is doable. You have to set yourself some goals and you will get there with the love and support of everybody and some determination" (February 7, 2018).

Sloane's mission to improve student learning brings her professional and academic life together. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on classroom assessment and she worked as an instructional coordinator for assessment in a school board. As she connected parenthood and graduate school, she often felt guilty for not being fully present in the role or task at hand. While she had an effective support network, she wished her own family better understood and were more interested in her journey. Sloane often questioned how she gets everything done and viewed her well-being as cyclical.

Graduate Studies Experience

A culture of change. Sloane's purpose for completing a PhD was to be a voice for her colleagues; it had little to do with her career, and she has no expectations to advance her career. She recognizes that, "The teachers I work with are always working towards improving student learning, and I want to share their experiences as leaders and move successful practices forward" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Sloane understands that taking a step back to reflect on the processes and student learning is necessary to enhance education: "It's a problem I need to explore to keep my own self sustained in my interest of education; you can get really bogged down by the micro politics of your job and the interpersonal and intrapersonal of your job" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Her job responsibilities involve supporting assessment leadership and learning; her research focuses on how teachers informally support leadership and literacy. Sloane discusses the many roles in her life,

> They compete and conflict and sometimes they beautifully come together as well. At work, there are moments when I need to talk to this person so I can use their conversation for my data but then I am conflicted by the fact that I need to provide

> professional learning for 50 secondary principals who don't have a hot clue around this idea of assessment. When I really want to go deep and think about it, I'm actually focusing on the surface work to get administrators to move forward. It's weird because I don't know if it's a conflict or a support, but I am always in this bucket doing assessment but it is rarely separate. I think that's why I feel like I am always working. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Parenthood and graduate studies are interconnected in many ways for Sloane:

> Every time I learn something about an effective way of assessing or understanding learning it permeates so connectedly into my parenthood and my parenting practices that for me they are inseparable. For example, when my husband was berating my daughter the other day about something, I gave him a look and said, "What Papa is trying to say is this." Then I gave her some concrete descriptive feedback so she would feel not judged, but would have a next step, which is the fundamental principle in assessment. You describe the learning, you give a next step or you ask a question, you help that kid move forward. As I continue to study and investigate assessment and leadership, I see that more and more as being important so sometimes I wish that they would separate but they don't separate, not for me. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Improving education for her daughter was one of Sloane's primary motivators: "I think everything that I do, I do with the notion I want to make education better for her" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Her goal was reinforced when her daughter asks questions about what and why she's doing things. She explains,

> I want to model for her how to be a learner, and that it's okay to come across a

> problem and to be kind of stuck and to sometimes be frustrated and move through it. I might say, "Oh I am stuck on this, and I don't understand this." And then she'll say, "Oh I'm stuck on this math problem and I don't understand this, but I'm going to get there." She says that because she has heard me say it. My kid is an elite athlete; she's just changed schools and moved from French immersion to an English program. She goes to school for only half a day, because she trains in the morning. Her notion of learning has been kind of blown up, because she now sees that learning can happen in so many places and in so many ways, and that we're always supportive of it. I think she has been able to do that because she knows that I am constantly learning and that it's important to be constantly learning. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

An experience of guilt. Sloane divulges that her biggest challenge is her ability to regulate her time; "It's trying to be able to not feel guilty about not doing work on your PhD, which I think sometimes I spend way too much time thinking about it and not doing it" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). For Sloane there is never enough time, the expectations associated with being an active parent, working full-time and being a successful graduate student are time-consuming endeavours. These differing expectations led her to feel guilty about focusing solely on one task over the others. Sloane explains, "When I started my PhD I was working full-time, my daughter was in before-and-after school care but that is never enough time to do my PhD because I am meticulous about my work" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). And then there is the guilt associated with parenthood: "I feel a tremendous amount of guilt when I'm talking to my daughter and she is doing something interesting or we're having a conversation, and I might not be fully present because I am thinking about something else" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Childcare is

problematic because it "would mean more time away from my kid and the guilt I would feel being away from her is too much" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016).

Sloane also feels guilty at work when she is not fully present, because she is trying to connect 20 different things at one time. Referring to parenthood, Sloane explains,

> It's okay to pick apart what women do but it's not always okay to pick apart what fathers do, like a Dad needs to pick up a kid from childcare and he is amazing but if a Mom is 5 minutes late for childcare, she is crass. That's always been a frustration of mine—the different perceptions of men and women in parenthood. I see it in my own work environment; there are 15 of us who are coordinators at this large board, and three of them are men. They choose to leave earlier than other people to deal with their kids and everyone comments that they are such great Dads, and so dedicated. Whereas if I left work at 3:30 p.m. on a regular basis to go get my daughter, they would question, "Why the hell is she doing that? Can't she get childcare?" There is a different expectation for men and women when it comes to parenting, and when Dads step up to do equitable parenting work, they are more highly regarded than women who just do the work that needs to happen for their children. I won't even discuss my colleagues who are gay, don't have kids, but have responsibilities with their elderly parents. People's notions of family responsibility are really being shaken up. I really like the notion of rethinking parenthood, fatherhood, masculinity and femininity, and the roles within families. We also need to think about our elders and how we care for them, because they are our responsibilities too. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Sloane understands that the different expectations for men and women when it comes to parenthood are likely a result of long-standing, ingrained traditional gender norms and

stereotypes of male and female identities:

> I think men have this perceived notion of masculinity and fatherhood, and those are really long-standing traditions even in 2018. It's totally acceptable for my husband to work until 7:00 at night, but it's not acceptable for me to. As a feminist, I question this every day of my life and wonder how I ended up in this situation. I am a part of a fairly traditional family set-up, but my husband would probably not agree. He calls himself a feminist, and he does do a lot around the house. He is a great guy, but there are still some very traditional practices that he couldn't possibly shake. I think it is just long-standing tradition and part of his cultural background and mine as well. I have to take ownership too. I had a stay-at-home Mom who raised four kids and that was what I saw as a woman and as a parent. Last week it was a crazy week, and I told my husband, "I wish you could make a lot of money so I could work less." I have never felt that way before. I think it was because I wanted to spend more time at home with my daughter, and I was just tired of basically working three jobs. It happens over time. I have been with my husband for 25 years. We were just kids when we got together, and over time, things became more his responsibility or my responsibility. Sometimes, it's just logistical and other times, I really don't like taking the garbage and recycling bins out; I would rather tidy the kitchen. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Support Systems

Sloane recognizes that pursuing graduate studies is not an individual endeavour, and that her colleagues in the program, work colleagues, supervisor, daughter, husband, and her summers spent overseas each contribute to her success.

Meaningful relationships. Sloane enjoyed the onsite courses at her institution because of the conversations and meaningful relationships she formed:

> Everybody was so open to learning because we are from such diverse backgrounds, as a K-12 educator I felt like I got to represent that voice. It was wonderful to hear about everybody's different point of view and to really deepen my understanding about what education means across the spectrum as opposed to just the K-12 system. We had First Nations and Metis people, we had men and women, we had people who were older and younger, people who had classroom experience, people who had business experience. I loved thinking about education from not just my lens. (Phone interview, September 19, 2106)

Although Sloane developed wonderful friendships with many of the women in her program, they did not share writing with each other. They created a Facebook group, but no one posted writing for feedback. Sloane offers this explanation: "I don't think that people are willing to take that risk, putting their own work out there, there is a very protective or maybe self-conscious nature to it" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). She is not eager to share her writing because she was apprehensive and not eager to impose work on others equally as busy. Cohort support, according to Sloane, is a function of time spent together:

> When I first started the PhD program my cohort was really close, but then over the years quite a few people dropped out of the program and people move on to do other things. A few have graduated so that cohort that you started with kind of dissipates and the relationships start to dissipate. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Work colleagues. Over the last year, Sloane has developed relationships with colleagues who are working toward their PhD. She states, "We are all in the same space, we

are at different places in our PhD but we are all really supportive to one another and we all touch base with one another" (Phone interview, February 7, 2018). She explains how work colleague support has created wonderful moments,

> We make time to ask each other about our research which is so exciting to be able to talk about your research and ideas. I have found a lot of challenging moments where they'll ask me, "Why are you thinking about it that way?" or "Have you read about this?" We send articles back and forth which has been a really wonderful thing. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Supportive supervision. As Sloane transitioned into the PhD program, she secured her Master of Education supervisor as her PhD supervisor, recalling the experience as positive. Her supervisor pushed her and provided support as necessary, without being overbearing. Sloane recalls,

> In the beginning my supervisor was busy taking care of herself and her family and didn't push me as hard as perhaps I needed. Today, I respect and understand that and think back on what a whiny little wimp I was to not see what was going on and take responsibility to push myself. She has been wonderful, and I think she has worked through her experiences, I have too. Recently, she has been more active. I think she is looking forward to retirement in the next few years. She said, "Get your arse in gear sister because I want to retire in the next couple of years." It's actually been super effective. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Sloane appreciates the fact that her supervisor has been an educator in the K-12 system because she understands and can relate to her area of interest, stating, "Half the time I think we talk about my dissertation and the other half of the time we just shoot the shit about what crazy stuff is going on in my school board" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016).

Venting and problem solving with her supervisor has been helpful for Sloane due to her supervisor's strong social justice lens. Sloane is then able to stretch the conversation when she is back in the school environment: "Maybe we can look beyond Michael Fullan to other bodies of literature around leadership so that we're not always for the lack of a better expression, middle-class White guy's perspective on leadership" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Sloane describes her supervisor as a perfectionist who takes her position within a committee very seriously, "I do a lot of revisions which I'm grateful of because the more that I refocus with her the less I have to deal with the rest of committee" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016).

Mother–daughter relationship. Sloane's daughter is an elite athlete and only attends school for half a day because she trains every morning. Her daughter knows what she is doing, yet might not understand what a PhD in doctoral studies means:

> She knows that sometimes on Saturdays you can't go into Momma's office and she knows that sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I have to go write and that I might sleep in. She knows that sometimes I go to the library and it's because I am a teacher of teachers and that is pretty cool but she doesn't really understand. She has decided she wants to do her PhD but she wants to do it in costume design because Momma does it. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Sloane discusses how important it is to be a learner and how she wants to model this for her daughter. She said, "Especially as a woman, after Saturday's marches all across the world where we are still fighting for our rights, she needs to know that she has access to this and that she can do it as well" (Phone interview, January 23, 2017). She further discusses, "One of the reasons why I do this is to show her that she can too, use your voice to the best that you can and use your mind the best you can to support other people and yourself" (Phone interview,

January 23, 2017). Her daughter was starting to go through puberty and like any female athlete/high achiever she was experiencing some anxiety. Sloane explains, "We are spending a lot of time after school side-by-side, sitting next to each other to work through it in a way that is conducive to mental health for everybody" (Phone interview, February 7, 2018). Sloane spent a lot of time outside of school having conversations with her daughter to extend her thinking and her knowledge in different ways than she experiences at school.

Supportive husband in theory. Talking about her husband, Sloane states, "He is supportive of it in theory. He likes to be able to say that he has a wife who is doing her PhD; it's almost like a status symbol for him" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). One weekend Sloane wanted to finish editing her dissertation, however her husband wanted her to go pick a refrigerator: "I could not give two shits about the refrigerator and he is dragging me around and I just want to get this done" (Phone interview, February 7, 2018). While Sloane's husband is supportive, he does not fully recognize the time required to complete a PhD degree. On the weekend her husband will offer to take care of everything, however Sloane recalls: "He could get up, make breakfast, deal with the dog and then it's 10 o'clock. He finally gets up so I can do some work. However someone has to go grocery shopping so it can be impossible at times" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). Describing support beyond her own immediate family unit, Sloane says,

> My own family are pretty uninterested; I am the only one on either side of my family that has any postsecondary. My Mom doesn't even understand what I am doing and never asks. Actually nobody ever asks on my side of the family. My in-laws are kind of interested, because they know that I go overseas in the summers and I spend the first 3 weeks studying and writing, they've never asked me what I investigate or what I'm interested in but they know that I am doing a PhD. Nobody asks me what I am curious

> about or what I am investigating, I think the content area is so far removed from their average life. My Mom has a Grade 10 high school education and hasn't worked outside the home. She doesn't fully understand what I do for a living. She would never know what a journal article is, she doesn't know what I do when I say I am going to a conference. She just doesn't get it and at 72 years old I don't think she really needs the level of detail that sometimes I wish she would ask. Sometimes I feel like I need my Mom to be able to say that's so awesome, I am so glad you're doing that, I'm glad you're feeling fulfilled or I am here for you if you're frustrated but she has never done that and sometimes it's really tough. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Magical summers overseas. Sloane travels with her daughter overseas each summer to spend three weeks reading and writing and two weeks travelling with her husband and daughter. These family visits allow Sloane to focus on her PhD while her daughter attends day camp. Her in-laws graciously provide their basement apartment as a home base and then they travel as a family somewhere new when her husband joins them. Her daughter attends camp each day which enables her to accomplish PhD work; being in a different place without the distractions of home offers great opportunities to just sit and think. Sloane explains,

> I always go back to my notebooks from the summer when I am looking for an idea. I was always making notes of ideas to explore or I would read some paper and think, "I need to understand this a little more." If I didn't have enough time at the moment I would go back to it later. I still go back to those notes, especially now when I start to think about having to publish after my dissertation. It helps me see what I was thinking at the time or to see how my thinking has shifted, so it was just time for me. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Sloane considers her summers overseas a gift, and she is grateful every time she goes. A

typical day would consist of dropping off her daughter, walking home, having a coffee, and sitting by the river to read for a bit. She would come back to the apartment and have another coffee and do some writing. Sloane says,

> I would go home and make some lunch and have a glass of wine in the middle of the day, which helped with the writing process. It was nice to enjoy the experience of being there. I don't think I get to enjoy being a PhD student any other time; it's always a secondary thing the rest of the time. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

An experience of treading water. Sloane explores the concept of balancing everything in her life, saying "I have no key to success, I just barely manage to keep it all together on a regular basis" (Phone interview, September 19, 2016). She describes herself as a master list-maker who lets herself down because she does not get to check off the things on her list. She states,

> I have no keys I just kind of get shit done when I absolutely have to. So if my supervisor says I really need this by the end of September then I can work towards that. Two years ago when I first started my new position in my board, I did barely anything on my PhD. My supervisor was dealing with her personal issues and I was dealing with a new job, I just treaded water. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Sloane recently completed the first draft of her dissertation; she says, "The whole thing is done but I am thinking that it is not very important or not very well written so I am kind of feeling gross about it all" (Phone interview, January 23, 2017). Her daughter had a concussion so she missed deadlines and did not work on her PhD while taking care of her. She remembers, "My daughter was off school and out of practice for about three weeks and then we gradually put her back in and by Christmas she was fine" (Phone interview, January

23, 2017). Managing procrastination and figuring out better time management skills, she explains,

> I will do anything to procrastinate, and I desperately rely on a creative outlet to get me through to the writing piece. Writing is a real struggle so I often set up myself with these silly little rewards. For example, if you sit and work for 2 hours then you can sew for an hour. I have learned that it's really hard to be super organized and driven with a PhD. I was struggling before Christmas, moaning to my colleagues who are also doing PhDs, and three of the guys said, "Well just do it, just sit down and do it." I thought maybe I could just sit down and do it, but I needed to take my daughter to swimming and I needed to do this and I needed to do that, so of course I made up all these other excuses. Part of it is that those are valid reasons why I'm not focusing and the other thing is I sometimes feel like I have nothing to say or no mental capacity to put thoughts together at the end of the day. I have learned I am a morning person which I kind of already knew, but I have learned that I am a ridiculous procrastinator. (Phone interview, January 23, 2017)

Sloane has struggled with time management throughout her PhD journey. In and among her family life, work, and PhD she finds it difficult to carve out time for herself. Sloane recalls,

> Navigating time and being able to give myself a break once in a while is a challenge, knowing when to stop working on the PhD to do yoga because that's what is most important. In the last three weeks, I started taking time for myself to walk and do yoga because otherwise I am constantly thinking and making connections between everyone, not giving myself the down time that I need to be thoughtful. (Phone interview, September 19, 2016)

Revisiting her sense of well-being throughout this journey, she states,

> It has been inconsistent I go through phases where I can do things like meditate, exercise, and sew. I lose myself because I get too busy at work and too busy with my PhD and all those things go to the side and I lose it but then I get it back again. I don't know if it's a cycle where it goes in waves or I'm sure there are a million other factors that affect how I try to maintain my sense of identity. I am perimenopause so I don't know if that has an impact on it as well but it comes and goes. Sometimes I feel more sense of self and then other times I feel extreme anxiety and I feel I don't know much about who I am. Right now I am feeling insecure about the dissertation. I went for a run tonight for the first time in months and said okay I am not going to worry about it so I can maintain a bit of sanity. So it is inconsistent sometimes I feel more solid in myself than other times. I feel my sense of identity around the PhD also impacts my research and my work because they are so closely intertwined. So if I am having a bad experience at work I struggle more with the PhD and then because I am struggling with those things I am curt with my daughter. Then "oh my God I am a terrible parent" then I am not speaking to my husband. I finally realized the other day I don't actually say good morning to him very often anymore. (Phone interview, January 23, 2017)

Sloane was not sleeping well until she got her sleeping back on track with the help of her doctor. Once her sleeping patterns improved, she could see the end of her dissertation and start to consider other things in her life start to emerge as more of a priority again. She explains, "I am finally realizing it took me seven years; who cares if it takes me one more month to complete my dissertation. I feel more confident now and I don't worry about it as much anymore" (Phone interview, February 7, 2018).

Sloane realized over time that PhD work is independent and not intended to be directed by someone else. Revisiting her relationship with her supervisor, Sloane explains,

> Our relationship is better now than it ever was; I think she is excited that I am going to be out of her hair soon. She emails and checks in, always with such a lovely tone. I know that she hasn't been happy with me at times, or maybe I feel unhappy with myself but right now she is seeing the end and I'm seeing the end. It's about me getting my arse in gear and getting it done. (Phone interview, February 7, 2018)

The ebb and flow of life is evident in Sloane's journey. The PhD for her is fulfilling her curiosities and feeding into her existing comfort level in her job while helping her understand how she can better support educators and students. When asked what her husband and daughter would say about her journey, Sloane explains, "They would say that I like to learn and that it takes me a long time. Hurry up and finish so we can go skiing again on Sundays" (Phone interview, January 23, 2017).

Bob's Narrative: Savour the Journey

A research consultant by profession, Bob works full-time while pursuing a PhD part-time. He is currently in his eighth year of study with a focus on administrators and data-informed decision-making. He has two children aged eight and 11. His dream job includes getting back into teaching because "it was really engaging, fun, and I loved the people" (Phone interview, December 9, 2016). When Bob graduates, he looks forward to putting Dr. on his frequent-flyer membership.

Bob started his doctoral journey at the same time his wife Hannah began a Master of Education program; they attended school together. Hannah mentions it was her husband's positive experience in the Master's program that prompted her to enroll. Bob's second child

was born during the first year of his doctoral program that required him to travel out of town for the summer residency component. Bob describes his experience:

> I dreaded going, but it was the best summer I had in years. It was wonderful; a lot of it was just the social part. We would attend class in the morning, do some writing in the afternoon, and spend the evening at the pub on a warm summer day for the entire summer. I would go home on the weekends, and I got to savour those things. I met some great people along the way. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Despite his part-time status, Bob felt his experience was socially positive and described his coursework as "a fairly good balance of in-person and online opportunities with some self-directed learning. There is quite a bit of flexibility as long as you can attend to the residency requirements" (Phone interview, November 14, 2016).

Bob's pragmatic nature allows him to compartmentalize his life and arrange what needs to be accomplished. He prioritizes his family over school and is selective about when he focuses on graduate studies. He motivated his wife to pursue graduate studies; she graduated earning a Master of Education degree. His age positions him differently than graduate student parents whose goals are to enter academia and chase publications upon graduation. His family is supportive of his choices, and he models how learning is connected to living each and every day.

Graduate Studies Experience

Slow and steady wins the race. Bob values lifelong learning and enjoys being a part-time graduate student parent. His journey has been slower than most, because he did not view being a full-time graduate student parent as an option. Revisiting what brought him to graduate school, Bob states,

> I always enjoyed schooling. As I progressed through things, I felt a little empty when one item would finish and felt like there must be something else I could do. I would pursue opportunities as they came, and I went in a few different directions. Eventually, I landed here. I enjoyed part-time studies in the Master's program, which then prompted me to continue. I think it would have been much simpler to go full-time because life happens. It has been a slower process for me in a lot of ways than I would have wished but that's okay. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob feels that he often does not have enough stamina and free time to work on his PhD. His wife is a shift worker; as a result, they share the parenting responsibilities and kids' activities. Bob does not stress and works on his dissertation as time allows. His kids come first. He explains,

> I think for me I just slow down my pace, and I'm not really sweating it. There is a deadline that's fairly firm but I have been moving. I just work slowly because sometimes the ducks don't get into line for me quite as quickly as they could. I never wanted to go through this and feel that I short changed my kids on account of my own pursuit. My pursuit of this degree doesn't really stand to benefit me in any financial way or anything like that. These days, the degrees are like the old Master's; they are a dime a dozen in a lot of ways, not to belittle them at all. I still value education tremendously. I am just not sure that the days of them being a ticket to the academy, they are gone. You have to be a little bit multifaceted in how you intersect your work and your schooling and how you're going to capitalize on it. I think it still brings you some currency so that's good. I guess my point is I may have hustled more if I thought everyone would benefit. To short change anybody on my personal journey on

account of my personal interests? I just don't have it in me. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob's worldview stems from his upbringing but also from his own journey of trying to figure things out:

> Life didn't come easy for us. We are immigrant people. My parents arrived in this country as refugees, and my dad loved this country but was never accepted here wholly. He was discriminated against quite a bit in the early years, yet he always had a positive attitude toward everything, he never criticized anybody in his life. He was a very positive man in a lot of ways he was a bit of a worrier here and there, but that was because certain things were very important to him in terms of ensuring that our needs were met. You go through life, and you live and learn like everybody else. I don't have a hook on pragmatism. I came to lots of understanding through working and trying to figure them out, and create and adjust my model as I went through things. Eventually, I started to see things take hold and make sense in a way that made me feel grounded with my beliefs. I don't forget where we come from. We come from humble beginnings. We are still humble people and we try to lead a decent life. There isn't much more to it than that. There is no magic in it for me. (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Bob believes that obtaining a PhD is no longer a ticket into the academy; as he revisited his purpose for completing his degree, he laughed out loud, saying,

> I guess the only real thing is I don't know if it makes much difference except you know I'll be able to put doctor on my frequent flyer membership. Of course, you don't want to be the fellow who gets called up because he wrote that down

> somewhere to save a passenger who's ailing on an airplane either. I think in this day and age, it is sort of a basic level of currency of basic research competence. I think that is what it is an emblem of primarily. I think research is about you know continuing to learn and grow in the biggest sense. My hope is that on the completion of a degree, you exude a certain basic set of credentials to others with respect to where you come from and what you do and what a research degree is all about. I don't know if this is status seeking in some way, but I would like to think that the degree still has some status. I don't think that they grow on trees. I feel like I worked pretty hard to get to where I am and for a long time. I wouldn't de-value it. I just don't know that it is as unique as it historically was. (Phone interview, December 9, 2016)

Bob taught at the university he was attending for a few years and said it was a fun experience. He recalls,

> I think back one year when I was just finishing up my coursework and suddenly found myself teaching my first Master's level course. I was completing two of my own, one was an independent study and one was an online course that I still needed to do; it was a heavy season. I loved aspects of it but you get done and you're thinking I need a little breather. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Support Systems

Bob admits that pursuing graduate studies is not an individual endeavour, and that his wife and extended family have each contributed to his success. He feels his supervisor, employer, and institution could have been more supportive of his journey.

Wife as supportive partner. Bob and his wife have many conversations about their research and enjoy connecting on an academic level. Bob more than appreciates his wife's support:

> We are supportive of each other in a lot of ways. It creates a point of meaningful conversation when we both compare notes on what's happening, what our interests are, and what we think. We get to share some ideas, when she stumbles upon somebody that she is really enamored with that she has been reading or if she reads an article that she thought was pretty cool, she'll share it. It keeps us in some ways in a symmetrical conversation. I think it might be challenging if one of the partners is pursuing higher education and the other is not. Maybe the conversations are tough and you need another outlet in some ways. I think it helps to have an outlet. I think other people who aren't in it don't really know what to make of it. You know, it is a little odd. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Watching his wife complete her degree brought Bob a lot of joy and pleasure as he describes,

> Her writing is wonderful. She was exploring a topic area that was underexplored and very much glossed over in the literature, and she did it in a very creative way because there were not that many things written that were deep in exploration. She ended up doing a work that had to be creative as an auto-ethnographic piece of writing that connected to really important ethical issues and distinctions. Hers was a joy to problem-solve with her. We chatted a lot as she was working; it was very interesting to watch somebody else go through. The only thing I think that has changed is she has had a little bit more time and that has meant that I have a little more time. We both

> don't have to write on a Saturday while the kids were going to gymnastics. Two people trying to write at the same time with two kids kicking around? What a pain in the neck. There is a practical difference—with friends in real life you aren't competitive, you just accept them the way they are. That's the way we live. We both wish the other was done. That's what we wish, that's all. Life is short in many ways, and when you have kids you know how it is. You watch them those few years as they grow, and you think, "My god that was it." (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Extended family as supportive. Bob and his wife have never had to hire an outside babysitter for their children; they are fortunate to share childcare with their extended family, largely a result of shift work and part-time employment. Bob explains, "In the absence of an extended family that could support us, we probably wouldn't have been able to both do it, we would have been overwhelmed" (Phone interview, November 14, 2016). Both his mother and mother-in-law work part-time and have been very accommodating and helpful taking care of the kids. Bob's father passed away; however, his mother is still a supporter of him pursuing a PhD. Revisiting his father's words of advice, Bob remembers,

> My Dad was the kind of guy who said, "Just stay in school." He ended up working in a factory so he didn't know what school looked like or what I should study; all he knew was that school was a pathway over. (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Supervisor: Interesting and hands-off. Bob describes his supervisor as a good mentor, always prompting him to consider going deeper and pondering the complexity of things. When asked how their relationship has developed over time, Bob emphasizes,

> Well my supervisor is an interesting fellow, I have known him for a long time. I first met him when I started doing my Master's. He was teaching a course on the

> philosophy of education and I had a background in philosophy so I was interested in his take on things. He encouraged me in a very positive way; he ended up becoming my Doctoral supervisor. He is retired now; he can still finish out his work with me, but he has been checking out a little bit in the past few years. That has added to the challenge, because he is often not available for feedback in a timely sort of way or he is out of the country for extended periods of time. That complicates things a little bit. You know these days you can go far with electronic communications, but sometimes conversations are richer. I think you miss that a little bit and he has been a very hands-off supervisor which for me worked really well because I have always been sort of self-directed. I put my kids first. I never jam the kids because I need to do writing. The kids get what they need and then my stuff waits which means the pace at which I go through is slower, but we keep moving and we do what we can. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob recently expanded his dissertation to include another chapter; he has revised his work twice and is now waiting on feedback. His supervisor is out of the country for six months of the year because he is retired. Bob is frustrated playing the waiting game and not having a timeline from his supervisor. After emailing his supervisor a copy of his dissertation, Bob explains,

> I promised it to him two weeks ago and not only did he not give me feedback, he didn't acknowledge that he even received it. I'm sure it's out there but he is in Mexico, enjoying his retired life so I have to just wait. (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Bob clarifies that his supervisor already tried to end his professional relationship with him once. When he was retiring, he had two graduate students left, and he successfully ended

his supervisory role with the other student but not Bob. He acknowledges, "I said you can't do that to me, I said I need you, we have been down this road too long, so he relented and stuck with me" (Phone interview, February 8, 2018). Revisiting the reasons why his supervisor has been hands-off and unsympathetic on a personal level, Bob explains,

> My supervisor's father passed away when he was quite young and he had a hard life in a lot of ways. He is really, in some ways, not a very forgiving guy. That is where his hardness comes from I think. He is quite cold and distant, and when I could have used some positive feedback, it never came from him. I have never relied on him for emotional support. That would be ridiculous, but you get to a point where you don't need emotional support. I just need to move this along. Because he tried to ditch me and I fought him off, I don't dare overstep any requests with him. I fire it out to him and I just wait; whenever he gets to it he does. (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Unsupportive employer. Bob discusses his employer's lack of support by explaining, "There is no real level of support at all, in terms of financial support there is zero" (Phone interview, December 9, 2016). Bob works in a learning organization that does not value or recognize learning for their employees. He describes one particular incident that cost him two years of time:

> I had to take a leave from work to do my residency. The first time I asked, it was denied because they didn't want to part with my particular skill set with what we had on the radar at the time. That was a huge pain in the neck for me, I had to wait an entire year and over the course of the year, I had to build a case. The only reason I ended up being able to take the leave was because I had a colleague who got pregnant at that time and she ended up going on a maternity leave about nine months later. We had someone

> come in to cover that leave, and as they were transitioning out of that leave, I arranged to get my leave on the tail end of her return so the person could just move from her coverage to cover me. I basically had to do all the arranging myself, make another proposal, and then they let me go. (Phone interview, December 9, 2016)

Bob understands employers may not have funds to financially support employees; however, he suggests other ways to offer support, such as flexibility: "It could be as little as giving someone a little bit of flexibility in terms of getting something done or support in spirit by saying, we value that our workers are doing this" (Phone interview, December 9, 2016). As the leaders changed at his workplace, the rules changed with them. Bob believes that these inconsistencies did not work in his favour. His workplace does not have a strong level of support for research-based degrees, and higher education is underappreciated; as Bob explains, "Part of the reason it is underappreciated is because most of the senior team doesn't have higher education" (Phone interview, February 8, 2018).

University could be more supportive. Bob felt the university supports and opportunities offered to part-time students were insufficient. He clarifies by saying,

> There are an awful lot of things that are just not open to you in terms of applying, it doesn't matter how good your research might be or how on the mark you might be in terms of funding, they just don't extend those opportunities to you. The main thing is that as a part-timer, you have to play a different game than full-timers, and as a full-time parent, you have to juggle a lot of things. The school, by and large, is not sympathetic to your competing needs; they don't really care. Sometimes their intention is to cross all the Ts and dot all the Is in terms of their own accountability, but do they actually understand the part-time student experience? I think they could

> do more in terms of being inviting, flexible and certainly more in terms of extending funding opportunities. (Phone interview, December 9, 2016)

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

Family life and parenting: Learning and living as connected. Bob's relationship with his children is important and he views learning and living as connected:

> Philosophically in some ways it's about modelling a passion for things in the world for them. That is how you go through life with your kids. I have an opportunity to be a good role model, model the idea of continually learning and growing, challenging things, challenging myself. Learning to live with a little bit of discomfort along the way and figuring out how to thrive in a set of competing things, that is really all you can ask for. I hope that my kids are thoughtful about the world that they engage with ideas in ways that are reflective and considerate of different ideas. I see learning as connected to living in a way. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob mentions the pure pleasure of seeing his kids develop, learn, grow, giggle, and savour. He describes the most gratifying and challenging aspect of being a parent:

> The biggest pleasure is to see them find their footing in things. Doesn't have to be in everything; it's in fact better if it's just in some things but find their footing, find their comfort, find their place to land and find the things that they savour. We act as river guides: We don't just send them out on a journey and hope that they come back; we corral and try them in a more tame environment. Watching them practise and get their legs is both a source of importance for them and a source of deep pleasure from a parental perspective. You can see them building assets that will enable them to achieve and set goals. The biggest challenge is they spend all my money! [Both of us laugh out loud.] One thing I didn't anticipate on this journey was how expensive it

> would be over time especially with two of us doing it. It's a great expense and my kids are huge consumers of anything you throw at them. They are both fanatical about gymnastics; they do boys tumbling gymnastics and they are really into it. They would go every day of the week if I could fund it. Most of the things they want in life aren't really possessions per say but they are actually experiences, which I value tremendously. The biggest challenge is providing them with the richest set of experiences given money is finite, time is finite and there are lots of things competing for your time. That is probably the main challenge. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob is alone with his children a lot because his wife is a shift worker. His wife Hannah says, "We share the household duties pretty evenly I would say and my husband and I have known each other for a long time which contributes to our tag team attitude" (Phone interview, January 24, 2017). Bob provided an update on his children, saying, "Everybody is happy and relatively healthy so we can't ask for more, we are thankful" (Phone interview, February 8, 2018). Bob spends most weekends ensuring his kids participate in activities and extracurricular sports they enjoy. Revisiting how he values time with his family, Bob explains,

> It's a challenge to work on my PhD because there is not a lot of free time. My wife is only around for 12 weekends a year so I am not willing to give up one to write. More often than not I say, "Let's just do what the kids want to do." (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Sequentially attending. Bob does not believe that he is balancing anything well in his life:

> I'm not even sure if I am balancing exactly. I am kind of sequentially attending to. I don't feel like I'm spinning plates. I have a sense of time as limited: days are limited,

> the hours within are limited, and I do my best to prioritize and attend to the things that are before me in the time that I have. When I'm done, I mentally separate from that, and I am at ease with it. I don't feel like I make choices, I say, "Well, when I go home, my kids are going to want to go scootering." Tonight, I am going to take them scootering. Am I going to fret that I'm not writing? No, I kind of don't care. There is a bit of pressure applied, and obviously if it's livelihood-related pressures then you have to attend to them, because things that feed me are pretty important. The other stuff? Well, it can wait, people talk about work–life balance but I'm not sure I have that. I think I have all the things that I want, but how they should be in balance or whether they should be in balance, I don't really know. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob feels the different roles in his life intersect and overlap with one another. The idea of learning and growing is present in parenting in the same way it is present in schooling. He explains,

> I don't feel like I am putting on different hats when I go and do it, I just go do it. I don't have a lot of ego wrapped up in what I do. I am a doer for the most part, I am good at prioritizing and I am selective about how I attend to things. I prioritize pretty efficiently and I know what my strengths and limitations are in terms of when I do my best work for the kind of thing that I am doing. For example, I know I am a good writer in the mornings. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

When asked if graduate studies and parenthood were intertwined, he reframed the question, instead asking, "Do you think travelling and parenting are intertwined?" (Phone interview, November 14, 2016) and then responded:

> The answer to that question is it all depends on who you bring on the journey. People

> will choose to do it however it best meets their interests and needs. I'm not sure there is a right way or a wrong way. There is an intersection between what your opportunities are and some people may find you are going to have to be more dedicated to the journey and that parenting will add challenge to that in ways that for me it didn't. I took the pressure off a little bit, I may pay for it yet or I continue to pay for it because that is an area where I haven't always had a lot of support. As I go through slowly people will ask, "When am I going to see this?" I respond, "Well, you're going to have to wait until I have some time to get there." Graduate studies and parenthood are philosophically connected in terms of learning and growing. I don't think that they're conducive to one another though, certainly the kids can create a lot of interference if you're trying to work. I wouldn't try to write on a day when I was by myself with the kids. That would be neglecting them. I would have to wait until my wife was home and could engage with the kids which would give me an opportunity to write. (Phone interview, November 14, 2016)

Bob pursued graduate studies because he felt empty after finishing his Master's degree. Revisiting his feelings when his PhD is complete, Bob states,

> No, I will not feel empty, I have a rich life. I have a very rich and rewarding life, I am very lucky and fortunate in so many ways and I live to try to savour the journey. I look at my kids they're growing up, I don't want to look back at my life and say I missed something with them because I felt that there was some kind of big financial gain for it that would benefit the family. We lead a comfortable life, we are not affluent people but we're not struggling people either, we work hard for our money and we make the best we can with it just like everybody else. I will not be empty on

> this journey, I am done with this project, I'm done. This thing sucked all the life I had out of me; it's the most soul sucking pile of paper you could ever imagine. I printed off a fresh copy for my last read through because I thought I need to do it on paper, I have 250 pages of crap there. I can't even get through it in a reasonable amount of time; looking at this pile of paper is so deeply satisfying because it looks like it's something finished. I am at the point where I just need to meet the minimum threshold and hopefully they might look at me and feel sorry for me. I won't be empty, I'll be honest with you, I'll be resentful but I won't be empty. (Phone interview, February 8, 2018)

Ashley's Narrative: Trust Your Gut

A single mother with an 11-year old daughter, Ashley is a second-year Master of Education student focusing on drama in education. She is working five part-time jobs to help pay for everything and believes adaptability has served her well throughout graduate school and life in general. Her dream job is "working part-time in theater while also training teachers with little to no performing arts background various drama methods they can use in their classrooms" (Phone interview, January 28, 2017).

Due to her passion for drama, Ashley graduated with an undergraduate degree in theatre; a few years later she found herself overseas teaching English through drama. This is when she began to see the connection between drama and education. Ashley got pregnant while overseas and decided to return to Canada to have her baby. Her daughter was born and seven months later she began her Bachelor of Education degree. Reflecting on the decisions she was making, she explains,

> I realized that bringing a baby to school was not exactly feasible so I had to adjust my

> living that way. I got my education degree and saw more evidence of how my drama background would be beneficial going into education. I continued teaching while my daughter was growing up and I started seeing more and more evidence because my students responded to the drama methods I was using. Teachers were curious and didn't have the confidence to do it themselves; they wanted training so they would come and watch some of the things I was doing. It finally started dawning on me this could be worth researching. I thought about it for a year [laughing out loud] being busy and a single Mom to boot. I take a while to make up my mind about anything, so I finally applied and got in, so here I am. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Ashley's ability to adapt and go with the flow has made her a resilient and self-motivated graduate student parent. The cost of graduate school has greatly impacted her journey and has required her to work multiple jobs to pay for life. Although Ashley has a supportive family, the day-to-day responsibilities of school, parenting, and work rest on her. The vicious cycle of working to keep her debt down hinders her ability to make progress on her research.

Graduate Studies Experience

The show must go on. It was clear from Ashley's life experiences that theatre training helped prepare her to be a graduate student parent. She mentions her ability to adapt as one of her keys to success:

> You can rehearse, but I guarantee you the show will not go the way you want it to and you must adapt, so that is an analogy for life. Plan it all you want. You have everything thought out, and then somebody calls in sick and you have to go somewhere else. My philosophy is, don't whine, don't complain, adapt, and deal. And

> don't worry about your pride. That has helped me through almost everything. You can't do it as a parent, you can't do it as a student without having the ability to ask for help and humbly apologize when you screw up [laughs out loud]. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Ashley's supervisor understood that life happens because she had young children while pursuing graduate studies as well. She describes her supervisor by saying,

> She is very bright, she is flexible and if something comes up, she understands. She makes sure I have goals. Every couple of weeks I have to come back and account for them and if I don't make it I have to be able to explain why, so she is a good task master. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Ashley's supervisor passed away suddenly on Halloween; she describes this loss,

> It was quite a sideswipe; she wasn't even ill that I knew of so it was a shock to the whole community, not just the university but the whole area. She had quite an effect on the arts and theatre culture here. It was a huge loss and there are only one or two other professors in the whole university who would understand my project. Happily, the one professor on sabbatical agreed to take me on. I had to wait another six weeks before anything could start to happen but then we got together and created a new timeline. (Phone interview, January, 28, 2017)

Around the same time her supervisor passed away, Ashley explains, "Puberty hit my daughter like a ton of bricks; at the end of October everything hit the fan, and she has diagnosed herself with depression. It's rough. I would say she is probably accurate on that" (Phone interview, January 28, 2017). Ashley confesses,

> My daughter has been going through a rough time and has not been eating with me;

> half the time, she does not want to go to school anymore. It has been really hard on both of us emotionally these last few months but at least I am home a little more often. On top of this, student loans were late and bursary paperwork got lost. It never seems to fail. Once one thing goes right and you finally make some progress in one corner, another corner comes crumbling down. These past two weeks have been particularly challenging emotionally for me, dealing with everything at once. I am falling behind on my timeline for writing, and I have to remind myself every other day, "Don't beat yourself up it is okay you will get through this. It does not mean it's not meant to be, it just means you have to work harder." (Phone interview, January 28, 2017)

The price of admission. The financial burden of being a graduate student parent is exacerbated by Ashley's status as a single mother. Ashley feels the roles in her life compete with one another; she feels that she is continually trying to balance all of her part-time jobs to pay for everything. She acknowledges,

> I received a healthy-sized fellowship when I started and that ran right through to the fall term, but it is now done. I am a little short at the moment, but they have bursaries available. You can get $1,000 bursaries throughout your tenure as a Master's student, and it is mainly based on financial need. You must be a hard-working student in order to qualify. I received one and I just applied for another one so hopefully that will take me through to the end. Student loans are what I am living off, and part-time work to help cover smaller stuff. You're only allowed to work 10 hours a week on campus; there are TA and RA positions available to graduate students. They are seniority-based, but apparently the pay rate is one of the lowest ones around. Our union is

> trying to fight for a higher competitive wage. They are threatening to strike which does not help those of us who are working and depending on that income. Ten hours a week isn't enough to make up the shortfall; student loans will only give you two-thirds of your calculated needs no matter what your need is. You constantly have to work here and there and everywhere; it is a very unstable way of living because you can't just focus on what you came here to do. (Phone interview, January 28, 2017)

Ashley believes universities should gear their fellowship structure to accommodate the different needs of single parents and those who have a partner with a second income. She states, "Taking into account the differing needs so that both students can focus on their work equally would be a great benefit to parents especially to the single parents or low income parents who are trying to do better" (Phone interview, January 28, 2017). Cost of living also surfaced as a point of meaningful conversation largely because Ashley completed her undergraduate and B.Ed degree on the East Coast. Expenses such as rent, food, transportation, and childcare vary depending on the location you reside. The East Coast cost of living was substantially lower than Ontario's.

Ashley pursued her Bachelor of Education while living in a small community; this made finding a good babysitter or childcare provider challenging. Her daughter was 10 when Ashley started her Master's program, which required childcare during her evening classes. She hired a few teenagers, but it was expensive and not easy; she reflects,

> It would have been nice if there was something at the school or some place for her to hang out which wasn't on the other side of town. Now that she is old enough I can be away for a couple hours so it's less of an issue. The other parents I was in courses with were married so they had another adult to rely on. One parent would be there or

> a big brother or aunt because they had family nearby but I didn't have any of that. I am glad that I decided to wait to apply for my Master's. I was going to do my Master's a few years ago but I changed my mind because I wanted to get a little more experience under my belt. Now I realize it was actually more a matter of the parenting side of things. I hadn't even thought of that [laughing out loud]. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Support Systems

Just as putting on a theatrical production is a concerted effort, so too are graduate studies. Ashley acknowledges that pursuing graduate studies is not an individual endeavour, and that her family and supervisor each contribute to her success. She feels her institution could be more supportive of her journey.

Supportive family. As a single mother, Ashley discusses how supportive her family has been of her academic journey:

> My brother and sister-in-law have both done their Master's in different things; their main concern was more the financial side of things. They wanted to make sure I had a plan before they started being supportive [laughs out loud]. Once I made my decision, they even offered to have my daughter live with them for the first year until I was done my course work. It was an incredible offer, but they are in another province so my daughter wasn't ready to leave me for that long. My parents have been encouraging me to do this for years, because they could see the kind of world I needed to be in—the university world. It was just a matter of letting me make up my mind. (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016)

Ashley sets high standards for herself, which translate into high standards for her

daughter. These high standards and work ethic stem from her family culture:

> My Dad's side of the family have a hard work ethic from the physical point of view. They are all very hard workers in that regard but not academically; that is on my Mother's side. You put those two together [laughing out loud] and you have a different kind of work ethic. My Dad was also academic; he was the first person to graduate university on his side of the family and was a professional. Both of them have placed a huge emphasis on doing the best job you can do no matter what. In terms of academics, they bribed me as a kid to make sure I got as many B's and A's as I could. Going into puberty, apparently I needed a bit more motivation to keep working and then after that I understood that this is what was expected and it was expected because they knew I was capable. (Phone interview, January 28, 2018)

Revisiting her support system, Ashley writes,

> My parents and extended family are still gunning for me, and my parents offer some financial assistance on occasion. Friends and family encourage me when they can, but they are all helpless to do anything that would actually solve any of my current struggles; re: degree, income, or parenting. My daughter has been decreasingly supportive because of my attention being split so much. She is going through the throes of adolescence and is having an extremely hard time with it. Finding sources of support for her is relatively easy but accessing it and having it start is a multi-step, time-consuming, slow process compounded by my limited ability to fit everything in. (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018)

Inaccessible and somewhat supportive supervisor. Ashley's new supervisor is good at giving timely constructive feedback regarding the written portion of her work. She has been struggling to obtain enough volunteers for her research project, which her

supervisor has not been able to help with. Ashley explains, “My supervisor and I haven’t seen much of each other this year so our relationship is not that well defined. It’s hard to schedule a time to meet with her” (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018). The cycle of working numerous part-time jobs to pay for her education affects Ashley’s productivity and redirects her attention away from her research. She further explains,

> If I didn't have to work so much in order to cover costs and avoid staggeringly steep student loan amounts, I would have been able to completely focus my attention on my project and my daughter. I wouldn't be so divided and may actually be done by now- even with the significant disruption of losing my original supervisor. As it is, I have been working several jobs for two years now and my project has suffered as a result. (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018)

University should reconsider requirements. Ashley has attended three different universities; she indicated that she has not found a single university that offers parent groups or childcare for school-aged children, especially during the evening courses:

> There is an assumption that if you have a child, you are married. We are not a minority group anymore. There are a lot of divorced parents and they are raising their kids. There are single Moms like me, where we’re always single Moms and a few single Dads. They are few, but they’re out there. Everything seems to be built with that in mind, that everybody has another adult, and there are quite a number of us who don’t. We are constantly left foraging around, looking for our own help, because that’s what we have to do. I don’t regret anything. I am proud of myself for doing what I do and I know there are a lot of parents in a worse situation than myself. When you’re in that zone, you’re the parent and there is nobody else to help you, you just do

> everything yourself anyway. I start not even expecting there to be any help at all. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Ashley finds it unhelpful that graduate students have to be registered and pay for the spring/summer semester when there is little work or funding available to support this requirement. She explains, "This requirement does not allow for any down time for mental or emotional recharging, let alone any time with family or friends, or even time to work full-time for a couple months to pay for school" (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018).

Ashley credits her current institution for being open in terms of communication, she recalls, "The chair of the graduate studies department has an open-door policy, she does an introductory session with every new graduate student who comes into education. She says come see me, come talk to me, I am here" (Phone Interview, January 28, 2018). Ashley's institution is placing more emphasis on mental health and making different activities available to everyone, such as writing workshops. Ashley claims, "Being able to go and talk to somebody. That has been great. If I didn't have that, I would be a lot more stressed now than I am" (Phone interview, January 28, 2018).

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

An experience of competing roles. Parenting for Ashley means**,**

> Doing the best I can to provide for my child so she feels loved and so she may grow up to be a confident, contributing member of society; it also means that I need to be a role model on one hand and a background supporter on the other. It's a lifelong commitment to the well-being of someone else. It also means a long-term adventure of successes and pitfalls, guess work, a life of constant change and second-guessing, fun times and frustrations, and a whole new education I did not expect. (Entry survey, September 14, 2016)

The relationship Ashley has with her daughter is paramount; she discusses the most gratifying part of being a parent:

> I would say the unconditional love and relationship that I'm developing with this person, this little stranger who came into my life and is completely dependent on me. She is gradually becoming her own person and there are no words to really describe that feeling. It's pretty sweet and gratifying. She is becoming an adolescent, and yet she still wants the hugs, the reassurance sometimes, and that is always nice. I must have done a good job in the younger years because she still feels that connection. Although she doesn't come to me when she needs me quite as often, that is probably part in parcel of gratification and frustration. Watching her become independent, knowing there are times when she really should be coming to me for help and she's not, is so frustrating. There are times when I am paying way more attention to work or school, and I'm not noticing when she needs me. Sometimes things are going on, and I forget that she has this project due which is really challenging. I try to remember not to get too bogged down in any one thing. As a parent, sometimes I feel the pressure of doing it right is almost too high and I'll snap. Then think I am failing her, I am terrible. I eventually get over it so that is the challenging side of things, never knowing whether you're doing a good job until later. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Parenting her daughter while engaged in all of these different roles has impacted Ashley's academic journey; she states,

> The level of pressure that I feel I'm under is quite high. One other reason why I went this route, not just because I thought there was a need and I have passion for the

> subject, being the only parent and a woman I wanted to be a role model for her. I better not just sit there and talk about dreams I better go do something. So I am feeling that all the time, I often feel I can't mess this up because she is watching me. She is at that age where she is developing her own identity and she has me to look up to. I'm juggling all the responsibilities and trying to remember to be there for her and not get too absorbed in one way. If I get too far on the parenting side then my work slides, it's a lot of flip flopping. If I don't look after her needs, at the same time looking after my own and getting the course work done, that money aspect it's going to bite me later one way or the other. I have been working through that the last couple of months figuring out that balancing act or the timing of everything. (Phone interview, October 1, 2016)

Intertwined but separate. Despite Ashley's desire to be a role model for her daughter, she is determined to keep her daughter and her graduate work separate. Revisiting her beliefs about parenthood and graduate studies, Ashley offers, "They intertwine for me but I do try to keep them separate. I learned as a teacher to keep teaching at school and parenting at home" (Phone interview, October 1, 2016). Keeping university and parenting separate worked well for Ashley last year when she was completing her coursework; however, this year Ashley says, "I have to do so much from home so now the worlds have collided [laughing out loud]" (Phone interview, October 1, 2016). Revisiting previous conversations, Ashley offered,

> I was thinking of you and our conversation just a few days ago. I was reflecting on the unique kinds of challenges student parents have. One thing I forgot to mention is computer sharing. We only have one computer and with a 12-year old that means

> having to share computer time. There have been several times when I have put off doing some task or work because of this with the end result being I fell behind on some things. This leaves me taking over the computer for entire evenings and sometimes weekends. I also had a delay in my timeline (again) which means I now have to pay for yet another full term. Fingers crossed, my physical research can go ahead this school year but it's going to be tight. It will mean a summer of writing which means continued stress with computer sharing and working from home instead of campus because my daughter will be staying here this summer instead of going to her grandparents. My parents did help pay for a week of Youth University and I covered another week so that's two weeks I can work with fewer distractions. (Email correspondence, April 10, 2017)

A struggle for self-care. Ashley learned a lot about herself throughout her graduate school journey. She explains, “I have learned that I really do prioritize my daughter’s needs and my student needs more than my own even though I know intellectually if I don’t meet my own I can’t serve the rest at all” (Phone interview, January 28, 2017). The emotional and mental training she underwent as a theatre major has helped her deal with rough patches in her life. Ashley emphasized, “Always take 15 minutes every day to indulge in a little something for yourself. It’s not a want, it’s a need. It’s your soul crying out for you to read a chapter in Harry Potter or something non-academic” (Phone interview, January 28, 2017). Ashley came face-to-face with the reality that life happens as she revisits her journey,

> I am nearly a year behind where I wanted to be at this point. I had to work seven days a week nearly every week since June in order to supplement a lack of student loans. I only got a partial payment (long story) and I am trying to keep the total debt load

from creeping up too high. With the delays in getting approval to research, I am going to be in this program a lot longer than I had planned. Knowing how much my loan payments are going to be, roughly, is putting a lot of pressure on me to avoid increasing it. The catch 22 is that means I end up working more, and I don't get to spend much time on my own project thus prolonging my time enrolled.

As for balancing graduate work with parenting, it has been okay but still quite challenging at times. My daughter, who will be 13 in six weeks, has gotten past some of her emotional turmoil from last year but not all of it. She still seems to fall ill just when my full attention is focused outside the home front. For example, the weeks I have to do a lot of work on the computer for my university students (I'm a tutor through the international program this year working with two courses), put in hours at a hotel I clean for, and plan to work on my own project, are the weeks she feels nauseous, or gets a cold, or decides she needs a mental health day. She insists the timing is coincidental. She can stay home alone comfortably, but I still feel guilty for leaving her so I tend to cut out activities so I can be home sooner than planned. This semester, that meant cutting out my project time or time I could have spent networking with other graduate students at writing events. I've been really missing my family and some of my friends these past several months. My parents were able to come down for a visit for Thanksgiving weekend. I was working for most of it, but I did get one day off so we could visit and have a proper dinner together. I didn't get much time off over Christmas so I missed out on most of my family and friends visiting. I have this week off though so that's been good for my mental health and, probably, my daughter's too. (Email correspondence, January 3, 2018)

Revisiting her view of graduate school, Ashley wonders,

> How am I ever going to finish? My daughter needs me now more than ever, so I'm desperate to get this done. I have had some rewarding and interesting jobs on campus as a TA and an Advanced Education Tutor (AET) through the International department which has been a separate learning experience for me. I'm grateful for those opportunities. My work as an RA has led to a publication credit. The professor shared the authorship of the article with me so that's a good thing too. These experiences give me something positive to hang on to as I scratch and scrape my way up this mountain called graduate work. (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018)

Ashley continues to live by the advice and skills she learned as a theatre major: "Life may not go according to plan; you must adapt, because the show must go on!" (Phone interview, October 1, 2016).

Melissa's Narrative: Excavating My Life Experiences as a Graduate Student Parent

Melissa, myself, as author of this dissertation, is a sixth-year doctoral candidate and researcher in this study. I am married and have a three-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son. Motherhood is, at once, the most gratifying and difficult journey I have experienced in my life. I enjoy teaching health and physical education courses at the university and love to cook, exercise, travel, and spend time outdoors. My goal is to become a full-time professor while negotiating the various roles in my life.

In Chapter One, I shared the story of what brought me to graduate studies, which was my personal justification and reflection of my longing to research parents as graduate students. I presented my story in the outside world and the many opportunities that had been offered in external contexts. My experience of teaching in Africa reinforced the importance

of finding connection in everything I do; my house fire reminds me daily of the importance of the relationships in my life; teaching at the university and occasional teaching taught me to balance my need for authority while remaining open to new ways of thinking and teaching; and my disposition of genuine care and concern for students became justification for why I teach, how I research, and what I thought would sustain me throughout the PhD journey.

Graduate Studies Experience

The PhD program at my institution is full-time and students must complete 30 credits within 12 consecutive terms. Students participate in two mandatory summer residences; the first term of residency is completed during July and the second term of residency is completed the following July.

An experience of unrealistic expectations. While the two mandatory summer residency periods were challenging both mentally and emotionally, the face-to-face time with professors, course work, and dialogue with my cohort were enjoyable and beneficial. In the summer residences, I knew exactly where I was, and timelines and expectations were pre-established for me, both by the course instructors and by the university. The independent phases, particularly the revision phase, were more difficult, and I contemplated quitting on more than one occasion. As I constructed this narrative, I began to suspect that this difficulty may have been due to a combination of my desire to just be done, feeling isolated, and perception that I was misunderstood by extended family and friends, along with my own feelings of insecurity and inadequacy.

A desire to finish alongside some of my peers emerged early on, and continuously, in my journals. I compared myself to my peers, measuring my progress or lack thereof (in my mind) against their successes, instead of recognizing that each journey is individualized once

the coursework and residencies are complete:

> I haven't slept well in the last week and part of it is because my son is teething while the other part is the pressure I am putting on myself to stay in PhD mode. As I receive emails from fellow PhD colleagues sharing their exciting news about passing their comprehensive exams I can't help but feel like I am falling behind. I know I shouldn't compare myself to others however it's hard not to. I feel this intense pressure to keep some momentum going now that my coursework is finished. This pressure is ridiculous considering I am officially on maternity leave right now. (Personal Journal Entry, January 31, 2015)

In my journal entry, appropriately titled *The Emotional Roller Coaster*, I questioned my need to keep up with my peers and the effect that this self-induced pressure was having on my relationship with my son:

> Why do I put pressure on myself to complete the comprehensive exam before the summer? Is this a realistic goal with an eleven-month old and little family support? Why do I compare myself to others with children? When I have one hour in the morning to myself it tends to be a decision between showering, marking assignments, or reading a journal article. Showering sometimes wins however more times than not I feel as though I am spinning my wheels and not making much progress. Are my expectations too high? Would I enjoy my time with my son more if I didn't have a PhD hanging over my head? Should I withdraw from the program? Would I be happy as a stay-at-home Mom? (Personal Journal Entry, March 18, 2015)

Finishing my degree in a timely fashion became the goal I was working toward, and as a result, I found it increasingly difficult to accept feedback and revisions that were offered to

strengthen each chapter. After the Lakeshift Writer's Retreat in 2017, I was motivated and optimistic. Early Fall, I presented a set of timelines to my supervisor that would see me graduate in June of 2018 (alongside some of my peers). Timelines came and went as each time my document was reviewed, it came back with yet another round of revisions. I accepted the fact I would not graduate in 2017 and I tried my best to go with the flow and readjust as revisions were sent. In 2018, I encountered similar disappointments as I aimed for an early March defence that did not materialize, leaving me devastated yet again. My expectation that revisions would be accepted and things would move forward was difficult to deal with which was clear in my journal:

> I am on the verge of tears as I write this journal entry. I need to rewrite Chapter Six because the version I have is not deep enough or strong enough. The revision process is so frustrating, I feel discouraged and confused. (Personal Journal Entry, April 28, 2018)

Early in 2019, I still had yet to defend. My desire to just be finished and my focus on the light at the end of the tunnel, instead of staying in the present, continued to fuel my frustration as evidenced in the following rant:

> What I assumed was a realistic timeline to complete my PhD has now been changed again. Minor revisions turn into major ones and it makes me angry. I have lost track of how many weekends, evenings, and days have been consumed by my PhD. You think it would get easier or I would get used to it but I don't. I can feel the stress and anxiety stirring up my stomach. (Personal Journal Entry, January 25, 2019)

Unrealistic expectations became pressure, pressure became stress, stress became anxiety, ultimately settling in as guilt, particularly at the end of long weekends after my

husband and children had provided me with much-needed space that seemed to move me nowhere. My unrealistic expectations started to bump against the mindset I needed to be productive, invading the space that I needed to complete my PhD, and stealing the energy I needed to complete my PhD.

Funding reduced barrier. I received a scholarship from my host institution. Had I not secured a funded position, I would have relied on student loans to pay for graduate school. I am also privileged to have a husband who has secure and financially stable employment. During my PhD, I presented at one conference; the travel expenses for this networking opportunity were covered by the university. I also had the privilege of attending The Lakeshift Writing Retreat hosted by Queen's University, once again funded by the university. I needed the motivational boost afforded by this time and space, and I re-found structure and, therefore, productivity:

> It has been a productive and fun five days. I really enjoyed the structured writing time and I sat in the same spot in the library each day. I still have a lot more work to do so hopefully I can take the momentum from this experience and keep going. This is the longest I have been away from the kids, it has been a much-needed break for me and I think the time away only strengthens all the relationships in my life. If it weren't for the university funding the trip, I never would have attended. (Personal Journal Entry, July 13, 2017)

The scholarship I received from the university along with part-time teaching eased the cost of childcare and everyday expenses such as groceries, transportation, and paying bills. Without funding, the stress of being a graduate student parent would have been exacerbated and my productivity would have been negatively affected.

Support Systems

Dependable husband. I have spent many late nights discussing my research and academic goals with my husband. He has supported me, and continues to do so, through the adventures of graduate school and parenthood. During my summer residences, my husband took parental leave, which eased up on the guilt and anxiety I felt at leaving my son so early on in his life:

> It has been difficult to leave my son each morning however I am eternally grateful to my husband for taking the month off work. It has been amazing watching the bond develop between my husband and my son. I remember how nervous he was when I was pregnant as he had no exposure to babies. He was worried and had many questions about how to hold a baby and change a diaper. Now he is a professional diaper changer and I love watching him interact with our son. I have witnessed a side of him I didn't know existed as he is constantly singing to him and reading him books. Our relationship has been strengthened through the whole process and I am more in love with him now than when we got married. Seeing him as a father warms my heart and gives me goosebumps when I wake up and see the two of them. (PhD Learning Log, July 10, 2014)

My extended family does not live in close proximity and while this was difficult, it also created a tighter bond between my husband and I; together, we celebrated the good times which helped me through the difficult stages of both graduate school and parenthood. When our daughter was awake crying all night, my husband was there, at the end of his long night shift, to take over. When I wanted to quit the PhD program, it was my husband who challenged me to persevere. His support was not lost on me: "My husband has been my rock

through this process and I couldn't have done it without him. Regardless of how tired he was from shift work he still pulled his weight and helped out with the kids" (Personal Journal Entry, June 15, 2016).

Mother–daughter relationship. I have always had a close relationship with my Mom and we have supported each other through challenging periods in both of our lives. I speak with my Mom regularly and although we do not see each other every week or month, I know that she is always a phone call away. Reading my dissertation, listening to me vent, offering advice, and, occasionally helping out with the kids, she supported as best she could, adopting the philosophy of once a mother, always a mother:

> Just talking with her has eased my mind and made me feel comfortable with everything that has been going on. We are able to pick up where we left off and talk about anything and everything. My 'mothering' skills were definitely learned from my mom so I hope I have the same relationship with my son when he is older. (PhD Learning Log, July 18, 2014)

Although my mom did not complete a university degree, her skills as a female entrepreneur, successfully running a business for over twenty years, make her a strong role model. As a two-time Boston Marathoner, she knew the type of determination and stamina it took to reach a goal; we often discussed the similarities between graduate school and training for a marathon:

> My mom always worries about me taking on too much and not carving out time for myself. She wants me to secure full-time childcare and find a babysitter for the weekends so we can go on a date night. Although her advice is good, it is easier said than done. (Personal Journal Entry, March 27, 2019)

Becoming a mother myself, I now appreciate the relationship I have with my mom, and all that she has given me. I know that my mom was reaching from a deep place of care and concern. When my negativity got going, she reminded me of all the positives in my life, and when I felt overwhelmed, she encouraged me to care for myself, suggesting that children do not need a perfect mother, just a happy one.

Meaningful friendships. I developed numerous meaningful relationships with PhD students from my cohort during my first summer residency. Spending extended periods of time with individuals who understood what you were experiencing was reassuring. We attended the same classes, collaborated on assignments, and engaged in meaningful dialogue surrounding our writing and research interests. The social aspect outside of class time allowed us to decompress and talk about life. While these friendships continued to develop during my second summer residency; I found it challenging to have a three-month-old baby at home:

> I feel emotionally and mentally exhausted but proud of myself for making it through. This summer has been very different for me however my thinking has been pushed and challenged in a positive way. My new reality involved pumping breast milk on break and feeling disconnected from my peers but I wouldn't change anything. I felt pressure socially to go out with everyone but my priority remained getting home to feed my son. My connections with everyone were not as strong as last summer however I think they understood why. (PhD Learning Log, July 25, 2014)

After the two summer residency components were complete, I missed the connection and relationships with my PhD cohort. As a group, we stayed in touch sporadically; however, as the years went by, I lost touch with most of my PhD friends.

Throughout the interview process, I developed relationships with my participants. I now recognize this as the relational aspect of narrative inquiry. One of the graduate student parents from my research kept in touch beyond the interview stage, and she became a source of support. She emailed on a regular basis to check in and see how I was doing. She offered words of advice and a quiet place to work; it was nice to know I had another person cheering me on. During the writing phase, I mustered up the courage to set aside my loneliness and embarrassment at being the last one from my cohort to complete, and reached out to some of my PhD colleagues. Their support, encouragement, and empathy left me feeling less alone and more positive:

> It felt so good to speak with someone who understands what I am going through. Why didn't I reach out sooner? I am not alone in my feelings and I will get through this. I feel much better about where I am going after receiving advice and encouragement from someone who has succeeded. (Person Journal Entry, April 11, 2019)

Simultaneous Role Negotiation

Intentional balancing act. Throughout graduate school, I did my best to balance the different roles in my life. I intentionally brought my son on-campus a few times during my second summer residency because I wanted him to be part of my life as a graduate student. I remember the pride I felt at being able to have him sleeping on my lap as I listened to an ethics seminar:

> As I sat in class this morning taking notes about research ethics, I couldn't help but feel proud of my son and how well behaved he was. Our bond is special and I love gazing into his eyes as the love we have for each other is unconditional. He watches

> me so intently and I feel content in the moment as he naps on my lap. His smile makes me feel joyful and I can't help but stare at him. It was wonderful to have him with me this morning and I am grateful for the flexibility built into the PhD program. Despite what other people think or say about me returning to school so early I am at peace with my decision. (PhD Learning Log, July 10, 2014)

During my maternity leave, I needed to channel my energy into something else; I, therefore, conducted my interviews with graduate student parents; pulling myself outside of my own reality and into someone else's experiences was more than beneficial:

> In a lot of ways interviewing parents was challenging while living with a colicky baby but it also helped get me through the fog. I enjoyed speaking with parents about their journey and it gave me something else to focus my attention on. Despite being exhausted and run down it felt good to use my brain academically. I could relate with many of the stories told and so much of what parents said resonated with me. (Personal Journal Entry, November 19, 2016)

Life with two young children reminded me of the importance of being a positive role model for them. I remained intentional with my time which often meant overlapping different roles in my life. I sometimes brought children with me when meeting my supervisor; they sat and played with puppets or read books, while I sifted through revisions. I also remember teaching a health class at the university while my son worked on a puzzle in the front row. Reflecting on the complexity in which I was immersed, I wrote, "It has been a juggling act trying to keep my mother, teacher, and student balls in the air simultaneously. Some days one ball takes priority over another but overall the motherhood ball occupies most of my attention" (Personal Journal Entry, April 23, 2015).

I was committed to being the type of parent who was always there for my children, overseeing their social, emotional, mental, and physical needs. I did not commit to activities or commitments that were not conducive to my success as a graduate student or a parent. I declined teaching courses that were offered beyond 4:30 p.m., wanting to be with my children for dinner and bedtime while also recognizing we did not have after school childcare in place.

Powerful teaching connections. One thing that remained constant throughout my graduate school experience was part-time teaching at the university. I recognized the benefits of reciprocal teaching and learning, and teaching health and physical education was the most powerful positive outlet I had during graduate school. Reflecting on a successful term of teaching, I wrote:

> I taught my last class of the term today and it feels good to be done. I gave both of my classes my best effort and provided them with as many resources, ideas, and inspiration that I could come up with. They definitely appreciated the extra workshops I facilitated and I really enjoyed both groups of teacher candidates. My goal is to switch focus to the PhD and get a draft of Chapter Five done. (Personal Journal Entry, December 4, 2017)

Perhaps it was the structure and routine of teaching, beginning, and ending a semester, or finishing something concrete that provided me with a sense of purpose and fulfillment, much like the two summer residencies. Or perhaps it was the relationship and sense of connection I found, PhD student to undergraduate student:

> Thank you for inspiring me to continue pursuing my passion of teaching and for being a great, no incredible role model to so many pre-service teachers. Keep up the

> positive attitude. Thank you for really showing that you care. (2017/2018 Student Comment Sheet)

Or maybe even, it was the fact that in my teaching, I found positivity and empathy, recognition of who I was, and a reminder of why I was pursuing my PhD:

> Hands down the most thoughtful professor I've had in all my years at Nipissing . . . The fact that you were willing to go above and beyond for us when you have so much going on in your own life means a lot to all of us. (2017/2018 Student Comment Sheet)

A struggle for self-care. I struggle with a gastrointestinal disorder that is exacerbated by stress. My well-being throughout graduate school resembled a wave: some days I was riding high and felt well, while other days my health came crashing down and I felt washed out. Writing about my struggles to remain healthy helped me to deal with my emotions and perhaps hold myself personally accountable to put in place breaks and strategies to take care of my health and well-being (something often advised by my mom):

> I took a break from writing today and walked down the road. I noticed my thoughts became clearer and ideas flowed easily as I listened to my footprints in the snow. Once my steps became rhythmic, I felt lighter and my breathing became deep and mindful. Exercise has certainly benefitted my journey throughout graduate school which made me wonder if anyone has considered a walking dissertation. As you walk inside or outside thoughts could be recorded and transcribed later. I feel like graduate school would be more sustainable if exercise and well-being were part of the equation. While walking back home, I noticed the creek was partially frozen and snow covered however right in the middle was a small crack of water flowing quietly

> through. This small crack of water immediately reminded me of my graduate school journey. Sometimes life gets frozen and you have to switch your focus. When you are ready to return to the flow of things, the work will always be waiting. My dissertation was written in the small cracks of time I had. I tried my best to protect those times but the reality is kids get sick, plans get rescheduled and life happens. If a crack of time is missed another crack will appear later beckoning me to come and re-join the writing. As the seasons change, time may open up or become frozen in commitments. It's what you do with the cracks of time that matter. (Personal Journal Entry, January 18, 2018)

In 2015, classes were cancelled due to a university strike; I accepted the opportunity to catch up and restore balance:

> This past week has been all about restoring balance in my life. I went for a hike every day, ate healthy meals, caught up on marking assignments, had friends over for dinner and spent time with my son. My goal this weekend is to spend time with my husband. This term is definitely teaching me about the importance of balance because I don't like who I am when all I do is work. (Personal Journal Entry, November 6, 2015)

My health and well-being took a beating during the revision process; I allowed myself to continually internalize a script of "I'm not good enough." Graduate studies and parenting and health all rolled into one, which began to affect my happiness and make me doubt who I was and who I had allowed myself to become:

> Somewhere over the last year I have lost myself, which in retrospect sounds funny to hear. My ongoing health struggles have taken a lot out of me both physically and emotionally. I don't laugh as much, play as much, have the energy and passion I used

> to have. My stress and anxiety tend to creep up more often and my thoughts are consumed by what I am going to fuel my body with. I have closed myself off to some of my friends because I don't feel like discussing my true feelings. (Personal Journal Entry, October 29, 2018)

There were nights when I was unable to turn my mind off, and I found myself journalling:

> I haven't been sleeping the greatest lately, partly because I have a lot on my mind. I was up for the day at 3 a.m. I am feeling stressed about the PhD; however, if I can strike some kind of balance where I keep my well-being in check, I think the Fall will work out well. (Personal Journal Entry, August 28, 2019)

My struggle for self-care began prior to undertaking my PhD and it will likely continue long after; taking time for myself is important and something I strive to be mindful of.

Concluding Remarks

The experiences of each graduate student parent and the researcher as co-participant offer insight into how they simultaneously navigated life as a graduate student and parent, which in turn provides an understanding of how experiences function contextually and temporally. The journey through graduate school is not unlike any other journey in life, it is filled with support, patience, and perseverance. In Chapter Five, I discuss the emerging themes that arose from the personal and professional lived experiences of graduate student parents which illustrate the complexity of each and are discussed within the frameworks of Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry and Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R narrative elements of narrative reveal, narrative revelation, and narrative reformation.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

> *For it is only by coming to terms with one's past, in the present, that one can move toward the future armed with a better, more adequate vision of who and what one ought to be.* (Freeman, 2014, p. 19)

In this chapter, I use Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to explore and gain insight into the storied experiences of six graduate student parents and Ciuffetelli Parker's (2013, 2014) 3-R narrative framework to analyze my narrative beginnings and my storied narrative. As will become evident, this narrative inquiry research allowed me to further reflect on my own lived experience and offered me greater understanding when considered alongside the experiences of other graduate student parents.

Cross-Participant Themes

Overall, three cross-participant themes emerged from the data; these include the need for identity, the need for self-efficacy, and the need for support systems. In the following sections, I discuss these cross-participant themes in detail, making reference to the storied narratives presented in Chapter Four as they relate to Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) commonplaces of temporality, place, and sociality. My storied narrative explored the complexity of navigating the research process; however, themes identified by my participants ran deep in my story as well. Similar to Bree, I struggled with feelings of guilt as I tried to balance being there for my children while also being a good scholar and teacher. Like Ashley, I often negotiated my role as mother and scholar at home, trying to accomplish work on the computer with two little ones playing beside me.

The Need for Identity

The continual push and pull of balancing being a learner and being a role model for children poses the greatest challenge to the graduate student parent identity. While graduate student parents are following their dreams, engaging in lifelong learning, and demonstrating that hard work and persistence pay off, they may also be unintentionally modelling the disconnect that often takes place when scholarly expectations and demands force them to compartmentalize, minimize connections, privilege one role over the other, or even battle intense feelings of "not being good enough." Sloane mentioned not being fully present during conversations with her daughter because she was thinking about her research. She shared how her identity as a graduate student affected her experience at work and her identity as a parent and wife. Sloane struggled to separate her personal and professional identity as evidenced by this statement: "I feel my sense of identity around the PhD also impacts my research and my work because they are so closely intertwined" (Phone Interview, January 23, 2017).

Like Sloane, I wrestled with separating my personal and professional identity. There were periods of time when I felt overwhelmed with the multiple identities and their associated expectations and responsibilities:

> I feel stressed, overwhelmed and like my life is out of control right now. I have too many things on the go and not enough energy or time to accomplish what I need to. The end of the teaching term is full of deadlines and responsibilities which are being compounded by PhD revisions. I feel like a bad friend because I have not been out socially and I feel distant from my family right now. (Journal Entry, December 11, 2018)

The way in which participants negotiated the dual identity of graduate student and parent was individualized, and there did not appear to be one solution that worked for all. Each graduate student parent's identity was reflective of their unique strengths, assumptions, and prior experiences that were shaped and developed over time, the multiple contexts in which their work and home life took place, and the relationships they cultivated with their children, families, and supervisory committees.

Temporality and place. Participants in this inquiry had either recently completed their PhD work or were still in the midst of completion. Immediate benefits they identified for themselves included lifelong learning, earning their PhD, or reciprocity between their professional and personal identities. There was little reference to the longer-term benefits such as learning or relearning what it means to be a learner, to defer gratification, and to model persistence, all of which are necessary skills not only for a parent but for a student.

Participants reported the need to be effective role models for their children in both the present and future. Whether their intentions were grounded in the feminist roots described by Sloane, the connectedness and pressure Ashley felt as a single mother, or Bree's need to position herself as a first-generation student for the sake of her son's future, being effective in their role as parenting model was of tantamount importance to each of them. Ashley shared how parenting while engaged in different roles impacted her academic journey, she explained, "Being the only parent and a woman I wanted to be a role model for her so I better not just sit there and talk about dreams, I better go do something" (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016). Like my participants, I wanted to show my children the value of being a life-long learner and the importance of finishing what you start. Being an effective role model required participants to negotiate their own expectations in order to balance their graduate student

identity. For Daniel, this meant spending almost every Saturday morning at the library with his son; showing him that learning can lead to interesting opportunities is something Daniel models in his life. He expressed how parenting takes priority most of the time, but he also reflected on how it can be difficult to balance his expectations. Daniel's narrative snippet exposes the importance, and tension, of being an involved parent and role model for his son, "I don't want him to feel the effects of my time commitments. I don't want him to feel pushed aside because I have work to do" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018)..

Temporality was evident in the quick shifts and flexibility that allowed participants to compartmentalize their lives and roles, based on what they felt was needed in different places or contexts. In Bree's first interview, for example, she felt positive about her ability to balance graduate school and parenting. Referring to how parenting has impacted her academic journey, she replied, "The things I do get involved with are flexible so I don't think my graduate studies have necessarily impacted my parenting" (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016). Upon reflection, however, she realized the challenges of being a graduate student parent were left out of the conversation. Bree'slevel of comfort changed over time as a result of the relationship we started to develop as evidenced by this example: "I think it's great that you're doing more than one interview because I think that interview really caught me on a good day but didn't reveal the full picture of my experience" (Skype Interview, December 13, 2016).

It is clear that the passage of time allowed Bree to feel comfortable sharing the challenges and tensions of being a graduate student parent. Like Bree, I was not prepared to face my own vulnerabilities and unrealistic expectations the first time around. It is with this knowledge, my storied reflection, the retelling of my story, and my increased confidence that

I am able to narrate my experiences and excavate my own meaning in order to relieve a new narrative way of understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Timelines associated with completing the PhD left some participants, particularly Bob, feeling resentful and more than ready to move on, which prevented him from fully accepting the PhD as a journey. Revisiting his feelings when his PhD is complete, he said, "I will not be empty on this journey, I am done with this project. This thing sucked all the life I had out of me" (Phone Interview, February 8, 2018). Bob's inability to contextualize his experience within the larger graduate student school and parenting community, even life, interfered with the positive aspects of his experience. He allowed his expectations of support, self, and others get in his way. Like Bob, I also allowed my own expectations get in my way. I wondered,

> Why do I put so much pressure on myself to be perfect? I have to be the best at everything and it is exhausting! I feel like I am living in a pressure cooker and I am going to explode. I put a lot of pressure on myself to be the best teacher, mother, and scholar. The weight of finishing the PhD is keeping me down and the revisions never seem to end. (Journal Entry, August 30, 2018)

Reflecting on my journal entry, I see in hindsight how destructive my expectations were to my progress. I expected too much of myself which increased my feelings of isolation and failure.

In this inquiry, fathers appeared to have an easier time segmenting their identities, depending on the context, which often resulted in them being freer to work and focus on the task at hand; while they did share in the parenting responsibilities, they were also more adept at not allowing their parenting identity to interfere with their workday. Bob shared his belief that parenting and graduate school are philosophically connected in terms of their notions of learning and growing, however, he reflected that they are not conducive to one another.

Bob's narrative snippet suggests how his identity changed based on the various settings in which he found himself: "I wouldn't try and write on a day when I was by myself with the kids. That would be neglecting them so I would have to wait until my wife was home" (Phone Interview, November 14, 2016).

In this inquiry, balancing continuous and changing identities seemed to be more difficult for graduate student mothers, who reported having a more challenging time separating their graduate responsibilities from their family responsibilities. Ashley referred to juggling as an analogy to explain how parenting influenced her academic journey. Ashley's narrative example of balancing continuous and changing identities may suggest that higher education, particularly graduate school, continues to hold gendered policies and practices: "It is a lot of juggling knives because I know if I don't catch something right it is going to bite hard" (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016)..

The context within which experience takes place may have an impact on the way the experience is recalled (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and the way we position ourselves. Inevitably when graduate students have children, space becomes incredibly important for reaching the final goal. Whether it is the cubicle assigned at the university or the complexity of negotiating workspace at home and sharing computers with children as in Ashley's case, writing without the distractions of daily life is a necessity for processing information and engaging in the writing process. Reflecting on the unique challenges graduate student parents face, Ashley discussed computer sharing. In this excerpt, we see clearly and feel, the conflict a mutually shared space can create: "We only have one computer and with a 12-year old that means having to share the computer time" (Email correspondence, April 10, 2017).
Like Ashley, I struggled to accomplish work at home, I found myself most productive at the university library where there were no children, no dirty dishes to wash or meals to prepare.

Working away from home positioned parents in a space where children did not have to be taken care of and scholarly engagement remained the focus.

Presenting and disseminating information is an integral part of being a graduate student; the space of graduate studies, therefore, often extends beyond the walls of the university to out-of-town conferences and meetings. Securing childcare and travel time were noted as factors that often prevented graduate student parents from attending conferences, which for some, including Bree, became a source of guilt. In this excerpt, Bree draws attention to how participants' own expectations of self and the expectations of others can get in the way of what often needs doing, ultimately revealing how she felt about extra graduate school commitments, "No one understands and they expect the same out of you as someone without a kid and it's like no, I can't perform that way" (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016). As identities shifted over time participants had to adjust their expectations in order to move forward. Bree and her partner created a strong routine at home to establish clear expectations so the workload was distributed evenly. Bree affirmed how thankful she was for her partner's support: "In terms of my academic work, my partner is always willing to solo parent and he doesn't ever guilt me for it, he is always willing to pick up the slack at home" (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016). Like Bree, I relied on my husband to do more at home and take our children to visit family some weekends so I could write.

Where we are affects who we are and who we choose to be in any particular moment in time, which was evident across all participant narratives. Similar to academic invisibility (or downplaying the academic role outside the university context), some participants felt the need to adopt maternal or paternal invisibility, leaving their children—figuratively and literally—at home, while others found different ways to balance their roles. Daniel and Bob described being professionals at work. Sloane negotiated her identity as graduate student

most effectively when she was overseas. Through this statement, we feel and imagine how Sloane separated graduate work from her everyday life: “I was in a different place where I didn’t have the distractions from home and so it was actually the best time to just sit and think” (Phone Interview, February 7, 2018).

Bree willingly claimed her motherhood identity while on campus by bringing her child to school with her. In this excerpt, Bree identifies how her motherhood identity directly impacted her academic performance: “There are times when I brought my son in with me and it is so distracting. When he is with me I am Mom, I am in Mommy mode” (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016).. Like Bree, I brought my children on campus and taught one class while my son coloured and built a puzzle in the front row. Although it was stressful getting everything organized in order to bring him on campus, I received many positive messages from my students afterwards that re-affirmed the decisions I was making to merge my roles:

> I feel so proud of myself for merging my motherhood and teacher role today. My students were eager to interact with my son after class and many thanked me for bringing him to class. I think it was good for my students to see me in a different light and it was gratifying for my son to understand what Mommy does when she leaves for work. (Journal Entry, November 19, 2018)

Sociality. Many graduate student parents recognized the reciprocity between their identities as parents and graduate students. For example, Daniel appreciated how his son’s entry to kindergarten helped him to understand the importance of connecting with other parents. Bree prided herself on professionally connecting and caring about each of her students, which may have been sparked by her own experiences in high school where she recalled being encouraged to pursue post-secondary studies by a few high school teachers, “I can think of a handful of teachers that made me feel like I had something to contribute to the

world, and that made me feel smart. I always looked up to those teachers" (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018).

Sloane considered how her daughter's experience as an elite athlete informed how learning was discussed in her family in terms of where it took place and what it looked like and also made efforts to use her authentic experiences as a mother to inform the work she did with students. Sloane shared that improving education for her daughter was one of her primary motivators for enrolling. Sloane's except shows how her journey in graduate school has reinforced the importance of lifelong learning for her daughter: "My daughter goes to school for only half a day because she trains in the morning. Her notion of learning has blown up" (Phone Interview, September 19, 2016).

As a first-generation graduate student, Bree was motivated to make a name for herself and fit into the university environment, simultaneously seeking her family's acceptance and understanding in the pursuit of something that was largely unfamiliar. Reflecting on the support she received from her family, she emphasized "I come from a family where no one had attended university so I wasn't positive what graduate studies meant in terms of jobs" (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016). As a first-generation graduate student, Bree demonstrates her ability to persevere and create a new path for herself despite her family's lack of understanding.

Many participants experienced recurrent self-doubt as each new stage of the doctoral journey presented a new set of expectations and challenges. Perhaps the self-doubt was generated by the pressures and competition implicit in the academic. Ashley pointed out how the financial burden of being a graduate student parent often affected her ability to balance all of her part-time jobs to pay for everything. She shared that, "You can get $1000 bursaries

throughout your tenure as a Masters student and it is mainly based on financial need but you do have to be a hard working student in order to qualify" (Phone Interview, January 28, 2017). Ashley's story further revealed the need to differentiate graduate student financial support based on socio-economic background, race, gender, and ethnicity.

Perhaps it was the nature of PhD work, whereby participants often questioned whether their writing or research was "right" or how it "should be." The perceived (and perhaps self-imposed) isolation of graduate work may also have exacerbated feelings of inadequacy that contributed to overall life stress. Ashley recognized how her experiences as a graduate student parent changed over time and how difficult the process can be, particularly with unanticipated circumstances. Ashley's example of life circumstances demonstrates the fluid nature of PhD work and how identities shift: "It never seems to fail once one thing goes and you finally make progress in one corner, another corner goes crumbling down" (Phone Interview, January 28, 2017).

For some participants, being okay with good enough, or a mindset that it was best to be good enough in a variety of contexts instead of great in one, proved to be an effective strategy. It is possible that adopting this mindset offered relief from the perfectionist nature of higher education (Flaxman, Menard, Bond, & Kinman, 2012; Hibbard & Davies, 2011; Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Rice, Leever, Christopher, & Porter, 2006).

The Need for Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977). Negotiating time and space is a common experience in graduate school. As graduate student parents worked towards achieving their goals, they attempted to balance personal and

familial well-being, manage and protect time, confront procrastination, compartmentalize, and interweave roles as they faced the many opportunities that day-to-day life offers.

Just as negotiating the dual identity of graduate student and parent is highly individualized, so too are practices that develop and enhance self-efficacy as a graduate student parent. Participants' beliefs in their ability to successfully complete their degree and their strategies, experiences, and strengths varied throughout their degree journey (temporality), the various contexts within which their graduate work took place and the resources available to them (place), and the associated feelings, hopes, and desires they experienced (sociality).

Temporality. Most participants recognized and described how their self-efficacy changed depending on the stage of the journey that they were experiencing. Busy periods were often fraught with a struggle for personal well-being, and increased stress levels. Reflecting on how things changed when he became a PhD student, Daniel shared, "Some weeks are really stressful and I know I'm not the best partner or parent" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018). Here Daniel recognized that his ability to spend time with his partner and son are affected by graduate school commitments.

Priorities during graduate school shifted, requiring graduate student parents to make decisions of how best to use their time in order to accomplish what needed doing. Participants demonstrated how they took control of their studies and how they utilized flexibility and negotiation to restore balance in their lives. Sloane reported other priorities becoming important in her life, such as walking and doing yoga after she finished editing her dissertation. Revisiting her sense of well-being throughout this journey, Sloane said, "It is inconsistent, sometimes I feel more solid in myself than other times" (Phone Interview,

January 23, 2017). Sloane's narrative illustrates the cyclical and continuous nature of identity.

Participants who came to understand that short-term stress was often necessary for longer-term gains experienced higher self-efficacy; for example, Daniel willingly worked later and longer to complete abstracts for a journal, recognizing that not only did this build his curriculum vitae, but it also achieved the goal of looking good in various contexts. In his experience, Daniel observed, "This week I submitted my first collaborative paper to a journal for consideration and started an abstract for another call for papers that's due next week" (January 25, 2018). Extra task completion demonstrates Daniel's ability to see beyond graduate school.

Temporality for graduate student parents meant acknowledging that this time of stress eventually ends. Most participants were aware of the ebb and flow of the dissertation journey—from the busy times of residency periods, comprehensive exams, reading, collecting data, transcribing interviews, and analyzing data to the less busy times waiting for approval or feedback. Bob, in particular, shared that he had no guilt doing nothing because he was waiting for feedback from his supervisor and knew that a new round of revisions was forthcoming. Recognizing the need for work-life balance and prioritization, he commented, "I do my best to prioritize and attend to the things that are before me in the time that I have. When I'm done, I mentally separate from that, and I am at ease with it" (Phone Interview, November 14, 2016). Bob's narrative demonstrates his ability to accomplish goals, while working within his own timeline.

During busy periods, graduate student parents felt overwhelmed and stressed with the amount of work but paradoxically these were the times when their identities as graduate

students were typically stronger; over time, they became more adept at multi-tasking and strategically managing their time gaining confidence in their abilities to break tasks into manageable pieces some of which intersected and overlapped at times. Time management, for Bob, meant identifying the times when he felt most productive. Bob believed in the importance of writing each morning to maintain his flow as evidenced by this snippet of conversation: "I save editing and revising for the afternoon because when I am not fresh I don't get good efficiency" (Phone Interview, November 14, 2016).

Sloane motivated herself with creative outlets such as sewing to allow processing time during the writing phase. She shared, "I often set up myself with silly little rewards like if you sit and work for two hours then you can sew for an hour" (Phone Interview, January 23, 2017). Like Sloane, I made similar deals with myself however I used exercise as my reward. If I worked in front of the computer for the morning I would go for a walk before lunch to stretch my legs and come back refreshed and ready to write.

Place. Connelly and Clandinin (2006), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Clandinin (2013) discuss the importance of context and how it impacts the actual experience and our associated memories. Participants who felt comfortable and supported in their space were better equipped emotionally which gave them greater confidence and self-efficacy while completing graduate work. This may suggest that participants were able to focus on tasks that required concentrated effort because they were able to release some responsibility such as childcare to others. Sloane divulged that her biggest challenge was often due to the different perceptions and expectations of men and women in the workplace. In her experience, Sloane's statement reveals and highlights the traditional gender roless that persist today: "If a Dad needs to pick up a kid from childcare he is amazing but if a Mom is five minutes late for childcare, she is crass" (Phone Interview, September 19, 2016).

Participants found protecting time and space helpful with most associating 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with family time. Daniel stated, “When I pick up my son from school until I put him to bed I don’t think about graduate work at all” (Skype Interview, November 24, 2016). Most graduate student parents connected increased levels of self-efficacy as a graduate student to finding working spaces outside the home. The ability to accomplish more reading, writing, and research occurred when they worked away from home, for example, during the summer residency, or completing coursework on-campus. Attending to her work-life balance, Bree made a clear decision to work on her PhD on campus. Highlightint how place impacted what and how much work Bree could accomplish during the day, she stated, “I have that full 8-4 workday to work on my PhD but I feel I don’t have the same possibility in my day to allocate my time so everything is crunched in” (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016).

When participants were away from home, they did not have home and family demands competing with school demands, which perhaps made it easier for graduate student parents to focus and allocate energy.

Sociality. Sociality offers insights into participants’ relationships with noble procrastination and the pressure graduate student parents felt to say yes to every opportunity that arose. What we believe about ourselves can affect task choice and the level of effort put forth. Participants who reported high self-efficacy tended to procrastinate less. Daniel and Bree viewed graduate student opportunities paradoxically, as both extras and expectations, because they realized that academia is characterized typically by a publish or perish approach. Bree and Daniel expressed a strong desire to work in academia; they reported feeling some pressure to say yes to the extra opportunities offered. Exploring her need to say yes to everything, demonstrating her belief in the importance of extra opportunities, while

simultaneously recognized how easily graduate school-related tasks can be sidetracked, Bree explained, “We say yes to things because it might look good on our CVs” (Skype Interview, September 8, 2016).

Despite the pressure, Daniel mentioned he enjoyed completing the extra tasks offered to him. Reflecting on his need to look good as a graduate student, Daniel offered “If I had to define “looks good” I’m not sure I could. I don’t think it’s as simple as saying yes to everything, but it’s saying yes to a lot of things” (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018). In this except, Daniel recognized that being a graduate student involves more than just coursework.

Procrastination was apparent over time and among graduate student parents, with some procrastinating more, some less, and yet others realizing they procrastinate far more than they would like to admit. Daniel conceptualized it as noble procrastination, which he defined as “avoiding a task that needed to be completed by putting time and energy into a task that is less (mentally, temporally) strenuous” (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018). For many, noble procrastination often meant writing conference proposals, attending conferences or weekend symposiums, attending monthly reading groups, research group meetings, collaborative papers, and/or working on joint projects with their supervisors. They embraced these tasks in the moment recognizing them as critical to their development, often neglecting to see the connection to their work and that all of this work builds not only their self-efficacy but also their identity as graduate student. The reality is that such tasks often take graduate students from the task of writing their dissertation or following through on what they feel is less fun, less engaging, and often more isolating—their own work.

The commonplace of sociality materialized in the guilt experienced by Sloane, Bree, and Ashley when school work took time away from family time. Mothers struggled to be there for their children while also fulfilling the responsibilities of graduate work. This dilemma was evident in the example provided by Sloane when she consciously declined additional childcare because she feared that increased time away from her daughter would cause even more guilt. Telling her story, the different expectations for men and women when it comes to parenting surfaced. Sloane's example of parental inequity shows her ability to maximize time away from her daughter: "When Dads step up to do equitable parenting work, they are more highly regarded than women who just do the work that needs to happen for their children" (Phone Interview, September 19, 2016).

Guilt weighed on Ashley's self-efficacy as a parent because she often questioned whether she was doing a good job. Reflecting on the most challenging part of being a parent, she offered, "As a parent sometimes I feel the pressure of doing it right is almost too high and I'll snap and then think I am failing her, I am terrible and then I eventually get over it" (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016).

Bree's self-efficacy as a graduate student was questioned when she asked her husband to call in sick to take care of their son so she could attend class. Bree discussed the internal struggle that arose when forced to make a decision between classes, a meeting, or staying home with a sick child. Pressure can be felt in Bree's statement as she realized the guilt that comes with missing an important meeting: "There is a lack of understanding that sometimes when your kid is sick you might have to miss a class or you might not be able to come into work that day" (Skype interview, September 8, 2016).

Participants reported strong belief in themselves and their abilities to succeed which helped them negotiate their roles as graduate students and parents. As graduate student

parents successfully completed checkpoints such as passing comprehensive exams or obtaining ethical approval they reported higher self-efficacy. Sloane shared how external rewards kept her motivated during her graduate journey, “My work as a research assistant has led to a publication credit” (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018). Here, she recognized how positive experiences provide incentive to keep moving forward.

Like Sloane, I felt a greater sense of confidence in my graduate student ability after having a piece of my academic writing accepted in a book. It confirmed that I had the ability to share my thoughts with a wider audience.

Protecting time and compartmentalizing roles became strategies utilized by most graduate student parents to keep the momentum of their studies moving forward. Participants who were not pursuing their degree for professional gain felt differently about the strategies they utilized; for example, Bob did not protect time to work on his PhD because he did not want to shortchange his kids in the process. Believing family comes first, he emphasized, “I never wanted to go through this and feel like in any way I short changed my kids on account of my own pursuit” (Phone Interview, November 14, 2016). Bob’s example of putting family first may be connected to his part-time status in the program. His degree did not stand to benefit him financially or professionally which affected his timeline.

Like life, the journey of a graduate student is filled with unpredictability, requiring continual readjustment of goals, priorities, roles, and timelines. Whether it was a family member with a concussion (Sloane), a supervisor passing away (Ashley), or changing supervisors (Bree), participants learned to adjust their expectations, strategies for success, and beliefs in their own personal abilities to complete their degrees.

The Need for Support Systems

While graduate student parents recognized that pursuing graduate school is not an individual endeavour, there often existed a lack of interest and understanding from family members about what graduate studies entailed. Reflecting on her limited familial support, Sloane explained, "My own family are pretty uninterested, I am the only one on either side of my family that has any post-secondary so my Mom doesn't even understand what I am doing and never asks (Phone Interview, September 19, 2016).

Realizing that cohort support is a function of time spent together during the degree process, participants were often left searching for individualized support to accommodate what they required at various points throughout their journey. Revisiting the types of supports built into her PhD program, Bree revealed, "Our program has limited supports within our faculty. Your cohort can very much become your support, but it's like the blind leading the blind" (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). This statement shows how solidarity is valued in a small program, and how change can be difficult to initiate.

Each graduate student identified different support over time (temporality), what support looked like in various contexts in which their work took place (place), and the changing relationship dynamics they experienced with their children, families, and supervisory committees based on what they felt they needed (sociality).

Temporality and sociality. Participants recognized that support changed over time, both the amount of support required and who provided it. Conversations about support typically focused on the block of time after the mandatory components of their schooling were complete (e.g., onsite and online coursework, residency requirements, comprehensive exams, ethical approval). Most participants described their partners as supportive: Daniel and

Bree found extra parenting support helpful while Bob mentioned having meaningful conversations with his wife. For Bob, support and motivation came vicariously as he said, “It has been a joy for me to watch my wife finish her Master of Education degree. Her writing is wonderful and she did it in a very creative way” (Email correspondence, February 8, 2018). He believed in the importance of having someone to problem solve and share stories with.

Friends and colleagues were cited as great listeners and provided mutual understanding, particularly other parents in his program as discussed by Daniel. Recognizing the value of talking to others who understand what it means to be a graduate student parent, Daniel stated, “In my group of friends two of us have children so it’s nice to have someone who is experiencing similar struggles between school and parenthood” (Email correspondence, December 17, 2017).

Most participants felt their supervisors were helpful with feedback and questioning. Bob and Ashley felt their institutions and supervisors affected their progress. Their expectations for support and for timelines got in the way and created tension. Ashley explained the complexities of working with a supervisor, particularly when the needs of the student and the supports of the supervisor varied. In her experience, Ashley observed, “I have struggled to get enough volunteers for my study and my current supervisor has not been able to help much at all” (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018). This shows how Ashley placed blame on her supervisor instead of changing her expectations for support.

Temporality was apparent when examining what stage of graduate school participants were experiencing. Sloane described working with her supervisor on final edits saying, “I finally got my dissertation back from my committee then I had a total emotional breakdown (exaggeration of course) and I couldn’t open the email” (Phone Interview, February 7, 2018).

This shows how much Sloane relied on her supervisor's support in order to work through the edits provided.

Participants learned to negotiate their support system at different points in order to accomplish short—and long—term goals. For Bree this meant having an honest conversation with her partner about the long-term goal of becoming a university professor. Bree discussed how support from her partner might involve more of a give from him and a take from her. As she said, "When it comes time for a move, and it will come time for it, it will be a large conversation over a period of time with all options explored before any decisions are made" (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). Through this statement, we learn how Bree will negotiate with her partner to ensure they do what is best for their family.

Ashley continually re-negotiated her support system in order to pay for graduate school by accepting financial and emotional assistance from her extended family. Together, her family came up with unique ways to support and help her be successful on her chosen path. Ashley admitted that "My family wanted to make sure I had a financial plan ahead of time before they started being supportive" (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016). In this example, it is clear that Ashley's family had her best interests at heart.

Graduate student parents felt well supported by their cohort during residency requirements however some of these support networks dissipated after the time spent together ended. Reflecting on her graduate school experience Sloane shared, "When I first started the PhD program my cohort was really close but then over the years quite a few people dropped out of the program and people move on and do other things" (Phone interview, February 7, 2018). I felt very motivated and supported after the second PhD summer residency was complete, however, as the years passed the writing process became

isolating and lonely. My internal struggle flowed into my journals, which served to further isolate me from the process; I wrote:

> I am having a hard time focusing and staying motivated to continue on with my PhD. I am overwhelmed with the number of revisions and I feel disconnected from my cohort because most of them have already graduated. I don't like bottling my feelings up inside and even after conversing with my husband I still feel the need to write my thoughts down on paper. (Journal entry, January 11, 2018)

Once graduate candidates entered the writing stage, finding and maintaining support was more challenging. Sloane and Ashley, in particular, looked to their female supervisors as models, largely as a result of their ability to manage a professional career and parenthood. Speaking about her supervisor and the relationship they have developed, Ashley shared, "My supervisor is very bright and she is flexible, if something comes up she understands. She has already raised her kids; they are gone and have grown up so she understands life can happen" (Phone Interview, October 1, 2016).

Cultivating a support network was different for every participant, Daniel was grateful for his wife's willingness to take on more responsibility at home, discussing his own contributions when possible. He stated, "I try and find ways to help, I prepare lunches before I leave or get breakfast set out for them. I try and minimize the hassle for my wife as much as possible" (Email correspondence, January 18, 2018). Daniel believed in the importance of taking care of his family and supporting his partner despite his graduate school commitments.

Like Daniel, I tried to minimize extra work for my husband especially if he was taking the kids solo to visit family for the weekend. I always made sure bags were packed, laundry was done ahead of time, and meals were planned and prepared before they left.

Participants consistently reported the need to connect with others in a meaningful way, particularly those engaged in a PhD as Sloane discussed "In my job now I have a few colleagues who are also doing their PhD so it has been really nice to talk to them" (Phone Interview, February 7, 2018). Here Sloane recognized that she enjoyed being challenged by colleagues in a supportive environment.

Daniel had late-night phone conversations with his friend, and Bree scheduled mini-socials with other graduate students after completing her coursework. Within this support group, she identified the need to step outside the PhD work and do something different: "There are about six to eight of us who meet weekly, and we paint with wine and food, or go to a board game café, the movies, community events, concerts, and comedy shows" (Email correspondence, January 30, 2018).

Support associated with completing graduate studies is closely connected to the social context of each participant's journey. Negotiation and renegotiation surfaces again, forcing graduate student parents to communicate their needs and surround themselves with people who can help them succeed. Participants described emotional and financial needs along with guidance, understanding, productivity, connection and the need to prioritize family first.

Family support varied across participant narratives based on the context of experiences. For example, Daniel and Bob had supportive and understanding wives, Bree's partner solo parented so she could attend conferences, Sloane described her husband as supportive in theory saying, "He likes to be able to say that he has a wife who is doing her PhD, it's almost like a status symbol for him" (Phone Interview, September 19, 2016) while Ashley received most of her support from her parents and extended family. Finding and maintaining support is a balancing act that involves mutual concessions and compromises.

Like Daniel, Bob, and Bree, I relied heavily on my partner for emotional and social support throughout the PhD journey. Participants who did not receive emotional support from family turned to friends to fill the void and those who struggled with supervisory support tended to rely on extended family.

Place. Not surprisingly, place often determined the nature of support, both perceived and actual, for many participants. Support for Bob and Ashley meant struggling to work at home with little outside support, while Bree and Daniel felt supported working on campus with peers present. Technology, for some, brought their support network a little closer even if they were dispersed across various locations. Daniel described, "Group texts with two colleagues in my cohort are helpful, and I call or text my best friend daily" (Email correspondence, January 25, 2018). Ultimately, Daniel concludes that, by checking in with colleagues, he is able to keep his school stress away from his wife.

The support network that existed on campus felt far away and the personal conversations and relationships from onsite courses or residency requirements were gone. Most participants were productive during residency periods because support networks were readily available and easy to access. In her own opinion, Bree continued to thrive on campus because the graduate student community was small, supportive, and accessible. As a first-generation student, Bree did not have the same level of familial support and understanding as others and, therefore, relied on physical campus supports. As she said, "I think a big reason why I stayed and pushed through was my best friend who also attended the same undergrad institution" (Email correspondence, March 27, 2018). Bree knew she needed a friend with whom to discuss her life and found comfort spending time with someone who understood graduate school.

Participants spoke about the need to renegotiate both the types of support needed and their support network after the mandatory requirements of their degree were complete. The isolating nature of research can affect productivity, so participants found alternative support systems and locations in order to succeed. After being unproductive working from home I started going to the library to write. This provided a safe space and an opportunity to socialize with other students during break times. Bob and Ashley struggled to work from home but found support from family. Everyone was aware of the time commitment required; however, not all participants could afford the opportunity to work in a distraction-free location. Sloane was privileged to have space overseas to call her own saying, "It is a gift and I am grateful for it every time we go, when I was a little kid I never imagined I would grow up and I would be able to do this every year" (Phone Interview, February 7, 2018). Ashley could not afford this opportunity because she was focused on paying for her education as we feel in the following excerrpt: "If I didn't have to work so much in order to cover costs and avoid staggeringly steep student loan amounts, I would have been able to completely focus my attention on my project and my daughter" (Email correspondence, April 17, 2018).

Although university campuses are always accessible to graduate students, most participants found a way to find time on their own. Support was reported as periods of uninterrupted time in quiet locations where participants could focus on whatever stage of the journey they were experiencing. Time and place also provided support for participants to meet with colleagues, supervisors, and friends to discuss their progress. Bree built her own support network by meeting other graduate students off-campus for social events regardless of whether they were in the same faculty or program. She reflected, "I have noticed a change in my overall levels of happiness and life satisfaction because of my new friends" (Email

correspondence, January 30, 2018). Her statement reveals the balance Bree found when she shifted her focus from solely focusing on academic work to creating a network of people.

Reflecting on the Cross-Participant Themes

The cross-participant themes and storied narratives suggest that the relationship between how students view themselves and their identities, their self-efficacy practices, their needs for various types of supports (including people, financial, institutional, etc.), and their expectations is ongoing, reciprocal, positive, and negative. When expectations vary, there is a tendency for graduate student parents to look outward to either what is happening or what they need to do in the world (e.g., working multiple jobs, seeking funding, writing papers, meeting yet another deadline), instead of looking inward at their own personal experience and the meaning they make of that experience. This leaves many students feeling divided and disconnected. Instead of accepting the opportunity to connect inwardly with oneself and one's deepest experience, reformulating as Dewey (1938) would suggest, graduate students often manipulate the circumstances of their lives in an effort solve their problems and the way they are feeling (e.g., travelling overseas, compartmentalizing their identities, settling for the external goal of "good enough"). Instead of looking at the journey through a lens of opportunity and possibility, many graduate students tend to settle in to the widely held beliefs of isolation, perfection, even the slowing of time as negatives. It is possible that some of this becoming is embedded in graduate school, and that the way we become whole is through a continual process or struggle of unbecoming and becoming. Parker Palmer (2004) writes that,

> We are cursed with the blessing of consciousness and choice, a two-edged sword that both divides us and can help us become whole. But choosing wholeness, which

> sounds like a good thing, turns out to be risky business, making us vulnerable in ways we would prefer to avoid. (p. 9)

Living a divided or compartmentalized identity as a graduate student may feel easier for a while, but over time it may result in concealing our true identities for fear of being criticized or not taken seriously. At the crux of my storied narrative—even my own experience of not only graduate school parenting but also my experience of this dissertation—is this concept of formal division between who we are, who we think we are, and who we need to be as both graduate students and parents.

Living an undivided identity, or choosing wholeness, is not always a comfortable place to be; even in accepting that we need help or that our expectations may be getting in the way, we need to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, to be in constant flux, and to truly accept that this is indeed part of the process. We need to come face-to-face with the limitations of our own knowledge (Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, 2019) in order to truly make sense of the world and our own experiences. In the spirit of this expectation, I offer what I have now come to understand as my real story, if indeed one truly exists.

Revealing My Real Story

In this section, I use the element of narrative reveal to show how, through a process of retelling and reliving my story, I came to expose my unconscious assumptions and biases (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Chapter One opened with my narrative beginnings, describing what called me to graduate studies and what I initially felt was my personal transformation. Revisiting this story, I see my starting point; calling it forward in this chapter, I explore how my maturity as a scholar has developed and grown over time, particularly at the data analysis stage.

Narrative Beginnings Revisited

I wrote Chapter One very early on in my dissertation journey as a way to set the context and situate myself as researcher. I was motivated by connection and acceptance of community, which I tried desperately to find over the course of my research. I attempted to organize an informal monthly meeting off-campus where graduate students could meet for coffee and discuss their research. After several failed attempts to create a graduate community off-campus, I decided to look elsewhere. I suppose this might have been to my detriment. There are days when I still wish my family lived closer to support us on a regular basis with childcare; however, we have built a life for ourselves in North Bay. We have accepted that date nights are few and far between, and we rely on each other to make it through difficult times. It took many years to form meaningful and lasting friendships; I now feel more connected and invested in this area. My son started school in September 2018; setting a solid foundation for him was important to me. Like my participants, I want my children's experiences to be grounded in relationships, dialogue, mutual respect, community, and connection.

I initially interviewed 16 graduate student parents, which I now believe took away from the deeper levels of exploration and analysis that could have taken place with a smaller group. I was focused on quantity not quality. This group of 16 participants became my community and my connection to the world of graduate studies, even parenthood. I found validation, strength, and support in their stories and lived experiences. I nurtured these relationships and reached out personally, sending congratulatory emails for the arrival of new babies, new jobs, and successful defences.

Perhaps at the data-gathering stage, I was so busy looking outward, nurturing relationships, seeking validation, and keeping my eye on the finish line that I completely missed the opportunity to dig deeper, leaving my participants' stories and my own experience of the experience very much unexcavated and at the reveal stage. Essentially, I got what I asked for; while theoretically I understood life as experience and experience as life (Dewey, 1938), I really did not enact it in my stance as researcher. I allowed the way I listened to participants' responses to my questions to emerge from my views, opinions, feelings, and attitudes as a graduate student parent despite my best efforts to remain critically reflective; validation and vindication in the external world were what I sought. Perhaps I was not open to the deeper responses, because they really were not part of my reality, nor did I want to consider any type of inner conflict or journey within myself.

Hearing how participants negotiated their timelines and personal challenges did not help–in a sense, they fuelled my frustrations and their challenges simply supported mine. I allowed my own expectations to get in my way. When I heard one of my participants speak about "being good enough," that became a mantra that I adopted in practice, a mantra that I now realize was mis-educative (Dewey, 1938) and essentially inhibited my progress.

My first draft felt laboured and distant, much like the delivery of my first child. I developed feelings of inadequacy as an academic writer, and I wondered if I should continue. My passion for free-flow writing felt inhibited by citing academic sources and checking references. I started to question myself: Is my writing good enough? Am I an academic writer? What does it mean to write academically? Why am I letting the literature overwhelm and frustrate me? My first draft was not an accurate reflection of me. I forgot about my narrative roots, attempting instead to sound academic and prove my worth as a PhD

candidate. I allowed myself to be influenced by some of the negative and more daunting perspectives in the research literature.

I submitted multiple drafts and revisions that I felt were good enough, and on multiple occasions, I received feedback to dig deeper, to move beyond the surface, to make stronger connections, to review other dissertations, to go back to the data, and to look at my own inner journey and how that might be affecting, even interfering with, the process. I felt like a failure, and I contemplated quitting a number of times during the process, particularly at the revision stage. My assumptions and mindset that my committee and supervisor were doing something negative to me or deliberately holding me up were not true, and it was not until I understood that my writing needed scholarly rigour that I was truly able to move forward in a productive manner. Even as I write this, I still have my eye on the finish line, and I am still comparing myself to my sense of where I should be. The process became a competition between me and the world. I was, I rationalized, after all, close to six years in to what was advertised as a four-year degree; I failed to accept that I had taken a year and a semester of maternity leave. My view of where I should be was grounded in my cohort's typical timeline of four years that assumed no leaves, and this further contributed to my divisiveness, one that I attributed, for the most part, outwardly and external to myself.

Writing this dissertation is the most difficult thing I have ever done, at times even more difficult than motherhood. And as I dug deeper, I had no choice but to look inside myself; I needed to confront the negative internal dialogue that occurred each time the question of "Are you done your PhD yet?" threw me into a defensive mode. I allowed myself to essentially get in my own way; instead of looking inward at my own inner script, I looked outward for validation of my self-worth. I lost my impartiality, and I struggled to keep my

subjective distance from the literature I reviewed, the data I gathered, and even the storied narratives I constructed with my participants.

Making the Leap Between Narrative Reveal and Revelation: Guided Support in Action

Upon considering Williams' (2018) guidelines alongside my supervisory committee's feedback, I began to realize that I needed to "respond with confidence and skill to a given writing situation" (p. x), thus reclaiming my authority, self-efficacy, and agency as graduate student parent. I also needed to revisit Becker (2007) who advised, "Use the literature, don't let it use you" (p. 149). I began to enter into meaningful relationships, dialogue, and mutual respect with the literature and with my supervisory committee, imagining what researchers might think and say sitting around the communal kitchen table.

I began to recognize how my frustration and disengagement with the process had emerged as subtext in my dissertation, particularly my data analysis and interpretation. With some gentle probing from my supervisory committee, I began to hear a negative and intensely subjective tone, which prompted me to return to my participants' storied narratives and search again for cross-participant themes. Dewey (1916) would suggest that my experience of the dissertation writing process had become intensely mis-educative and divisove, and it was incumbent upon me to reformulate the experience.

During the interpretation phase, I started to ask myself: Does this reflect how my participants felt or how I felt? Is this their experience or my experience? It was not until after multiple revisions of this particular chapter that I became cognizant of how my personal struggles were interfering with the process; in truth, I was satisfying my need for connection by pushing my own agenda outward in the world. Instead, what I really needed was to reach inward and maintain a solid relationship with self, something that I now realize I did not

invite with my participants. Being open to deeper levels of experience and meaning, and recognizing the subjectivity and influence of my own personal lens on the experience of my participants, from the very beginning, might have facilitated more connectedness instead of isolation, more acceptance instead of rejection. Hindsight though is just that: hindsight. I cannot change the past or the way I gathered data. What I can do is declare my subjectivities as the researcher and make every effort to ensure that my storied narrative, as well as my analysis and interpretation, are open to my participants' experience and not overshadowed by my perspectives as graduate student parent.

Originally, this chapter was written with four themes, but the deeper I dug, the more I realized that the cross-participant theme I had identified as *the need for consistency between reality and expectation* was really me projecting my own tension between the reality of graduate school and my expectations on to my data. After analyzing participants' stories using Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, I discovered that temporality, sociality, and place allowed me to focus on how individuals respond differently to similar events in their lives on a very surface level. Because I had a difficult time separating my experiences from those of my participants, my supervisor encouraged me to take a step back, dig deeper and allow myself to be vulnerable. It was not until after I had done my preliminary analysis of my participants' stories that I started seeing commonalities in my personal journal entries; in essence, I had no choice but to come face-to-face with my impartiality. I found multiple references to "guilt," "not good enough," "time," "frustrated," "expectations," "weight," "emotional," "support," and "imposter", and this became the story I lived and retold myself.

My greatest source of conflict came from my own self-imposed timelines to completion; my unrealistic expectations left me feeling disappointed and discouraged, and instead of looking inward, I looked outward to blame my committee, the university, even the culture of graduate studies suggesting that I did not have the supports that I needed. I was angry and frustrated, and instead of focusing on everything I had and the fact that I was on a positive trajectory, resentment, comparison, and eventually guilt entered the picture. Similar to Sloane, I needed to seek more support from my husband, and like Ashley, home was no longer a good place for me to work. I never expected the PhD journey to be easy, but I was completely unaware of the emotional commitment involved in the PhD process. Brown (2018) speaks about the importance of identifying the source of pain that is driving how we enact out lives, "Without self-awareness and the ability to manage our emotions, we often unknowingly lead from hurt, not heart" (Leading from Heart section, para. 8). I now realize that it was my response and my emotions that overwhelmed me and eroded my confidence, resilience, and productivity. Living outwardly, I struggled to separate criticism of my work from criticism of myself. And this internal script became the ultimate distraction.

Extending Insights Into My Story Using Narrative Revelation

Through narrative revelation, I extended and explored my storied experience and challenged my own status quo, working toward an awakened perspective (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013); my efforts at communicating my story during multiple revisions helped me to transition from negative to positive, from mis-educative to educative, ultimately enlarging and changing my experience of graduate student parenting (Dewey, 1938). I have come to understand that the struggles and successes I encountered are not a whole lot different than what I will encounter in the world; all the lessons I have learned throughout my PhD can

apply more broadly to life outside the university. My participants demonstrated the importance of making decisions by balancing the subjective and objective–in other words, one's head and heart (Wall, 2008); I am called to do the same, to turn seemingly negative experiences into positive insights that will serve me not just in academia but also in life. This transformation is exactly why Dewey (1916) discussed the need for reformulation through communication and sharing, the core tenets that motivated Clandinin and Connelly (2006) to conceptualize narrative inquiry. Experience on its own is not enough; like compost, we must turn the experience round and round to learn from it and create something usable, exploring and examining the stories we tell ourselves and how they impact our way of being in the world. Without this reformulation, I would have been left bitter and negative about my experience as a graduate student parent; I now understand that it was my story of transformation that ultimately interested my supervisory committee. It was this story of inner transformation that would demonstrate my readiness to assume my role in the outer world of academia.

Left uninterrogated or unexplored, my expectations and subjectivities as researcher kept pulling me from what really needed to be done. My participants more than demonstrated that identities are meant to shift over time, but I was unyielding and unwilling. In the end, I discovered that self-efficacy can have a negative side and it often needs to be balanced with the gentle support of a more knowledgeable other or others (Vygotsky, 1978). My expectations for support, for self, for others, for the committee, and for the institution are all connected and integrated, and I now see how my participants brought me to where I am. Each graduate student parent struggled with their own expectations at some point during the process. When I heard Sloane talking about her time overseas, it made me think about my

own expectations for support. Were my expectations realistic? How were they affecting my family? Hearing participants discuss the importance of being a role model for their children brought me back to the expectations I had for myself and others. I wondered, "What lessons do I want my children to take away when they remember mommy earning a PhD?"

It was not until I really looked at my relationship with self that I understood why I was struggling to revise my work. Comparing myself to others kept my focus on the destination and the outer world, rather than the growth and lessons the process could teach me. I now realize that losing and regaining balance is part of the process (Brown & Watson, 2010; Murphy & Cloutier-Fisher, 2002; Williams, 2007). Like Kaminska (n.d.), "I felt overcome by the intensity of my own emotions and the strength, and stubbornness of my own beliefs" that I stood in a place of loving myself less-than others (p. 134). The path of loving myself again started when I gave myself permission to go back to my yoga mat. Instead of assigning blame, I intentionally looked inward, deciding who I was and who I wanted to be. I wanted "to work with purpose and parent with care" (Obama, 2018, p. 329).

At different times in my PhD journey, I truly believed I was working with purpose; I now recognize that my purpose was more about time and my own expectations of the process. I resisted living in the moment and enjoying the process. Eventually, I came to terms with the fact that a PhD is not just a product but a process that requires mindful, slow, iterative time with multiple revisions. Just because my committee required revisions did not mean that they were intentionally holding me back, that there were general guidelines in place, and that my PhD was not something I could accomplish on my own (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Tiu Wu, 2013).

I have never viewed the roles in my life as distinct or divided; I believe that each of my roles influences and informs the others, sometimes in tension, sometimes in peaceful acceptance (Grassetti, 2013; Martin, 2017; Parr, 2017). I deliberately opened this dissertation with my narrative beginnings to show the pivotal moments in my life that shaped me as a human being and continue to inform who I have yet to become. Somewhere along the journey, I forgot these roots, and I began to experience a tension that divided my identity (Dewey, 1938), forcing my graduate student self to compete (unsuccessfully) with my parent self. Ultimately, giving myself permission to slow down and enjoy the present moment changed the process for me. I made time, guilt-free, to colour and play with my children, I engaged with my husband, I reached out to old friends, and this made it easier to come to terms with my graduate student self.

The question of graduate studies and parenthood is one that I have not answered until now. For me, graduate studies and parenthood are closely intertwined:

> It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become. (Obama, 2018, p. 421)

Like my participants, I now view balance and well-being as intentional, continuous, and ongoing, much like an ebb and flow (Connelly & Ghodsee, 2014; Eisenbach, 2013; Seth, 2014). It was an intense struggle, but I now take this lesson with me; there is joy in the inevitability of losing my balance, of falling, and of getting back up (Drake, 2017). And I could not possibly know one without the other. The journey was challenging and often led me to question myself as a human being as well as a researcher. I now know that this questioning is healthy and should be viewed as strength. I am exactly where I should be, and

I am now willing to share the vulnerabilities I experienced throughout the journey. As Brown (2012) reminds us, "Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences" (p. 12), and it is this vulnerability that will ultimately allow me to be present and be seen in a way that engages others in a journey worth exploring, regardless of whether this is teaching, researching, or parenting.

Looking Forward to Narrative Reformation

Ciuffetelli Parker (2013) defines narrative reformation as a process by which remarkable insights come about as a result of specific relationships. She believes that being awake to experiences helps reform understanding of individuals and their practices. In the process of reliving and self-questioning, I am working toward a new way of understanding. I now realize I was not engaging narrative inquiry in my research; instead, I was simply telling and retelling myself the same stories with little desire to learn from them. I learned as a researcher that it is impossible not to live alongside research, which surprisingly I knew in my head, just not in my heart. If I were to go back and do it again, my focus would be on why the story matters deeply to the person telling it, why the storyteller tells the story as he or she does, and the insights garnered through each retelling or reliving. Although I am not yet at the point of reformation, I can imagine what my narrative reformation in the future might look like.

Orchestrating my reformed future life. I dream of a day when I can see natural and logical links between my personal and professional life and where I can call forward what I have learned and use it in new contexts to maintain flexibility (Bateson, 1989). My life as a parent will inform my teaching practice, and what I learn in the classroom will inform my parenting decisions. I imagine a seamless weaving of my life where challenges are viewed as possibilities. Times of stress and being overwhelmed will be used as opportunities to connect

with others and focus on self-care. Revise, resubmit, even rejection letters will be viewed as constructive feedback, and I will seek ways to improve and grow as an academic writer. I dream of continual negotiating and flexibility as reminded by Bateson (1989):

> Composing a life involves continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative. (p. 30)

Possibility exists knowing that my living narrative will always be a work in progress as part and parcel of my living narrative.

Concluding Remarks

The cross-participant themes of the need for identity, self-efficacy, and support systems eventually allowed me to explore and reveal my own assumptions and subjectivities about graduate school. The process of narrative reveal and narrative revelation helped me realize I am not at the point of narrative reformation. Instead, I imagined what narrative reformation will look like for me in the future. Chapter Six returns to the purpose of the study, describes suggestions for future research, and offers recommendations for graduate students and universities.

CHAPTER SIX

BRIDGING TO LIFE FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL

> *One of the greatest challenges with both parenting and academia is recognizing that life changes and new opportunities present themselves, leading perhaps to new goals, new desires, and ultimately, new guilt.* (Ricciardelli & Czarnuch, 2017, p. 177)

This chapter revisits the aims and objectives of the study, outlines implications for future research, presents recommendations for graduate students and institutions of higher education and envisions what a community of practice might look like.

Revisiting Aims and Objectives

The purpose of my study was to explore and illuminate the experience of graduate studies within the context of parenthood, broadening the field by focusing on the experiences of fathers as well as mothers. This objective was accomplished through the development of meaningful relationships, open dialogue, and mutual respect with participants, including myself. My overall research question was *How do graduate student parents navigate lived experiences in both parenthood and graduate studies?* The findings suggest that participants' need for identity, self-efficacy, and support is individualized and characterized by continual negotiation of time, space, and relationship, including my own. To meet the scholarly expectations of graduate school, participants utilized strategies such as compartmentalizing, minimizing connections, and privileging one role over the other. Graduate student parents adjusted their expectations for support, for self, for others, for the committee, and for the institution in order to succeed. In this inquiry, it was evident that graduate students required different support over time in order to achieve short- and long-term goals. Participants spoke about balancing family/personal well-being, managing and protecting time, confronting procrastination, and interweaving roles. Participants who looked at the journey through the

lens of opportunity and possibility experienced higher levels of self-efficacy throughout graduate school. Finally, the need to connect with others in a meaningful way was identified by all participants.

My inquiry underscores the importance of focusing on the need for continuity (Dewey, 1938; Palmer, 2004) between who we are, who we think we are, and who we need to be as graduate students and parents (Barker, 2017; Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; DeRoche & Berger, 2017; Hoben, 2017), but even more importantly, as researchers. Researchers who do not know themselves may find it difficult to come to know others. Negotiating graduate studies requires a holistic understanding of self that balances content and process in a way that contributes to the well-being of self, other, and society. In my experience, for graduate student parents to fully understand their journey, they must first come to terms with the nature of human experience, first their own, then that of their participants.

Limitations of the Present Study

It is possible that the participants' storied narratives remained predominantly at the reveal stage, due to my limited focus during data collection that tended toward seeking personal validation in the external world instead of remaining deeply open to the responses participants could have provided with further probing. As is the case with many narrative studies, my study examines the experience of a small number of participants. Replicated at a later date with a different group of graduate student parents may yield additional information and offer possibilities that would extend our understanding of parenting within the context of graduate studies.

Implications and Recommendations

In Chapter One, I discussed the justifications for narrative research: the personal, the practical, and the social. The personal justification connects the inquiry to lived experiences,

interests, and why it matters personally. The practical justification outlines how research can be "insightful to changing or thinking differently about a subject" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 25). Finally, the social justification focuses on the "so what and who cares questions important in all research undertakings" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 8). Individual journeys are not the same, but the storied narratives suggest that graduate student parents may, at time of registration, not be fully aware of the social-emotional, institutional, and financial implications of attending graduate school. This study may prompt positive social change at the individual/personal, practical/organizational, and social/societal level as discussed below.

Personal Recommendations

At the individual level, this study may inform how graduate student parents approach the dual task of parenting and attending graduate school. What works for one individual may not work for another; the recommendations are, however, meant to provide a starting point for graduate student parents. Recommendations for graduate student parents pertain to the logistics, information, and expectations of graduate school.

Trust in the process and utilize parenting skills. PhD degree learning expectations are set by The Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents and include focusing on "the ability to evaluate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts" (Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, 2019, p. 5). Graduate student parents need to trust in their abilities and the process that has been established to earn a degree. The graduate school process utilizes many parenting skills such as time management, prioritization, planning, problem-solving, communication, negotiation, responsibility and financial management. Graduate student parents are encouraged to apply their parenting skills to the scholarly environment and have confidence in their ability to finish. Utilizing skills such as being in the moment, mentoring, and practicing empathy can help graduate

students navigate and successfully complete their studies. Being a parent keeps life in perspective and is a continual reminder that graduate school is part of your life's work not your life.

Research the context of graduate school. When applying to graduate school, it is the students' responsibility to be fully aware of degree requirements, program organization, and policies and procedures related to their graduate school of choice (e.g., the maximum number of years allowed in a graduate program; leaves of absence; the process of selecting a supervisor and supervisory committee). Potential students should ensure an institution meets individual and familial needs by exploring the opportunities for flexibility built into the program. Graduate student parents need to assess the extent to which their workplace and employer is supportive of graduate work and how much flexibility they will be afforded to complete their program (Long, 2017). Prospective graduate student parents should keep in mind that graduate school is a choice, a challenge and an opportunity. Further education has the ability to benefit the entire family because it can lead to better employment opportunities and future stability.

Establish realistic expectations of parenting and school responsibilities. Potential students need to explore expectations of self, others, and timelines to ensure they are realistic, recognizing that they will change over time. Graduate student parents should be honest with family and friends about what is needed and expected in order to create mutual understanding. Potential students should look inward and connect with their experience in order to live an undivided life (Palmer, 1998). Viewing the journey through the lens of opportunity and possibility instead of focusing on feelings of isolation and perfection will help graduate student parents adjust their expectations. Graduate student parents may need

supervisory committee support to recognize that some experiences will have immediate value, others will offer shorter-term stress for longer-term gain, and some experiences will enable a contribution to the greater good of society. Some participants mentioned that being an effective role model for their children required them to negotiate their own expectations in order to balance their graduate student identity. Compartmentalizing roles based on what is needed in different places or contexts is one effective strategy for graduate student parents to consider.

Prioritize self-care. Potential students need to recognize that self-care can be challenging; however, each day provides a new opportunity to stop, take a break, and do something small to increase personal well-being. Each individual will naturally gravitate toward different self-care practices (e.g., yoga, knitting, cloud watching, unplugging from technology, walking, laughing, sipping a cup of tea, napping). Sleeping well, exercising regularly, and eating healthy are important strategies to manage any stress that arises due to multiple roles.

Define priorities based on what graduate student parents value. The perfectionism that occasionally accompanies both academic work and parenting influences what can be accomplished in the time allotted for graduate requirements (Salomons, 2017). Ultimately graduate student parents must do their best to be a parent and an academic at the same time. The important lesson is to engage fully every day and recognize that work-life balance is more a state of mind than a state of life (Black, 2017).

Practical Recommendations

This study offers organizational suggestions for institutions and graduate student parents related to preparedness, logistics, and the challenges faced by graduate student parents.

Choose a supervisory committee well. Each participant spoke about the importance of choosing a supervisor who was supportive, understanding, and flexible of family and work demands such as bringing children to meetings or providing more time for writing deadlines. Participants viewed their supervisor as an important lifeline and attributed part of their success as a graduate student to their student–supervisor relationship. Choosing a program of study and supervisor that align with personal and professional goals and lifestyle enhances the success of a graduate student parent (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Developing ways to manage the feedback–revision cycle is helpful in understanding the growth and learning that will occur throughout the writing process.

Relationships need to be open, honest, and realistic in order for everyone to succeed. Graduate student parents must communicate with their supervisor and committee when family comes first, because one week will not resemble the next. The responsiveness, timeliness, and level of flexibility supervisors offer to graduate student parents enhances self-efficacy and socialization in higher education (Fairchild, 2003; Gardner, 2008, Gardner & Gopaul, 2012).

Offer on-site childcare spaces. Participants experienced similar levels of stress and frustration with the lack of childcare options. Most graduate student parents would benefit from on-site childcare spaces that are affordable, accessible, and flexible. Having a safe space on campus where parents can drop off their children to attend class, study, or teach a course would improve time management and emotional stress. Knowing a child is well-taken care of and in close proximity is reassuring to graduate student parents, which could improve productivity and efficiency. Providing on-site childcare spaces would make life and graduate school better for parents because the location is convenient and conducive to the flexibility of graduate work. Having a drop-in centre or family centre would be ideal because children

could be on campus while parents attend classes or meetings. As discussed by one participant, many institutions offer on-site childcare, but wait lists render it inaccessible when needed. Participants believed that on-campus childcare including after-school care, in-service day care, and evening/summer services would greatly improve their study time. Institutions with limited budgets for parental resources could utilize resources already on campus, such as recruiting education and nursing students to organize workshops or volunteer to run childcare while parents study.

Develop support systems that reflect the unique profiles and needs of graduate student parents. Some participants felt that creating a stronger community of graduate students on campus would be beneficial. A suggestion for fostering this community was offering more opportunities to work within the institution while being a graduate student. Recognizing there is no formula for what supports should look like, institutions could begin by collecting data regarding the number of graduate student parents on campus as a starting point. This would help institutions create support systems that reflect their unique needs and ways to best support graduate student parents; for example, by creating dedicated lactation spaces on campus or creating a family resource centre (Baker Sipes, 2010; Sallee, 2013; Tiu Wu, 2013; Williams, 2007).

Utilize local networking opportunities to expand graduate student parent self-care. Connecting with others and sharing experiences is one way to improve and encourage graduate student parent well-being. Attending and presenting at conferences or graduate student colloquiums expands graduate student parents' social networks and provides the opportunity to meet more people. Graduate student parents should recognize that research is a highly social endeavour because problems are multifaceted and solved in tandem with

others. Ongoing discussion and collaboration may help to reduce the social isolation that is often felt during the graduate process.

Offer workshops to enhance the graduate experience. Offering workshops early in graduate programs where graduate student parents learn about the process of feedback for improvement in course papers, comprehensive exams, proposals, and the dissertation could add to the understanding of what lies ahead working with professors and supervisors throughout the program. Emotion is an integral part of the doctoral student experience and managing emotions around proposal and dissertation writing is usually the medium upon which student–supervisor relationships are built (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). Academics are frequently unfamiliar with or uncomfortable providing guidance that falls beyond the academy. To address this issue, workshops could detail the options that exist after graduate school to help graduate student parents expand their definition of career success and broaden their scope of future prospects. Building self-care into graduate programs by incorporating yoga, paint nights, and other social activities to promote positive mental health would send a powerful message about the value of self-care.

Social/Theoretical Recommendations

At the societal level, this study contributes to the discussions of social, cultural and physical differences found in the literature alongside tensions of care and career (Aubrey et al., 2008; Sotirin, 2008) and addresses issues of equity and social justice with regard to graduate student funding, family-welcoming spaces, and university policies and practices.

Provide more consistent and equitable access to financial supports. Issues related to financial supports included differentiated access to grants, scholarships, assistantships, and fellowships, depending on need expressed by students (e.g., the unique needs of single

parents, part-time students, or distance students). For some graduate student parents, financial issues were stressful and altered their family dynamic. Participants who did not receive funding during graduate school found it stressful working part-time jobs to pay the bills. The financial consequences of pursuing graduate studies interfered with participants' attention working on research and writing. The cost of graduate school is an equity and privilege issue that should not be ignored. The formula to determine who qualifies for funding and how much they receive should be reviewed to ensure that single parents are not overlooked or compared to a student with a reliable family income. Family income, parental education, and race are important factors in the decision to enroll in higher education (Acemoglu & Pischke, 2001; Nguyen & Taylor, 2003; Steiner & Wrohlich, 2012). Participants discussed the importance of funding equity and advocated for providing opportunities to differentiate financial support based on socio-economic background, race, gender, and ethnicity.

Develop family-welcoming spaces. If academic institutions want to remain committed to equity and inclusion, they must become more accessible for graduate student parents. Creating family-friendly spaces on campus communicate the message that you can be a student and a parent. The University of Toronto Libraries opened Canada's first academic library family-friendly study space in 2019. The room includes child-sized furniture, toys, and a "take-a-book, leave-a-book" library of children's books. "The room was furnished with presentation facilities, white boards, comfortable seating, and workstations. The space was also soundproofed to avoid noise complaints from other users" (Carliner & Everall, 2019, p. 100). Canadian women spend on average 50.1 hours per week on unpaid childcare, compared to 24.4 hours for men (Statistics Canada, 2010). The lack of family-

friendly spaces disproportionately impacts women and has a negative effect on equitable access to library resources, services and research opportunities.

Challenge policies, practices, and assumptions that are inequitable. The gendered experience of academic mothering continues to be prevalent (Careless, 2012; Castle & Woloshyn, 2003; Mills, 2008; Sallee, 2013; Sotirin, 2008) which is why conversations of sustaining and supporting this population remains critical. Universities have the opportunity to contribute to gender norms on campus and beyond, which starts with dialogue and continues with creating equitable policies and procedures. Graduate students should be offered paid parental leave while still maintaining enrollment status with the opportunity to extend deadlines. Many parents decide to pursue graduate school part-time, however, funding opportunities are not always equitable for part-time students. Creating a specific policy to ensure funding is available to part-time graduate students could help increase recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. Universities should provide need-based financial support for childcare services. These subsidies can cover part-time care or offset the costs of full-time care. Employing an equity-mindedness framework to understand the causes of equity gaps is something all institutions should consider utilizing. Equity-minded practices, policies and mindsets are institutionally-focused, critically race conscious, systemically aware, evidence-based and action-oriented (Center for Urban Education, 2016).

Envisioning a Community of Practice

The types of recommendations I outlined above as a reflection of my data have been well-documented in past and present research literature (Prikhido & Haynes, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding & Lunde, 2017; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). While these are critical for graduate student parent success, they are not enough. During and post defence,

I was encouraged to consider how to bring my recommendations together into something that was less bricks and mortar and more reflective of my personal transformation-in-process (Mezirow, 1978). Returning full circle back to my narrative beginnings, I found the seeds of what I really needed throughout the process–connection, home, authority, a question, self-care, authenticity, support, and meaning. I have come to realize that what I needed most of all was to feel that I really belonged to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), one that would support both personal and professional transformation.

"Communities of practice [CoPs] are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). In my estimation, CoPs are composed of novices at various stages and more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978), students, faculty, even staff. CoPs are increasingly used in education and in the workplace; in my estimation, they are characterized by trust, honesty, a sense of belonging, transparency, shared goals, and commitment. Supervisory committees have the potential to function as CoPs, but there are times when power imbalances, perception of goals, even personalities may interfere with the process.

For graduate student parents with competing commitments, different locations, and various research curiosities, I envision a formal CoP that includes graduate students at various stages of their journey, faculty mentors, special guests, etc. Faculty mentors do not necessarily need to be members of the supervisory committee nor do they need to be the organizer of the CoP, although this might be the simplest CoP to formalize. When, how often, and where graduate student parents connect with their CoP would be negotiated with each CoP. On a smaller scale, even a buddy system, that extends the notion of the more

knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978), could be implemented between first and upper-year graduate candidates to help foster a connection that will span the length of graduate school and possibly beyond. The goal, particularly for graduate student parents, would be to construct relational spaces that are flexible, thoughtful, and family-friendly.

In the ideal CoP, self-care would be promoted as an everyday routine, not something that is treated as a reward for work accomplished. Journalling would be built into graduate courses, and writing would be shared among the CoP on a regular basis. As part of the CoP, faculty course facilitators would maintain a continual presence and connection from the beginning of coursework until residency requirements were complete. In this CoP, asking for help is not viewed as a weakness or something to be ashamed of; instead, reaching out for help would be accepted as part of the process and support would be offered in a judgement-free way. Online workshops would be offered to discuss that the purpose of graduate school, while focused on the dissertation as product, is more importantly a transformational process. Openness and vulnerability would be embraced recognizing that the experience of graduate school is about the power of yet (Dweck, 2014); with support and encouragement, we will get there. Ideal CoPs would foster growth mindsets where graduate student parents can grow through challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, accept effort as the path to mastery, learn from critique and feedback, and find lessons and inspiration in the success of others (Dweck, 2016).

In sum, this research experience has shown me that as graduate students move from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge, they need to be open to both personal and professional transformation. The PhD experience is intended to be a transformational journey, and as such, it cannot occur in isolation, nor should students emerge unchanged. It

really does take a village, or perhaps a really healthy community of practice, to raise a graduate student, particularly a graduate student parent.

Future Research

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of graduate student parents, more voices are needed. As I near the end of my journey, I wonder about the voices not heard in my study such as same sex parents or grandparents (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—the graduate student parents who chose not to participate or those who left graduate school for various reasons. Why did they choose not to participate? Where are they now? Why did they leave? Why did they stay? Were they coping well, or not? I believe it is valuable to understand the experiences of those who did or did not complete their degrees and how it has impacted their lives.

A longitudinal study that follows graduate student parents from the beginning of their journey through to completion or drop-out would aid in understanding the challenges at different stages of graduate school; it may even be interesting to speak with individuals 10 to 15 years later and gain their retrospective stance on graduate student parenting. It would also be interesting to compare the experiences of graduate student parents who have access to on-campus childcare and those who do not. These investigations could illuminate various strategies or supports that are required during specific points along the way such as working towards comprehensive exams or obtaining ethical approval for conducting research, as well as those strategies that facilitate the completion of their degrees. Alternatively, conducting action research (Lewin, 1946) to implement one of the recommendations suggested could provide insight into the experiences of graduate student parents.

As previously discussed, the male graduate student parents' voice is often limited in the research (Brooks, 2013; Carter et al., 2013; Eisenbach, 2013; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). A greater sample of male voices would provide further insight into themes related to procrastination, compartmentalization, and gender role differences. It would also be beneficial to explore how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents navigate graduate school.

Finally, it is possible that the experience of graduate student parents is no different than that of working parents (Berg, Kalleberg, & Appelbaum, 2003; Ezra & Deckman, 1996; Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010; Premeaux, Adkins, & Mossholder, 2007). It therefore would be beneficial to compare the experience of graduate school parenting to the experience of working parents to provide important insights for institutions, graduate schools, and graduate school parents.

Concluding Remarks

Using narrative as methodology and method, this inquiry provides insight into how graduate students within the context of parenthood identified and experienced the need for identity, self-efficacy, and support. Experiencing and interrogating my own experience of graduate student parenting alongside the experiences of five graduate student parents sheds light on the struggles, successes, and personal transformation that can occur throughout the research process, if and when graduate students are awake to the possibilities. Although everyone's journey is their own, and there is no specific approach that will work for every graduate student parent, it is the ability to see reality through different eyes that makes the journey worthwhile and meaningful. All participants entrusted me with their stories and, although the research process is complete, their tales continue to inform me as I write the

next chapter of my own narrative as mother, scholar, and teacher. Their confidence, wisdom, and insights will forever remind me of the importance of forging and owning my unique graduate student identity.

I was never alone on this journey. I know my voice is one among many graduate student parents. I learned from participants and graduate colleagues with children that it is normal to need more time to accomplish my goals. It is my hope that the findings of my study will help the academic community better understand how graduate students experience graduate studies within the context of parenthood and continue to open the dialogue to improve the supports offered. Graduate student parents should never feel alone in their thoughts, feelings, or experiences but rather should capitalize on the experiences of the many graduate student parents who have already explored the path.

> *When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us*.
>
> ~Alexander Graham Bell

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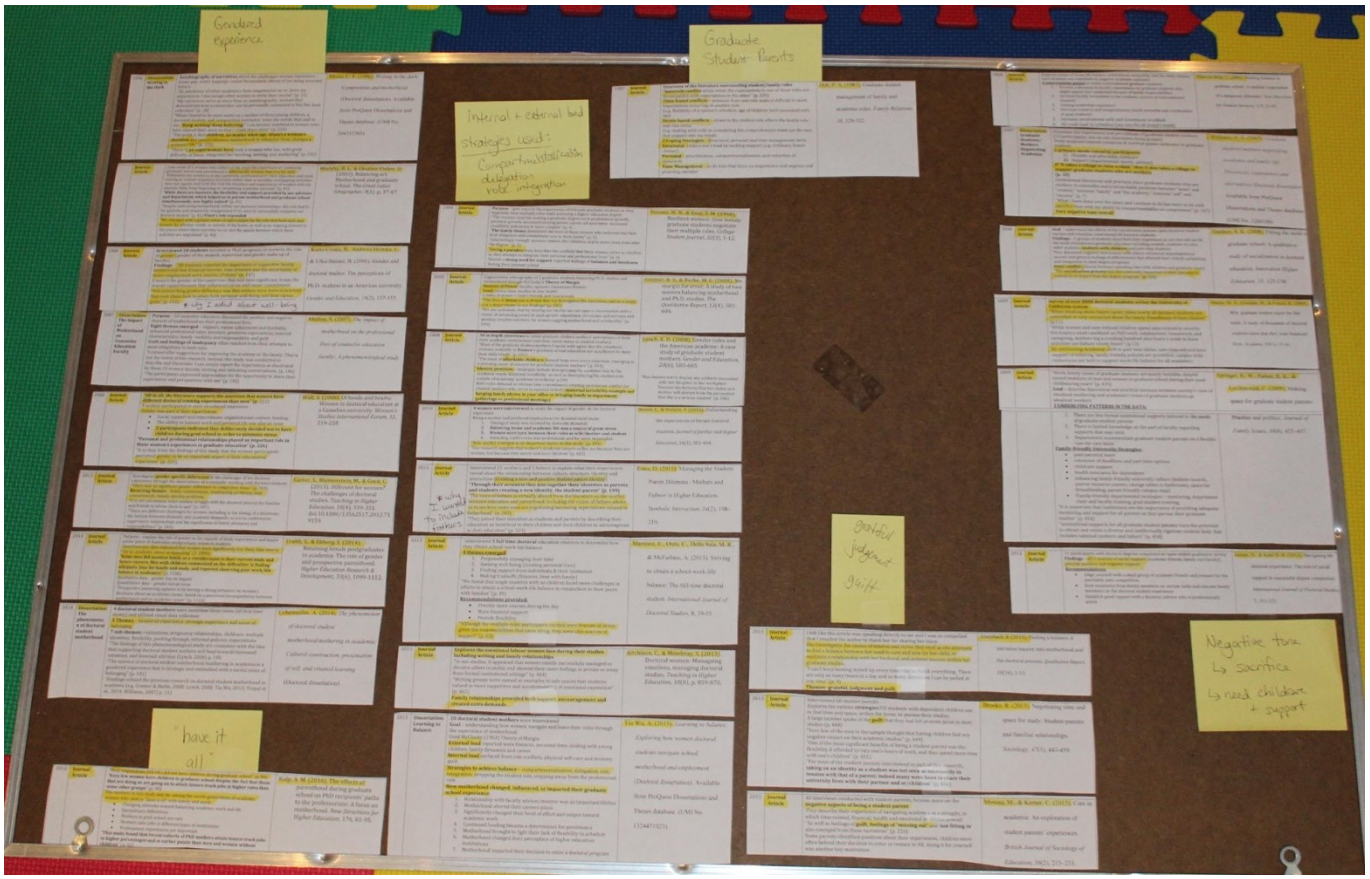
Appendix A: Literature Review Matrix



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Appendix B: Invitation to Interview and Recruitment Flyer

Graduate Student Parents needed for research exploring the realities of parenthood and graduate school

Are you juggling parenthood and graduate school? If so, please consider being part of a study on the realities of parenthood and graduate studies. The researcher is a doctoral candidate in the PhD program at Nipissing University. As a parent of two children, she wants to find out how parents balance their multiple roles and how parenthood affects or influences how they view their other roles. Interested participants, please email Melissa Corrente at [redacted]

Thank you for your consideration!

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Ethics Administrator, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7 or [redacted]

Appendix C: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: *Exploring the Realities of Parenthood and Graduate Studies* conducted by Melissa Corrente, Schulich School of Education Nipissing University. Questions or concerns can be directed to my research supervisor Dr. Michelann Parr [redacted] or 705-474-3450, Ext. XXXX.

What is the project about?

The project is intended to explore the unheard voices of parents who are, or have pursued, graduate studies. Investigating the experiences of parents who are, or were enrolled in graduate studies is important because it will provide universities with a better understanding of the needs of academic parents and families.

Specific objectives include:

- to inquire into the experiences of graduate student parents;
- to discover how sustainable graduate school is for parents;
- to explore and understand how parents develop their parenthood identity.

What are the benefits?

The benefits to you, as a graduate student parent, include increased understanding of your parenthood identity; potential to encourage other parents to share their stories.

What am I being asked to do?

If you consent to participate in this research project, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, as well as participate in two to four rounds of interviews, which will be digitally audio-recorded. During the interview process you will have the opportunity to explore your struggles, successes, barriers, motivations, and supports as a graduate student parent. Each interview will last between 45 minutes and one hour in length. Prompts will be given to help you reconstruct your journey of becoming a parent while engaging in graduate studies.

Will I have access to the findings?

The results of the study will be used for the researcher's dissertation for partial fulfillment of a degree from Nipissing University, however you will be provided with access to any publications arising from the study (i.e., reports, summaries, research papers, or presentations).

What about confidentiality, anonymity, and participation?

Interviews will be digitally audio recorded, which will then be typed into computer files. During transcription, the participants' pseudonyms will be used and all identifiable

information will be deleted. Only the researcher and faculty supervisor will have access to interview notes, digital audio recordings, and consent forms which will be maintained in a locked cabinet off campus. After transcription is complete, audio recordings will be deleted and interview notes will be shredded.

Only raw data will contain your names, and this will be held in locked storage accessible only to myself and my faculty supervisor. Outside the context of the study (in resulting papers and presentations), I will assure your privacy and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and literary devices.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and is not tied to your post-secondary institution. You have the right to refuse to participate in discussions that you find objectionable, or those that make you feel uncomfortable. You are free at any time to withdraw from the study or discussions without prejudice or impunity by emailing Melissa Corrente at [redacted] Data gathered to date will be immediately withdrawn from the study and destroyed by the principal investigator.

Statement of Informed Consent to Participate in Research

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw from this project at any time, and that steps are being taken to protect me. I have read this *Participant Information Letter and Consent Form* and have had any questions, concerns, or complaints answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided with a copy of this letter.

Name: Date:

Signature:

100 College Drive, Box 5002, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7
tel: (705) 474-3450 • tty: 877-688-5507
internet: www.nipissingu.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Ethics Administrator, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7 or [redacted]

Appendix D: Entry Survey

(Adapted from Wu, 2013)

Please complete the following information

1. Full Name:
2. Phone Number:
3. Email Address:
4. Pseudonym to be used in the study:

Background on Parenthood

5. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
6. Which of the following best describes your current marital status?
    - Single – never married
    - Married
    - Widowed
    - Separated
    - Divorced
    - Committed same-sex relationship
    - Committed opposite-sex relationship
    - Other _____
7. Your typical week day includes: (check all that apply)
    - Getting yourself ready for work
    - Getting your child/ren ready for childcare
    - Driving/commuting to and from childcare
    - Driving/commuting to and from work
    - Working
    - Cooking
    - Laundry
    - Cleaning
    - Study/doing readings/writing papers/ preparing for classes
    - Others _____
8. Parenthood for you means:
9. To what extent do you feel your immediate family (kids/partner/parents) is supportive

of your academic pursuit?
- Very supportive
- Somewhat supportive
- Not supportive
- Uncertain

10. To what extent do you feel your immediate family (kids/partner/parents) is supportive of your work endeavors? (if applicable)
    - Very supportive
    - Somewhat supportive
    - Not supportive
    - Uncertain

Educational Background and Training

11. Highest level of educational training and degree earned:

12. Current area of academic concentration:

13. You are currently working towards or have completed:

    - MEd
    - Ph.D
    - Ed.D
    - Postdoctoral fellowship
    - Other:

14. Institution where you're pursuing your education:

15. Length of time in the current program

    - First year
    - Second year
    - Third year
    - Fourth year
    - Others, please specify _____

16. How much time per week do you spend working on graduate-related activities? Does this change based on the time of year? (e.g. summer vs. school year)

17. To what extent is your academic program/advisor/supervisor flexible in terms of your responsibilities as a parent?
    - Very flexible
    - Somewhat flexible
    - Not flexible
    - Uncertain

18. To what extent is your academic program/advisor/supervisor flexible in terms of your responsibilities as a working professional? (if applicable)
    - Very flexible
    - Somewhat flexible
    - Not flexible
    - Uncertain
    - Not applicable

Professional Background (if applicable)

19. Present Occupation: please specify duration:

20. How many hours per week do you work?

21. Does your employer know you're pursuing graduate school?

    - Yes
    - No
    - Uncertain

22. To what extent do you feel your employer is supportive of you pursuing graduate education?
    - Very supportive
    - Somewhat supportive
    - Not supportive
    - Uncertain

23. To what extent is your employer flexible in terms of your responsibilities as a parent?
    - Very flexible
    - Somewhat flexible
    - Not flexible
    - Uncertain

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Appendix E: First Interview Questions

- What brought you to graduate studies?
- Tell me about your coursework.
- Tell me about your journey after the coursework.
- Tell me about your supervisor and the relationship you have developed.
- How have you found parenting while engaged in various other roles?
- How has parenting influenced or impacted your academic journey?
- What have you found the most gratifying part of being a parent?
- What you have found the most challenging aspect of being a parent?
- Tell me about your childcare situation.
- Do you find the different roles in your life compete with one another?
- Tell me about your support system.
- Do you look at parenthood and graduate studies as separate or intertwined?
- What do you find the biggest challenge in balancing the different roles in your life?
- Tell me about your keys to success.
- Is there any topic you would like to discuss further?
- Is there anything I did not ask you that you think I should?
- Is there anything that would have been more helpful for your experience as a participant in my study?

Appendix F: Second Interview Questions

- What are you researching for your dissertation/thesis?
- How is everything going since we last spoke? How are you feeling?
- What are your hopes once your degree is complete? Will it change anything for you personally or professionally?
- How has graduate school affected your family from a financial point of view?
- What have you learned about yourself throughout your graduate school journey?
- Tell me about your sense of self or sense of well-being throughout your journey.
- Do you have any words of wisdom for other graduate student parents?
- In your opinion what could be done by academic institutions to better support graduate student parents?
- Is there anything your employer could do to better support you?
- Tell me about your dream job after your degree is finished.
- Is there anything you would like to discuss from our first conversation together?
- Is there anything else you would like to discuss from our second conversation?

Appendix G: Participant Overview and Contact

Participant's name, age (years)	Status in program	Number & age of children	Marital status	Work status	Frequency and type of contact
Daniel (32)	2018 – Year 1 PhD student (full-time)	One: age 5	married	part-time	2 video Skype interviews (30 min.); 6 follow-up emails
Bree (29)	2018 – Year 3 PhD candidate (full-time)	One: age 7	common-law	part-time	2 video Skype interviews (35 min. & 25 min.); 6 follow-up emails
Sloane (46)	2018 – Year 7 PhD candidate (full-time)	One: age 12	married	full-time	3 phone interviews (40 min., 25 min., & 25 min.); 1 follow-up email
Bob (47)	2018 – Year 10 PhD candidate (part-time)	Two: ages 10 & 13	married	full-time	3 phone interviews (45 min., 30 min., & 40 min.) 1 follow-up email
Ashley (42)	2018 – Year 4 MEd student (full-time)	One: teenager	single parent	part-time	2 phone interviews (40 min. & 35 min.); 3 follow-up emails
Melissa (33)	2018 – Year 5 PhD student (full-time)	Two: Ages 2 & 4	married	part-time	personal journaling