ABSTRACT

Italian Canadian women “crossing the border” to graduate education

By
Josephine Mazzuca

Ph.D Dissertation
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto
2000

This dissertation examines the educational experiences of women in graduate education whose parents are Italian immigrants. Data are collected through in-depth interviews with Italian Canadian women about schooling, family, ethnicity and relationships. The women’s experiences are discussed in the interconnected contexts of the Italian immigrant experience, the education system, and, in particular, graduate education.

Although Italian immigrants and their descendants form one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada, their participation in the educational system has gone largely undocumented except as part of large studies on various ethnic groups in the Metropolitan area. The second generation of Italian Canadians has been educated in the Canadian system and raised by immigrant parents who have had little experience with this system.

Using qualitative methods, this study examines the educational experiences of Italian-Canadian women. The women are graduate students who were born and educated in Canada and whose parents immigrated to Canada in the post World War Two period.
Being raised in an immigrant home has influenced the women's encounters with education and the decisions they have made. Issues of resistance and assimilation are considered in this study. Findings from this research include the discovery of four roles which the women adopt in order to "survive" graduate school. The women develop these roles in order to find ways to approach their graduate work while maintaining the important relationships in their personal lives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Sandra Acker for her ongoing support and guidance, and my committee members, George Dei and Grace Feurverger for the interest they have taken in my work. All three have generously shared their knowledge with me.

To my family, my parents, Ida and Agostino and my brother Michael I owe a huge debt of gratitude for their constant belief in my ability to be successful in my endeavours and for encouraging me to challenge myself in this way.

Finally, my husband Benjamin Roberts, for his patience and emotional and practical support while I completed my graduate work. He never wavered in believing that this was an important pursuit and that I was capable of completing it.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of Research Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Objectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Outline</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: Italians in Canada</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post War Italian Immigration to Canada</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Background of Post War Italian Immigrants</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Experiences of Post War Italian Immigrants</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Opinions on Education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: Studies on Graduate Students</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering Graduate Students</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Difference in Educational Research</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Difference</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation and Identity</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivity</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting a Topic</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting the Data</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing Questions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Process</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Role</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and Questioning</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping a Journal</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: Participant Profiles</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Education and Employment</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the educational experiences of women in graduate education whose parents are Italian immigrants. Data are collected through in-depth interviews with Italian Canadian women about schooling, family, ethnicity and relationships. The women's experiences are discussed in the interconnected contexts of the Italian immigrant experience, the education system, and, in particular, graduate education.

In this introductory chapter I will explain the relevance of this research study, present the research questions and clarify the research objectives, as well as give an outline of the dissertation. I will also provide a review of relevant literature and outline the theoretical framework which informed this research. A brief discussion of methodology is also included here and expanded upon in Chapter Four.

Relevance of Research Study

I undertook this research project for many reasons, both academic and personal. One reason is the need to rectify an oversight in academic literature. As with many minority groups, the education of Italian Canadians has not been a popular topic of study. A few studies have been carried out which look at second generation Italian Canadian women (Colalillo 1974, 1979; Jansen 1993). It is disturbing to me as an
Italian Canadian woman engaged in higher education to find so little documentation of my experiences. Through the research process I discovered that I am not alone in my concerns. Over and over again participants expressed a profound interest in this research project and its findings. They reinforced my contention that this type of research endeavour is needed in order to begin to counter a near absence of research on this group of women. Participants thanked me for including them in this, as they described it, "important work." Their reactions speak clearly of the lack of attention granted to their cultural background. By acknowledging the presence of Italian Canadian women in academia in this project, I hope to alleviate their and other student groups' feelings of being "invisible" in academic literature. Moreover, the relationship between school and home or between public and private, is one that we all strive to balance. My research examines this struggle as it pertains to daughters of Italian immigrants. Understanding the barriers to graduate education that exist for some students and the strategies they use to overcome them will inform us about graduate education for minority students in general. Many people who have embarked upon post-secondary education are likely to recognize some of the experiences of these women, though doubtless some individuals will be able to empathize more than others.

This research has personal meaning for me as the daughter of Italian immigrants. As mentioned, this research partially stems from my own experiences of being an Italian Canadian woman pursuing a graduate education. My parents are immigrants from Italy who came to Canada in the 1950s as teenagers. They received little formal education in this country but encouraged my older brother and I to pursue
Doing well in school was consistently reinforced in our home despite my parents’ lack of experience with the education system. I received support but not practical guidance or advice as I continued on to university and graduate school. Although I have chosen to pursue academics for many years as an adult, I continue to experience a disjuncture between my home culture and that of academia.

Like other students from minority backgrounds who have written about their experiences in graduate school, “I, too, began to experience, although not quite fully understand, the pain that comes from cultural separation. I began to think about how the rewards of academic success were in stark conflict with most of my past” (Rendon 1992:55). It was inevitable then that, “I wonder[ed] how my research reflects the questions of my own” life (Peterson 1997: 210). “Did I really need to reject my past in order to attain success in the present? Was there some way to reconcile days gone by with my contemporary experiences?” (Rendon 1992: 56). This dissertation is my attempt to resist “rejecting my past” and to engage in “reconciling,” not just my past, but my current personal reality (as an Italian Canadian woman) with my academic experiences.

Giroux (1983) stresses the need to elaborate resistance theories by looking beyond the standard forms of resistance, such as “overt acts of rebellious student behaviour” (Giroux 1983: 287). He suggests that some students may “resist” the dominant ideology of schooling in a more covert way which allows them to remain and be successful in the system and “gives them the power to reject the system on a level
that will not make them powerless to protest it in the future" (Giroux 1983: 288). A study in which I was involved (Dei, Mazzuca, MacIsaac and Zine 1997) found that Black students resistance took many forms. For example, as a means of self-preservation, some chose to leave the education system that marginalized and alienated them. Others remained in the system and attempted to make changes within their reach, for example, initiating clubs for Black students, organizing events for Black history month and demanding inclusive curriculum. In their study of women of color graduate students in sociology, Margolis and Romero found the following examples of "resistance strategies":

These women struggled to maintain ties to their communities of origin and to keep a focus on social action. They challenged sociological research on their own communities. They pointed out contradictions in sociological theory and practice. They adopted paradigms, theories, and concepts from the discipline both to criticize the discipline and to analyze their own situations as women of color graduate students. They fought within the department for equity in the allocation of resources, and within individual seminars for more inclusive literature. (Margolis and Romero 1998: 115)

I would argue that my selection of research topic is my own form of resistance and attempt to "survive" in graduate school. This study will elucidate strategies of other Italian Canadian women.

Up until the point I began this research project — and even now — I have felt concerned about how it would be regarded. In academia it seems certain topics are seen as more "legitimate" than others. Some topics are more privileged than others are and this is obvious through what topics are selected for academic study, which studies receive funding and which studies gain scholarly attention. As I have stated several
times already in this discussion, the study of Italian Canadian women has not been one of the topics receiving attention. Why? Our parents are immigrants with little power in the education system, for the most part uneducated, and as a group Italian Canadian women have made small inroads to academia. What is valued as a worthwhile topic of study is tied up with power and privilege. "The bodies of knowledge given top priority... not only legitimate the interests and values of the dominant classes, they also have the effect of marginalizing or disconfirming other kinds of knowledge, particularly knowledge important to feminists, the working class, and minority groups" (Giroux 1983: 268). As much as I want to bring to light the experiences of Italian Canadian women I do not want to exoticize them or marginalize them. I believe this study is a legitimate examination of a particular group of graduate students, which can include important contributions to the topic of graduate studies outside of the service it provides in bringing forward the particular experiences of a group of ethnic women.

In this research, I will have the opportunity to study the experiences of participants who are similar to myself in many ways. I will explore further in discussing methodology how this "insider" role impacted my research endeavours. But from the start I need to acknowledge my own subjectivity. I attempted to be constantly aware of my subjectivity, as Peshkin (1988) suggests, so that I could attend to it during the data gathering and disclose it in the final analysis. I looked to the literature on qualitative research and narrative to negotiate the place of my personal reflections in the research project. In my role as researcher I attempted to remain consistently aware of my own reactions and how they may influence the participants. Essentially, I needed to
negotiate the inclusion of my voice in this discussion. Both Giroux (1992) and hooks (1988) expand on the use of personal narration. They suggest that simply to include "tales" of one's experience without locating them in the social and political arena in which they have been created:

Often denigrates into a form of narcissism, a cathartic experience that is reduced to naming anger without the benefit of theorizing in order to [...] understand its underlying causes... (Giroux 1992: 80)

Along with including my voice and the participants' voices I strive to connect these to the wider social context in which they occur. Like Lee (1996), who studied her own ethnic group, Asian Americans, "my voice(s) will appear alongside those of my informants. I will include my voice when it is most relevant to understanding how my identity and voice influenced the research process" (Lee 1996: 14).

Research Questions

This research sets out to investigate the following research questions. It does so in an exploratory manner which will both provide answers and allow for new areas of discovery.

- How do Italian Canadian women talk about their experiences with education?
- How has their ethnic and family background impacted on their educational experiences and decisions?
- What are the multiple roles the women take up as they pursue a graduate education?
- What strategies have the women used to be successful in graduate school?
- What do the women's accounts tell us about the graduate school experiences of ethnic minorities, children of immigrants and women?
How can we use these findings to inform graduate education?

**Research Objectives**

In the following section I will describe the research literature that has influenced my choice of study and how my study will contribute to this body of work. Most of this research centres on the study of Italian immigrants in Canada and Italian Canadian culture and on minority women graduate students. In the process of presenting these areas of research, I will introduce the objectives of this study.

Shortly after World War Two Canada had a large influx of immigrants, particularly from Europe. In this time of economic prosperity, most of the Italian immigrants became labourers (Jansen 1981; Troper 1993). Few became engaged in schooling. Despite the low educational levels of their parents many (although still not the majority) of the children of these immigrants went on to university. We know little about the lives of these children who, although born in Canada, grew up in homes where both parents had been born and educated in a different country. An account of the work force participation and residential settlement patterns of Italian immigrants places the women students’ experiences in a relevant context. Immigrants of Italian background were recruited to Toronto as workers and were considered labourers first and foremost. In a study I conducted earlier (Mazzuca 1995), I found that for these immigrants, and by their accounts for their contemporaries, education was low on a list of priorities, which was topped by economic survival. Combined with this outlook was the lack of encouragement they found in the Canadian educational system for their
participation especially when compared with the enticements of employers seeking low-waged workers.

The information from this earlier study is also useful in understanding the relationships the women in the current research have with their parents. Have Italian Canadian parents now moved education to a higher level of priority? If so, is it due to a changed perception influenced by Canadian life or by an economic stability that allows for a change in priorities? An Italian Canadian university student in a study conducted by Feuerverger points out that “there is a real gap between the kids and parents” (Feuerverger 1991: 664) and she continues by suggesting that, “there is an appalling lack of confidence on the part of a lot of these immigrants. It has to be pointed out. They seem indifferent to the school system but that’s not what they really mean. They really feel that they have nothing to offer; that they are nobodys... They still have a ways to go to integrate into society” (Feuerverger 1991: 664). What may then be viewed as “indifference” towards their children’s education may in fact be, as this student suggests, a lack of confidence on the part of immigrant parents unfamiliar with the Canadian school system. This perspective is useful as we think about how students from immigrant homes may be ill equipped to enter the school system based on their home culture. Are immigrant parents aware of and are they in a position to alleviate this deficit? In this study I attempt to address such questions through the use of interview data and existing literature.
Although Italian immigrants and their descendants form one of the largest ethnic
groups in Toronto the pattern of their participation in the educational system has gone
largely undocumented except as part of large studies on various ethnic groups in the
Metropolitan area. In contrast, information regarding Italian immigration to Canada is
plentiful. Those who immigrated were mainly from Southern Italian farming
communities and many of them settled in Ontario, particularly in Toronto. Today, as a
result of this model of settlement “40 percent of all Italians in Canada live in Toronto”
(Jansen 1985: 129). Jansen refers to Italian Canadians as: “an established group, that is,
… a group which has experienced a strong immigration in the past, but whose
immigration has now ceased and is not likely to pick up again” (Jansen 1985: 129).
Jansen’s comment tells us that as a group Italian Canadians have been in Canada for a
significant amount of time, which also suggests that the younger generation have, for
the most part, been born in Canada. This type of settlement also has implications for the
community as a cultural group. Because of its large population the community has been
able to retain many of its ‘old world” customs and traditions. One has only to frequent
an Italian business in any major Canadian city to see products geared towards this group
and hear the various regional dialects, nearly extinct in Italy today, still being spoken.

The Italian Canadian culture is necessarily based on the pre World War Two
culture that immigrants left behind. They brought this culture with them and attempted
to maintain it as their sense of ethnic identity in Canada. The Italian Canadian culture
does not reflect the current Italian one. In her study of heritage language teachers in
Toronto, Feuerverger (1997) found that they noted this phenomena about several
immigrant cultures in Canada. One teacher, in discussing the perceptions of second
generation Portuguese Canadians of Portugal, suggests that since “immigration at the
time [the early 1960s] came from rural areas, the image they have from Portugal is
uneducated farmers” (Feuerverger 1997: 48). One of the reasons that this image is the
only one students know is that it is the only one parents have to offer them if indeed this
was their pre-immigration experience. Rather than veer from this pre-immigration
culture and risk losing the only culture one knows, parents cling to it in the new
country.

Pichini argues that this maintenance of culture has had consequences for the
community and in particular for women:

The community is caught between two worlds; while it is not yet
Canadian, because of the maintenance of its language and customs,
neither is it any longer Italian by today’s standards. Rather, it lies in
limbo, somewhere between an Italy that once existed in the 1950s and
1960s, before Italians departed for Canada. (Pichini 1987: 22)

She suggests that due to the patriarchal nature of the culture prior to immigration,
women continue to be subservient to men. If, indeed, patriarchy rules the Italian
Canadian family, it will inevitably have implications for women who are pursuing an
education which encroaches on what have been traditionally considered their marriage
and childbearing years. The existence of a patriarchal family pattern within this cultural
group needs more exploration. It does appear that Italians in Canada hold on to their
values and customs in an attempt to maintain an identity in a new country. They have,
to some extent, resisted change out of a fear that any shift will result in a loss of their
culture and their personal identity. Italians residing in Italy secure in their cultural identity have been faster to change their ways.

There are also implications for students in general as parents maintain "old world" values. Numerous studies have shown how students from immigrant backgrounds struggle to adjust to a school system in a culture different from their home one (for example: Dei et al. 1997; Lee 1996; Rendon 1992; London 1989). "If parents do not understand what the children are going through - trying to sort out two very different cultures and finding a way to live with both - then they will be strangers to each other" (Feuerverger 1997: 48). The educational system, in turn, "rarely incorporates the languages and cultures of its students within the mainstream curriculum" (Feuerverger 1997: 42). This phenomenon needs further examination and this project will begin to explore it as it pertains to this particular group of women.

This study has also been informed by literature about Canadian immigration in general and how immigration policy, access to the labour force and residential settlement have played out for other immigrant groups. In his review of Canadian immigration, Troper (1993) makes connections between immigration policy and which groups immigrated at particular moments in history. As I have mentioned, numerous studies show that Italian immigrants were granted permission to enter post-war Canada primarily because of the need for cheap labour. In Ethnic Inequality in a Class Society, Li (1988) used statistics from the Canadian Census to assess the educational attainment, labour force participation and social mobility of various ethnic groups. He finds that
despite the persistence in the Canadian psyche of the impartial “mobility dream,” ethnicity is a factor in who achieves the “dream” (Li 1988). Italians, for example, do not fare well in regards to mobility in both employment and education relative to some other groups.

Studies of females from a minority culture who pursue a higher education show that they often have experiences and concerns which are distinct from those of other students and even from men with whom they share an ethnic background (Bronstein, Rothblum and Solomon 1993; Ferron 1989; hooks 1993; Hurtado 1994; Leal & Menjivar 1992; McKenna & Ortiz 1988; Melandez & Petrovich 1989; Nettles 1990; Turner & Thompson 1993; and Welch 1992). Detailing the educational experiences of women from Italian backgrounds is useful to our understanding of the linkages of ethnicity and education, as well as informing us about graduate education in general. By exploring the women’s experiences in managing their roles as students this research may inform us of how the academic system is either serving or impeding minority students, including those such as working-class persons, who are not traditional participants in academia. If, in fact, there are barriers to the progress of students from minority backgrounds, how have these students become “successful”? Not to deny that the education system alienates or marginalizes certain groups, I believe that why and how some minority women progress through the system successfully needs to be explored. Researching those Italian Canadian women who are pursuing advanced studies will lead to a better understanding of how this progress is achieved. Strategies and roles taken up by these women could indicate how minority students adjust to the
education system. This type of research can also be useful to developing an understanding of the educational experiences of other children of immigrant parents. Canada has received and continues to receive large numbers of immigrants from various parts of the world. This research then appears particularly relevant in the Canadian context. It will add a deeper understanding of how the children of these immigrants adjust to the school system and uncover barriers which exist to their progress as well as strategies for their educational survival.

**Theoretical framework**

My framework for this research begins with the idea of a "border crossing" which must occur in order for the women to become successful graduate students. There are numerous barriers to this crossing, as illustrated by concepts such as cultural discontinuity (Ogbug 1982), bicultural socialization (Zambrana 1988: 71), culturally determined behaviours (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 60), cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and transition class (Gardner 1993). Yet the women in this study have crossed the "border" of graduate education. Understanding the methods used in doing so is informed by notions of resilience, assimilation, and tokenism. This study adds to our understanding of this border crossing by uncovering strategies used by the women.

I begin my analysis of these minority women’s experiences with education by examining the idea of “borders” and “border crossings.” Employing a cultural studies and critical theory approach, respectively, both Rosaldo (1989) and Tierney (1991) use these images in their work on difference. They suggest that these invisible borders are
created in a manner which makes some voices inaudible within certain “borderlands.”

With critical theory, Tierney suggests research as a means to bring about change in power relations by exposing the “borders” of this power (Tierney 1991). These power relations create and maintain the borders. The borders are not necessarily visible for those who hold power as they do not have to overcome the barriers that surround the borders. This current study attempts to address Tierney’s suggestion. I do not begin this research with the premise that the women’s experiences in graduate school are unproblematic simply because they are there or even appear to be thriving. By exploring in more detail the strategies they must use to be successful, this study will expose the inherent power relations that exist in graduate education, particularly for women with an immigrant background. Rosaldo claims that:

Borderlands surface not only at the boundaries of officially recognized cultural units, but also at less formal intersections, such as those of gender, age, status, and distinctive life experiences. (Rosaldo 1989: 29)

Aspects of this framework are useful in my understanding of Italian Canadian female graduate students’ experiences. If we conceptualize academia as a “borderland,” we can see how the crossing of this “border” may be difficult for those who do not possess the appropriate cultural signs. As women, obviously gender will be one of the “less formal intersections” they encounter, as will be the “distinctive life experiences” they have due to their ethnic background. These life experiences, we will see, do indeed create a “border” for the women to cross.

Graduate school participation is a border, not crossed by all, for various reasons, which have to do with the power relations in society. Anzaldúa defines a border as “set
up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (Ansaldua 1987: 3). Many people may find it difficult to cross this border and to feel “safe” even if they are able to do so. As a “dividing line,” crossing the border may involve a complete break from the past that a student has known. Students may believe that the only path to academic success is one which leads them away from many of the practices and beliefs they have held. But as Rendon (1992) explains, we need to reassess this notion.

The academy is set up so that students most likely to succeed are those that can successfully disconnect from the past and turn over loyalty to the conventions and practices of the academy. Yet academic success can be attained without total disconnection, and many educators either do not want to accept this or fail to recognize this. (Rendon 1992: 60)

As this research considers how Italian Canadian women have come to cross the border of academia and “survive,” it will “recognize” how this can be achieved without a “total disconnection” from their past.

The border of graduate education has many barriers around it for the group of women I studied. Gender, social status and various life episodes all contributed to make it difficult for the Italian Canadian women to cross this particular border. Some of the factors which have conspired to create these barriers have been identified by various researchers. Ogbu elaborates on the theory of borders through his discussion of the “cultural discontinuity hypothesis” (Ogbu 1982). “Discontinuity” can be understood as a barrier for minority students and may take different forms for various groups. Ogbu suggests that rather than there being simply one type of discontinuity, which all students face as they enter the school system, there are three. The border looks different
depending on your vantagepoint. First of all there is "universal discontinuity," which is faced by all students if, as he suggests, there is always some level of continuity between the home culture and that of school (Ogbu 1982: 290). Second, there is "primary discontinuity" which is "transitional," for instance in the case of immigrants who may eventually adapt to school culture (Ogbu 1982: 291). Finally, there is the third type of discontinuity, "secondary discontinuity," which is most distressing (Ogbu 1982: 291). This last discontinuity is, in Ogbu’s view, most resistant to change, as the most subordinate minorities in society experience it.

Although he speaks of education generally, Ogbu’s consideration of discontinuity between the home culture and that of the school is useful to our understanding of difference as it relates to graduate students. Those students who undergo primary or secondary levels of discontinuity will inevitably feel the most alienated from the culture of school. Again, this view is useful to understanding how difference can play a pivotal role in how students perform in school and can be useful to our understanding of minority graduate students’ experiences. Following Ogbu’s theory, we would expect minority graduate students to experience heightened levels of discontinuity compared to other students from mainstream backgrounds. The border for minority students will be more difficult to cross.

Again, if we think of academia as a border, I suggest that there are barriers that exist for some students. One of the barriers can be explained by Ogbu’s theory of cultural discontinuity. Throughout this research there will be examples of discontinuity
between the women's experiences in their family and culture of origin and the culture they confront in graduate school, and to a lesser extent in society in general. The border that minority students are confronted with is partially constructed of these discontinuities. Many issues impact the cultural distance between their side of the border and that of higher education. As Ogbu suggests, all students undergo some "universal discontinuity" in making the transition to school from home. Primary discontinuity can be transitional. How does this apply to the Italian Canadian women? They are children of immigrants becoming educated, presumably they will "transcend" to becoming educated persons and no longer face this discontinuity.

It cannot be ignored that the women are white, and in many cases "middle class," if class is defined simply on a financial basis. However, ethnicity as it is expressed in cultural practices and beliefs impacts Ogbu's discontinuity hypothesis. Ethnic background shapes how minority students have experienced the world around them and necessarly education. Some cultural practices do not mesh well with the school culture. In the case of Italian Canadian women we will see how some of the practices and values they hold from their "ethnic selves" conflict with the culture of graduate school. This clash sets up a case of cultural discontinuity. The level of discontinuity is not clear as it may apply differently at various stages and in various contexts.

Applying Ogbu's theory to graduate students suggests some modifications might be necessary. Assuming that minority graduate students have experienced this
discontinuity throughout their education, questions arise about how they progress to the level of graduate studies and why they decide to pursue a higher education. I will take up this point in my research as I uncover “strategies” used by the women in order to be successful in graduate school. The notion of discontinuity is nevertheless helpful in understanding the women’s struggles with adapting to graduate school.

“Bicultural socialisation” (Zambrana 1988: 71) and “culturally determined behaviours” (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 60) can also pose a barrier to success and work to obstruct entrance to graduate education. In writing about the experiences of Hispanic women in graduate education in the United States, Zambrana speaks of the rupture which can occur between educational and family socialisation. She identifies six factors which can influence what she refers to as “Bicultural Socialisation” (Zambrana 1988: 71). She suggests that in order for this “process by which individuals from an ethnic minority group are instructed in the values, perceptions and normative behaviours of two cultural systems” (Zambrana 1988: 71) to be effective and not alienating we must consider six factors. These factors, which impact on how easily one can “move” between two cultures, are:

1. The degree of overlap between the two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like.
2. The availability of culture translators, mediators, and models.
3. The amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behaviour.
4. The conceptual style and problem-solving approach of minority individuals and their mesh with prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture.
5. The individual’s degree of bilingualism.
6. The degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture, such as skin colour and facial features. (Zambrana 1988: 71)
These factors are important to our understanding of minority students' overall educational experiences. The presence or absence of these factors in the lives of the Italian Canadian women can help us understand their influence on the women's experiences of socialization.

In examining these factors more closely several important considerations emerge. How closely related the two cultures are can be influenced by immigration for instance. A culture which is based on recent immigration will "fit" differently with the mainstream culture than one which has coexisted with it over a period of time. Education levels can also influence the level of "overlap" between cultures. For example, the women in my study do not have parents who have been educated in this country and so parents are unlikely to provide a home culture similar to the educational one. Related to the issues of immigration and education levels is the notion of "cultural translators" (Zambrana 1998: 71). Recent immigration and low education levels will make it more unlikely that members of a culture will have people available to guide them in a second culture. In turn, these issues can make it difficult for others in a culture (eg. parents) to provide "corrective feedback" to the student. Immigration and education also impact on cultural styles of interaction and language skills, as they are more likely to mirror the immigrants'culture rather than the one of mainstream education. Zambrana admits that this model provides a "conceptual framework" but not "specific information on the mechanism through which dual socialization occurs" (Zambrana 1988: 72). This study will show how the Italian Canadian participants
experience their socialization in both the home culture and the mainstream Canadian culture using the theoretical framework being outlined.

Another study of Hispanic graduate students discusses at length specific "culturally determined behaviours," such as styles of "interacting with authority figures," "cooperation," "dealing with conflict" and "friendship" which may vary from those valued in academic institutions (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 60). They found that often the styles the women were accustomed to from their home cultures were not the ones recognized or valued in educational settings. For example, in their interactions with authority figures "Hispanic students often keep a respectful distance between themselves and their professors" (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 60), a behaviour which could be easily misconstrued as disinterest or lack of initiative. Another example of how the students' behaviours were found to differ from those expected by the higher education system was in the area of cooperation. As the authors note, "competition and individual achievement are highly regarded values in the dominant U.S. culture" while "for Hispanics, group belongingness and cooperation are more important values" (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 62). This dissonance between their culturally based behaviours and those expected by mainstream schooling could become a barrier for the women in "fitting in" to the school culture. The women run the risk of having their behaviour become a barrier to their own success, despite other efforts to succeed. "The academic consequences to Hispanic women students of undervaluing these cultural patterns can be serious miscommunication between them and their professors, which
can lead to performance on the part of the students of less quality than that of which they are capable" (Melendez & Petrovich 1989: 64).

Studies such as those mentioned above must not be understood as defining the experiences of all Hispanic women regardless of class, life circumstances, personality and so forth. The findings of research such as Melendez and Petrovich’s are useful in beginning to broach the topic of cultural differences but we must not essentialize all an individual’s behaviours as stemming from their culture, nor should any one person be seen as representative of all members of their cultural group. In considering this work we must also keep in mind individual agency and how it may come into play in the process of socialization and educational success. I found their ideas useful in bringing to light how the socialization of the Italian Canadian women impacted on their ability to integrate into the world of graduate education. These studies suggest the existence of culturally determined – or influenced - behaviours which could serve as barriers to the success of minority students as the behaviours may cause them to respond to the educational environment in a manner which is not viewed by others as appropriate.

Closely related to the theories discussed above is Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu defines capital as a “set of actually usable resources and powers” (Bourdieu 1984: 114) and:

cultural capital as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from different social classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. (Bourdieu 1986: 243)
Bellamy (1994), in reviewing Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, explains that:

The culture that is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system reflects the culture of the dominant class. Schools reinforce particular types of linguistic competence, authority patterns, and types of curricula. Children from higher social backgrounds acquire these cultural resources (that is, dispositions, behaviour, habits, good taste, savoir faire, and attitudes) at home, and enter the educational system already familiar with the dominant culture. (Bellamy 1994: 122)

This notion of cultural capital as something acquired in the home and from one’s family of origin is useful in my analysis of the early home experiences of the women in this study. As children of immigrant parents who have not benefited from a Canadian education or upbringing, it is possible that they will lack cultural capital necessary to transverse the border of graduate studies. In order to make the transition they will need to surmount this barrier as well. Who holds this capital and how it is defined is based on the current power relations in society. For Italian Canadian women we will see that their culture, values and customs are not those which are privileged in graduate school.

As Giroux points out, “by linking power and culture, Bourdieu provides a number of insights into how the hegemonic curriculum works in schools, pointing to the political interests underlying the selection and distribution of those bodies of knowledge that are given top priority” (Giroux 1983: 268). As children of immigrants it is unlikely that the Italian Canadian women will hold a culture resembling the “bodies of knowledge” which are privileged in academia. They must adapt to this deficit and presumably have done so, to some extent, in order to be enrolled in graduate studies. It is not clear from simply the discussion of cultural capital how they will do so and at
what price acquiring this capital will come. It has been suggested that for minority students, becoming academic professionals requires “the adoption of attitudes and behaviour patterns that are different from or antithetical to their culture of origin – requirements that make the path through school more problematic and perilous than it might be for a student who arrives equipped with the dominant forms of cultural capital” (Margolis and Romero 1998: 9).

Finally, looking at the women as members of what Gardner (1993) refers to as a “transition class” assisted my understanding of the border that must be crossed as they enter graduate education. Due either to class background or immigration, parents of many minority students have not received a higher education, either at all or in the same country as their children. According to Gardner, as members of this “class,” she and other students “often experienced ourselves as outsider, both within the middle-class world of academia and within our families of origin” (Gardner 1993: 50). While most studies focus on academic experiences and not on the changes which occur in the personal sphere as a person “transcends” through higher education, several authors have taken this path. In his 1989 study of first-generation college students, one of London’s research questions was “how do students reconcile (or not reconcile) the often conflicting requirements of family membership and educational mobility” (London 1989: 145). He found that some of the students he interviewed were given “conflicting messages: one to stay at home, the other to achieve in the outside world” (London 1989: 148). An example of this is a student he calls Lorena, who “was pitted between incompatible role assignments. If she left she was disloyal in her role as a paternal
comforter and confidante; if she stayed she was disloyal in her role as an emissary” (London 1989: 152). First-generation students often play an important role, as “comforters and confidantes,” translators and mediators, in the lives of their immigrant parents. Engaging in a higher education can have an influence on how they are able to carry out these roles. Change in family relationships is an interesting area explored in this study which will further our understanding of minority students’ experiences.

As the participants in this study demonstrate, the “border” of graduate school is crossed by some students in spite of being hindered by “cultural discontinuity,” “culturally determined behaviours,” “bicultural socialisation,” lack of “cultural capital” and membership in a “transition class.” Some concepts that help us understand how this crossing occurs successfully have to do with “resilience” (LePage-Lees 1997), “assimilation,” “identity” and “tokenism.” One objective of this current research study is to inform the literature which examines how minority students are successful in graduate education by uncovering several roles or strategies adopted by the women in order to be successful in graduate school.

LePage-Lees (1997) suggests that certain personality traits can lead to resilience and explain why some women, disadvantaged by their backgrounds, are able to be successful, using graduate school participation as a measure of success. She defined the women as disadvantaged based on the following criteria, that “they lived in either a poor working-class or lower-class family as a child”, that “they were first-generation college students” who had “experienced at least one type of familial dysfunction or
traumatic childhood stress" (LePage-Lees 1997: 8). Through in-depth interviews with the women who were disadvantaged, LePage-Lees found that there are certain personality traits that were consistent across the sample. These traits were "independence and maturity," "benevolence," "self-confidence," "perfectionism," and "perseverance" (LePage-Lees 1997: 19-26). While these findings were relevant as I thought about the participants in this study, it is clearly difficult to conclude that the women in my study had different characteristics than other Italian Canadian women, as I did not interview Italian Canadian women who chose not to participate in graduate education. So while LePage-Lees' hypothesis about resilience helps shape the study in terms of looking at a particular group of women and their "strategies" for success, it does not enable me to point to defining characteristics for Italian Canadian women who are more likely than others to be graduate students.

What the above research by LePage-Lees does suggest is that often, as part of their strategy for success, disadvantaged women may adjust their public image to the dominant culture of graduate studies. In other words, they "hide" their disadvantaged background, and give the impression of being "middle class." The author argues that this behaviour has the effect of further alienating disadvantaged or minority students as through their observations they imagine everyone to be different from them. In turn they keep their difference hidden, thus perpetuating the myth that all graduate students come from a middle class background.
Assimilation provides a further explanation for this phenomena. In attempting to be successful in crossing the border, minority women may decide to transform themselves to fit into what they perceive to be the dominant culture of graduate school. This transformation may involve changes in their behaviours, practices and beliefs. Although there are many different definitions of assimilation, the one I focus on in this context is often referred to as “cultural assimilation” (Reitz 1980; Isajiw 1975).

Cultural assimilation refers to “changes of cultural patterns to those of the host society” (Reitz 1980: 101) and “the internalization of the overt and covert patterns of behaviour characteristics of the larger society by the members of the ethnic group” (Isajiw 1975: 129). In the case of graduate students, the “host” and “larger society” will be graduate education and the “cultural patterns” and “patterns of behaviour” they may adopt will be those found in graduate studies.

The concept of assimilation is related to issues of identity. Our sense of identity can influence how we approach the process of assimilation. Weeks provides the following definition of identity:

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. (Weeks 1990: 88)

We can apply this definition to our understanding of minority graduate students’ self identification. As the quotation suggests, identity is not a simple concept to define, and it can be based on a variety of factors. As Dei points out in discussing the educational setting, “students, like any other group, articulate multiple, overlapping and shifting
identities” (Dei 1996: 32). This study will explore how identity is defined by the participants, particularly as it relates to their ethnicity, but without ignoring the multiple identities that they carry as graduate students and members of other groups. “The identity of the self involves more than the individual,” it also includes “cultural identities” (Dei 1996: 31) and how we see ourselves in different contexts. I will take up assimilation and identity further in the next chapter as they relate to difference.

Difference is a concept which overarches much of the theoretical framework I have been constructing in this chapter. How we understand difference will be discussed in the next chapter in the process of reviewing literature on the topic. Experiencing difference will also be examined in Chapter Three and throughout the dissertation. Being “different” permeates the identity, the behaviours and the realities of minority students. It is necessary to consider not only how it relates to how they make decisions around assimilation, for example, but how it shapes the very choices that are before them and the context in which they make these choices.

Finally, tokenism may be another means by which minority students cross the border to become successful graduate students. How and why does the educational system work to encourage some minority students to assimilate? The literature suggests that the promise of success and a place in middle class culture is the incentive offered by education. Nieves-Squires elaborates on this suggestion in her essay contained in the collection edited by Welch (1992) which deals specifically with the concerns of minority women in higher education. In order to hypothesize about why some minority individuals do succeed in academia, she looks to the “academic explanation” of
assimilation and finds that "tokenism" and the maintenance of "permanent marginality" are central features of this "explanation" (Nieves-Squires 1992: 80-81).

That power withheld from the vast majority of minorities is offered to a few, so that it may appear that any truly qualified minority can gain access to leadership, recognition, and rewards; hence, that justice based on merits actually prevails. (Nieves-Squires 1992: 81)

She goes on to suggest that the minority person chosen for the role of "token" is perceived and encouraged to perceive herself as different from others of her culture, who in turn see her as different due to her participation in academia. This process, Nieves-Squires claims, is based on the "permanent marginality" of certain groups in the general society (Nieves-Squires 1992: 81). Nieves-Squires' explanation suggests that the existence of some minority academics does not represent an equitable and fair educational system but an attempt to portray it as such. The operation of tokenism, then, provides another hypothesis by which to understand how it is that some minorities, in this case, the Italian Canadian women in this study, come to be graduate students. What this explanation does not address is the role of individual agency. Why some minority women instead of others succeed in education and how individuals contribute to their own success in reaching the stage of graduate education is not explained by the definition of tokenism. Instead it is likely that tokenism does play a role in minority students achieving success in graduate school but does not tell the whole story.

In the preceding discussion, I have outlined the theoretical framework which informs this study. By looking at graduate school as a border with barriers in place for some students I begin to search for answers as to how some do indeed make the
crossing successfully. This study will focus on and inform us in the understanding of how, with the presence of such factors as cultural discontinuity, culturally determined behaviours and bicultural socialization, cultural capital differentials and being first generation students, some Italian Canadian women become successful graduate students. I will consider evidence of the processes of resilience, assimilation and tokenism and attempt to discover the specific strategies these women adopt given their unique circumstances.

**Methodology**

The study includes 18 single interviews and two small group discussions with Italian Canadian female graduate or professional students in various faculties. The women in the study are mainly students in Ontario universities and most of them have grown up in the Toronto area, where the largest group of Italian immigrants has settled. A fuller description of participants will be provided in Chapter Five. The women are all first generation Canadian, with both parents born in Italy and immigrating to Canada after 1950. Although sharing a cultural background, the women do not necessarily share a common economic or social one. I asked the women to reflect on their decision to enter a graduate faculty, how this decision was reached, and about the reaction of those around them. I asked the women to discuss their experiences in general terms as well as on a daily basis as students and as community and family members. They were also asked to consider how their relationships with others have changed (if at all) over their educational careers. Relationships with their families and how they perceive these relationships as influencing or being influenced by their educational experiences was
also a major focus of this research. Finally, I considered the relationship between the women’s roles as student and as family member.

Qualitative research is an appropriate method for this research project for several reasons which I will briefly mention here and elaborate upon in the methodology chapter. Through in-depth interviews I am able to probe the women’s views on various issues, both those which I believe at the start are significant to understanding their experiences and those which I discover to be significant through my discussions with them. This methodology allows for the women’s voices to be the basis of the analysis, an important point given that their voices have until now been silent in academic literature. The interviewing style I used also permitted me to acknowledge and respond to some of the women’s concerns and questions. Rather than limit my interaction with the women to that of the interviewer I was able, in moments where I felt it to be the only ethical reaction available, to reassure and inform them. There is also an opportunity with this methodology to recognize my role in the process. As I will discuss later in this dissertation, it would be inaccurate, in my opinion, to ignore the role of the researcher in this particular instance. As a woman who shares many characteristics with my participants, it is inevitable that I had an influence on the research process.

It must be noted that there are some limitations to this study based on the particular choice of sample. The sample is relatively small, although it does incorporate women in a variety of academic programmes, for example social sciences, medical
sciences, life sciences, and language studies. Most of the women were based in Toronto (where, as mentioned, the majority of Italian Canadians reside) which is an urban centre with two large universities within its borders and a multitude of cultural groups represented. These factors have inevitably impacted the women’s educational experiences and perhaps made it more likely that they would pursue a higher education than others living in smaller centres. Having said that brings me to another limit of the study: that is, it does not include a control group of either other Italian Canadian women who have not pursued a graduate education or of graduate students from other cultures. To some extent the review of literature fills this gap. These women are a self-selected sample in that they have chosen to attend graduate school while others with similar backgrounds did not. As graduate students the women are as a group more likely to be familiar with research practices and process, more likely to be articulate and probably more used to expressing their opinions and views than the general population. In this sense the research data may be rich and detailed reflecting these participant characteristics.

Dissertation Outline

In Chapter Two, I describe how post-war immigration policies and trends influenced which Italians immigrated to Canada and what positions they took up in Canadian society. In this chapter I also introduce the findings of a smaller study I conducted previously. This investigation included interviews with post World War Two Italian immigrants who were of school age, that is, younger than sixteen when they entered Canada. This group of participants reflects the generation of the parents of the
women I interview in the current study, giving further context to the women’s experiences.

Chapter Three provides a review of literature on graduate students with a focus on minority graduate students. In particular, studies of female students, ethnic minority students and working class students form the basis of this chapter. The students’ experiences in graduate school are examined in these studies, as are the transformations that occur in other areas in their lives due to their pursuit of higher education.

Chapter Four provides a description of the methodology used in this study. Appropriate qualitative research methods are discussed, as are specific methodological details of the in-depth interviews I conducted. A description of the participants is provided in Chapter Five. Several in-depth profiles invite a richer understanding of the women who participated in this study.

In Chapters Six and Seven I discuss the findings of the research related to the women’s educational experiences. Specifically, Chapter Six focuses on the overall educational experiences of the women, beginning with elementary education and moving through to graduate studies. Chapter Seven describes the strategies the women use to be successful in graduate school and the roles that they adopt in their educational and personal lives. Ethnic identity is taken up in Chapter Eight. How the women see themselves based on their ethnicity and how they perceive that others see them is considered.
Finally, Chapter Nine looks at how the findings from this dissertation corroborate, contradict or expand existing literature. The initial objectives of the study are revisited and unexpected discoveries are discussed.
CHAPTER TWO
ITALIANS IN CANADA

This chapter will provide a review of post Second World War immigration of Italians to Canada and a context in which to understand some of the findings of my research. Immigration patterns and international circumstances played a significant role in the Italian emigration movement. In order to enrich this examination some results from previous research that involved reflective interviews with six Italian immigrants who were under the age of eighteen at the time of immigration will be included in the discussion (Mazzuca 1995). Participants in this earlier research reflected on their first experiences with the Canadian school system and their current views of education.

Post-War Italian Immigration To Canada

Although Italian immigration to Canada had been ongoing for several decades, it peaked between 1951 and 1971 (Reitz 1980: 55). This period saw the greatest number of Italian citizens enter Canada than had ever before or have since arrived. In order to understand how it came about that Italians were allowed and, in fact, encouraged to enter Canada in large numbers, we must look at the economic situation in Canada during the period immediately following the Second World War. Italians had been deemed "enemy aliens" during the war due to the fact that they fought against the Allied Countries. Thus the circumstances which arose in Canada that produced favourable conditions for Italian immigration must, therefore, be considered highly significant.
In the years following the war, concerns in Canada centred on whether the economy would fall into a depression as it had after the First World War. In fact, the economy took an upswing as Canada produced goods for export, as well as for domestic use. With Europe in a state of depression, Canada was able to provide much needed materials to these European countries. Also, Canadians now had, due to shortages of consumer goods during the war, savings of which they wished to make use (Troper, 1993). For the first time in Canadians' memories, "The problem was a shortage of goods not money, of labour not jobs" (Troper 1993: 258). Canadian industries were very interested, of course, in taking full advantage of this economic opportunity, and they realised that in order to do this they must have labourers, particularly those who were willing to work for low wages.

Immigrants fit this description and due to the situation in Europe where there was limited opportunity for secure employment, Europe seemed the logical place to turn for workers. Of course Europe was also considered for other reasons which were racially motivated. Although Southern and Eastern Europeans were not considered as "desirable" as British or Northern Europeans, immigration from non-white countries was still virtually non-existent. So, due to increased pressure from industry for a supply of low paid workers, the Canadian government began to expand its immigration policies to allow entry first to those living in displaced persons camps and later to those from countries in Southern Europe such as Italy (Troper 1993). The opportunity to immigrate to Canada
was taken up by many Italians in the years following the lifting of restrictions against them. In particular those from Southern Italy took advantage of this opportunity.

Post war Italy was in ruins; the problems of southern Italy—eg., poverty, a poor educational system, unequal distribution of land, bad housing conditions—had been aggravated by the ravages of war. Whole families, extended families and villages moved to Canada from a depressed, economically starved, third world Mezzogiorno. (The Mezzogiorno includes the provinces of Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Sardegna). (Colalillo 1981: 14)

Driedger, in his discussion of ethnic identity, notes the importance of considering “the position to which ethnic groups are admitted and at which they are allowed to function in the power structure of a society” (Driedger 1976: 132). He argues that the circumstances surrounding the introduction of immigrants in a new society can have important influences on their settlement, employment and mobility patterns. In fact, Italians did not enter Canada in very favourable “positions.” “The entrance status of Italians in urban areas was low and far more segregated than any other groups (…). This is in large part because their lack of education and urban experience, and the fact that they moved directly into cities, forced them to rely in one way or another on the other members of this group” (Reitz 1980: 75). In briefly examining the background of how Italians came to be considered for immigration to Canada we illuminate some factors which we will see influenced not only who came to Canada, but also what their lives were like once they were here.

The above description makes it clear that Italian immigrants were recruited as labourers to contribute to Canada’s economic growth. In the period between 1951 and 1971, “an average of 22,080 arrived yearly. From a total of 152,245 in 1951 the
The population rose to 730,820 by 1971 (Jansen 1991: 160). The majority of these immigrants settled in Southwestern Ontario, in particular Toronto. In Toronto between 1931 and 1951, "the Italian descent group grew eight- to tenfold, from under 30,000 to upwards to 300,000" (Harney 1991:65). For the reasons mentioned above, the majority of Italian immigrants during the post-war period originated from Southern Italy (Sturino, 1978).

As Franca Iacovetta (1991) outlines in her examination of recruitment of Italian workers, Southern Italians were not the most desired immigrants by Canadian officials. Canadian immigration officials expressed a preference for Northern Italians. Early on in the post-war period, they formalised this preference in official quota allowing for more Northern Italians who were seen as most similar to British and Northern Europeans than Southern Italians. Even after the quota was lifted, the desirability of Northern over Southern Italians persisted unofficially. A quotation from correspondence of Canadian officials illustrates their feelings towards Southern Italians during the post war period. "The Italian from the south is not the type of migrants we are looking for in Canada. His standard of living, his way of working, even his civilisation seems so different that I doubt if Italians from the south could ever become assets to our country" (Harney 1985: 25-26).

The efforts of the Southerners, which enabled them to immigrate in greater numbers than those from the North despite this quota, may show that their situation was more deplorable economically than that of their Northern contemporaries (Iacovetta 1991). Eventually as the need for a labourers intensified and it became apparent that Southern Italians were
more eager to immigrate and that the Italian government officials supported their immigration, the quota was not upheld (Iacovetta 1991).

Most Italian immigrants turned to Canada for employment opportunities that were lacking in their own hometowns. Immigrating to Canada seemed most reasonable to Southerners and other Italians who came because here they could become labourers in what appeared to be a prosperous economy. In fact, “based on ‘intended occupations’ of those destined for the labour-force, three-quarters of Italians were destined for lowest status jobs” (Jansen 1991: 160). Motivation for immigration seems to have been mainly economic:

80 per cent of the Italian immigrants, a higher proportion than any other group, gave the desire to improve their economic position or standard of living as the most important factor in making them decide to come to Canada. (Richmond 1967: 32)

Therefore, the situation in post-war Italy, as well as the labour needs of Canadian business, helped to shape the picture of immigration to Canada.

I would venture to say that many Italians who left their country for Canada did so for economic reasons and their main aim was to become economically independent in Canada through working in mainly low status labour positions because those were more readily available. In my earlier work, I conducted in person interviews with six immigrants who had left Italy and settled in Canada during the post Second World War period before they reached the age of eighteen years (Mazzuca 1995). The participants were gathered in a “snowball” sample where one participant referred one or more other participants. The interviews took place in their homes and were tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed.
The participants were all in their fifties, were married and had children. The purpose of the study was to examine, qualitatively, the experiences of these immigrants with the Canadian education system and how these experiences, or lack of them, impacted on their current lives in Canada. All of the immigrants originated from Southern Italy. Four were from Calabria, one from Puglia, and another from Campania.

The immigrants all cited financial opportunity as the main reason for immigrating to Canada. Although some of their families owned their own homes and the farm land (others were tenant farmers in the ancient feudal system), they still believed that moving to Canada would provide them with more financial prosperity than surviving off the land. The immigrants also discussed the importance of a connection to the new country through a sponsor as another prime factor for allowing immigration to occur. The individuals had, like their contemporaries, a relatively low educational background. In general terms, of individuals who were fifteen years or older when they entered Canada from Italy, "over 70 per cent ... had less than grade 9 education" (Jansen 1991: 160). The immigrants who came to Toronto were, therefore, not highly educated and were most likely prepared to become the low skilled labourers for which Canada had a need. All of the factors discussed above must be understood as setting a context in which to examine the Italian immigrants' experiences with the school system in Toronto.

**Educational Background of Post War Italian Immigrants**

As the statistics quoted above show, the Italians who immigrated to Canada had relatively low levels of education. In fact:
The Italian and other immigrants from the Mediterranean had the lowest level of education of all post-war immigrants into Canada. Of this group, 89 per cent had less than nine years of full-time education, or part-time equivalent, compared with an average of 36 per cent for the sample as a whole. (Richmond 1967: 39)

Looking in particular at Italian heads of household in Toronto during the post-war years (1945-1965), “roughly 65 per cent” of them “had less than eight grades of elementary education, and there are indications that female formal education levels were even lower” (Harney 1991: 67). In my previous research, all of the respondents had completed grade five, which they compared to grade eight in the Canadian system, prior to immigrating. The system in Italy at the time included grade schools and were located in most small towns and went up to grade five. If a student were to pursue their education beyond this level they would need, in most cases, to travel daily or board in a nearby town.

None of the respondents had proceeded to high school prior to immigration and several had been out of school for a couple of years before immigrating. Familial obligations, particularly for girls, they suggested, overrode educational ones. At the time, most of their families survived by working the land surrounding their homes and if necessary school was occasionally missed in order for the child to contribute to the family’s needs. One respondent recalls how at the age of nine she missed a year of school to care for her new-born brother. Her mother, who was also working on the land, was overwhelmed by her child care responsibilities. Schooling for most rural Italian families was not the first priority due to the fact that the family’s survival often relied on other efforts.
In a study done by Suzanne Ziegler regarding Italian immigrants and education, she found that subjects described Italian school days as, "short (five consecutive hours) and intense, and there was a general consensus that pupils are more advanced than in Canada" (Zeigler 1980: 264). The immigrants I spoke with, although they did not necessarily feel that students were necessarily more advanced, agreed that school in Italy appeared to them as more "intense." The teachers, they felt, were stricter and a relatively high amount of learning was achieved in a short period of time. They believed that although education was taken seriously by their families, economic realities often superseded the desire for education. Often practical experience, such as sewing, cooking and agricultural work was more relevant to the Southerners whose family had survived as agriculturists for several generations. Since consumer goods were relatively scarce in Southern Italy, particularly during and following the war, families produced everything they needed or learned to create goods they could exchange for what they needed. It is probable that parents believed that by stressing these more practical lessons they were ensuring their children's future more so than if they encouraged them to pursue a formal education.

**Educational Experiences of Post War Italian Immigrants**

This pattern of not continuing in education was common for immigrants at that time. As Iacovetta suggests in her examination of post-war Italian immigrants in Toronto:

The statistics on education suggest that many sons and daughters closed off advanced educational opportunities and career options to contribute to the family's welfare. This pattern also reflects the streaming process in the schools, which discouraged immigrant children from pursuing a post-secondary education. By 1976 only 3 per cent of Toronto's Italians had a university education, compared with 15 per cent of Torontonians whose
mother tongue was English. Only 10 per cent of the Italians had completed grade 12, and only 7 per cent had finished grade 13. (Iacovetta 1993: 73)

These statistics demonstrate that along with the low education levels with which Italian immigrants entered Toronto, their children did not gain much in terms of education in the subsequent twenty years. The immigrant group which I considered in this earlier study would be included in these statistics. The immigrants who were between thirteen and eighteen at the time of immigration came to Canada at an age at which it was difficult to engage with the school system. (Lind, 1974) The immigrants also recognised the fact that being so dislocated in the early teen years was particularly difficult. They pointed to emotional and social difficulties which confronted them. One participant speaks about this concern which he has thought about quite a bit:

I really believe I came too soon. I came at a very difficult age, fourteen like you know if I stayed there [in Italy] at least maybe another three or four years first of all I was going to learn a trade good.... Or maybe instead of being fourteen I was eight or nine, maybe it would have been different, I mean first of all maybe you pick up everything a little bit faster and second maybe you don't feel so humiliated like I did. Like I said before I was a very difficult age like fourteen, I was not old enough to really go to work and I was really a little bit too old to start to get into education. (Mazzuca 1995: 19)

A female immigrant, also, felt that at thirteen she suffered more in adjusting to school in Toronto than her younger brother and sister. She felt more humiliation and found it more difficult to "pick up the language," she also had more responsibility at home in caring for her younger siblings. Therefore, keeping in mind the age at immigration can be particularly relevant. In this current study, only one of the women had parents who entered Canada when they were fourteen or younger. For most of the other parents, employment became their main occupation, not education, although some did pursue English language classes in the evening.
Inevitably, the immigrants spoke about language as a main barrier to their education. Entering the school system with no knowledge of the English language was the greatest challenge faced by immigrant children. But "if the Italian children were unprepared for Canadian schools, the schools seemed to be equally unprepared for the immigrant children" (Zeigler 1980: 265). None of the immigrants I spoke to said there were any special programs for immigrant children in the schools they attended nor do they recall hearing of any of their contemporaries being in any such program.

The immigrants all left school prior to completing a high school education in order to join the workforce. Financial reasons were given as to why leaving school and joining the workforce were beneficial for them and their families. Yet, they also believed that many factors, some mentioned above, contributed to their disengagement, if they were ever engaged, with the Canadian school system. Lack of special programmes for immigrants, being "put back" several grades in classes with students much younger than themselves and encountering principals who were willing to authorise them to leave school prior to the age of sixteen with "good reason" all limited their educational achievements.

Current Opinions on Education

The participants in the earlier study all have children who have been educated in the Canadian system. Through the experience of parenting these children they have come to have a deeper understanding of the Canadian education system. This understanding, in some cases, has rendered them more regretful about their own limited education.
their parenting experiences, and general social life in Canada, they have all come to mourn their lack of education. When asked to reflect on their lack of education in Canada one respondent stated, “I can answer that, I really miss it, I wish I was going to school. (...) Now I really sorry about” (Mazzuca 1995: 28). When asked how his educational experiences have impacted on his life, another responded poignantly:

To me I feel like not having enough education was a drawback to me all my life. I'm sure if I had a better education I can have a better job, I can do things which I cannot do because I mean, lack of education it really hold me back. At the time being young, being very inexperienced of the system here and everything I did the best I could at the time. Now I realise it was the wrong thing because I mean, to me now the way I see things now education is the first thing because I mean otherwise you're, everything is limited, when education is limited then whatever you do in life that thing is always kind of drawback. There are not that many doors open to you if education is that little. (Mazzuca 1995: 28)

Overall, the immigrants are able to be critical of the system that did not engage them and also of the opportunities lost to them. Though relatively comfortable financially they all speak in detail about how a lack of education has hindered their lives in Canada, as we saw in the quote above, not only in terms of employment but in terms of social interactions. All of this reflection has led them to encourage their own children to pursue higher education, in most cases as a means to financial security but also as a means to live a more fulfilling life in Canadian society. offering this type of encouragement to their children is not uncommon for immigrants.

In discussing her own findings from a study of children of Asian American immigrants, Lee (1996) refers to Ogbu’s suggestion “that immigrant minorities (...) have
positive attitudes toward future opportunities based on a dual frame of reference whereby they compare their current situation to their native countries" (Lee 1996:117). Equipped with this “dual frame of reference,” immigrants are able to look at their current inferior position in the host society and still consider it as superior to the situation they left behind in their country of origin. Believing that their situation can improve, “they place their faith in the power of schooling to improve the conditions of their lives” (Lee 1994: 118). She does not specify the mechanisms which lead immigrants to look to education as a means to social mobility. But in general the “dual frame of reference” serves as a positive factor in their lives and as a motivator. By considering “how far they have come,” immigrants have seen the changes that can occur in one’s life conditions. In my earlier study, although most of the immigrants had not developed a detailed understanding of the stages and options within higher education (for example graduate studies), they definitely believed that education was the key for improving their families’ position in Canadian society.

Participants in this earlier study all had assisted their children financially throughout their education and all had children who had attended university. In speaking of the higher education their children had completed, there is pride mixed with some regret. Either explicitly or implicitly all the participants expressed some level of regret for the changes that had occurred as a result of their child’s education. While proud of their children’s accomplishments there is an underlying sense that a distance has been created between parent and educated child. Add to that the immigrant experience which means that parent and child are “from two different worlds” and it is clear that we are talking about more than a “generation gap.” Literature in the preceding and subsequent chapters
demonstrates some of the ways in which this “gap” is evidenced. Children of immigrant parents do not always feel that their academic goals and achievements are understood or appreciated by family members and it is often impossible for them to find meaningful guidance in the area of education from family. By the same token, inherently, the parents’ experience of survival in a foreign, often unwelcoming situation is something the children know about only second hand. How the experiences of the first generation impact on those of the second, in particular those who pursue a graduate education, are explored in this thesis. The immigrant experience of their parents may well be a foundation for some of the barriers confronting students as they attempt to cross the border and be successful graduate students.

Conclusion

Currently, Italian Canadians make up one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada. What does it mean to be an immigrant from Italy forty or fifty years after settlement? And what does it mean to be a child of these immigrants? My earlier study touched on the first question as it asked immigrants to reflect both on their past experiences as well as on their current ones with the Canadian education system. In part my current research will address the second question by focusing on a particular group of women. Ethnic identity is a topic which I ask the women to discuss as it pertains to their lives but in particular to their education. As was discussed in Chapter One, Italian Canadian culture is one that is partially based on a pre-World War Two Italian culture. In the interim years what has influenced this culture? In her study of Italian Canadian parents and their adolescent children, Colallilo found a “recognition by both the Italian immigrant parents and their
adolescent children that the Italian immigrant culture of Toronto is a culture made up of both elements of the Italian rural culture of the majority of Italian immigrants and elements of the urban Canadian culture in which they now live" (Colallillo 1981: 239). Further examination is needed to better understand the details of this fusion and how being a member of this cultural group continues to influence one's experiences in society.
CHAPTER THREE
STUDIES ON GRADUATE STUDENTS

This chapter locates the experiences of Italian Canadian women within a body of literature about graduate and minority students. In Chapter One, I outlined the theoretical framework which guides this research. In this chapter I will look more broadly at research which relates to this study. My research project will build on this existing body of work. This context is important as it provides a picture of how this study evolved. The experience of being a graduate student can be “different” for students based on a variety of factors, including ethnicity, class and race. Italian Canadian women spoke in particular about how ethnicity played a strong role in their decisions, their activities and their interactions with others within the graduate experience. Coming from an immigrant home was a large part of this experience of difference. For many, social class had an additional impact. As a means to make sense of the women’s experiences, literature on minority graduate students is reviewed here and will subsequently be related to and expanded upon by this current research project. For simplicity I will use the term “minority students” to refer to students defined as different from the mainstream for a variety of reasons, specifically race, culture, ethnicity or class, while also considering gender.

I will begin by giving an overview of the literature on graduate education and minority status. I will then examine some definitions of difference provided by relevant
literature. Some studies also include suggestions on how concepts of diversity and difference can and should be taken into account more significantly in research. How difference is experienced by graduate students will also be considered. Following the discussion on difference, some specific topics which appear most frequently in the current literature on minority graduate students' experiences will be identified. These topics include assimilation, identity and family background. Throughout this review of the literature I will attempt to identify the gaps in research and raise critical questions still un-examined.

The discussion in this chapter will attempt to bring together literature on issues of gender, race, ethnicity and social class with that on graduate students. Relevant literature which employs a feminist framework, for instance, is particularly useful since it generally includes issues of difference in graduate education in its research and writing (e.g. Arnot & Weiler, 1993; Desjardins, 1989; Kelly & Slaughter, 1991; Luke & Gore, 1992; Minnich, O'Barr & Rosenfeld, 1988). Studies of university faculty, especially female faculty, also provide a context for looking at the experiences of graduate students (e.g. Acker & Piper, 1984; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bagilhole, 1994; Davies, Lubelska & Quinn, 1994; Lie, Malik & Harris, 1994; Welch, 1990). Another relevant area of research is that which looks at experiences of minority students in elementary and secondary education (e.g. Dei et al., 1997; Delpit, 1993; Mirza, 1992; Nieto, 1992, 1993; Raissiguier, 1993).
Overview

Studies from Britain, the United States and Canada inform us about relationships of graduate students with faculty (Acker, Hill & Black 1994; Acker, Transken, Hill & Black 1994; Friedman 1987) as well as other facets of their experiences (Baird 1990). Baird’s (1990) review of research done in the United States on graduate students over the last several decades covers a range of topics, including the decision to go to graduate school, the graduate socialization process, and relationships with supervisors. Baird suggests that research on graduate students has shifted in recent years to look at specific groups of students, as opposed to seeing all students as a homogenous group. In particular, he notes that women graduate students’ experiences have been the focus of several studies.

Feminist and postmodern approaches, which share a concern for the inclusion of different voices in academic scholarship, have resulted in literature which begins to address the concerns of minority students by investigating their experiences as distinct from other students (Bronstein, Rothblum & Solomon 1993; Hurtado 1994; Mutchnick & Anderson 1991; Nettles 1990; Singh 1990; and Turner & Thompson 1993). Edited collections such as those by Davies, Lubelska and Quinn (1994); Fay and Tokarcey (1993); Gaskell and McLaren (1991); Pearson, Shavlik and Touchton (1989); and Welch (1992) include literature by or about minority graduate faculty and students. In the United States, several studies have been done which look specifically at the experiences of Hispanic women in graduate education (Leal & Menjivar 1992; McKenna and Ortiz 1988; Melendez & Petrovich 1989; Nieves Squires 1992). Black
female graduate students and academics have also been the focus of a number of research projects (Bhopal 1994; Carty 1991; Guy-Sheftall & Bell-Scott 1989; James and Farmer 1993).

Many studies of post secondary students either focus on undergraduate students or mix undergraduate and graduate students together indiscriminately. Studies specifically about graduate students are relatively rare. Even less consideration is given to students who fall outside the mainstream, namely those whose race, culture, ethnicity or class define them as “different.” In this discussion research that suggests that its participants’ experiences differed somehow from the majority is examined. An author’s self definition of being different was another factor in my decision to review the work. I will look mainly at the experiences of women students, due, firstly, to my particular interest in this group and secondly, to the availability of literature. Increasingly, feminism has become concerned with recognizing a variety of experiences and so feminist literature includes much writing on the topic of difference and different experiences, some of which will be reviewed in this chapter.

It should be noted that the majority of the literature in this review originates from Canada, the United States and Britain. As countries which have a history and current culture of immigration they share certain characteristics and concerns. All three countries have a multicultural and multilingual population and current research is striving to address this social reality. Yet, of course, several differences among the populations do exist. The groups which are considered minorities vary from country to
country although their concerns are often similar. In Canada, it is ethnic and visible minorities, both those from an immigrant background and a native Canadian one, that are often considered in multicultural research. This pattern is similar in the U.S., although there the literature tends to focus on Hispanics and Blacks. In England, Blacks, especially those with a West Indian heritage, and persons from a South Asian culture are most commonly mentioned as minority groups. Only a few edited collections have taken an international view of issues concerning higher education and minorities (eg. Kelly & Slaughter, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). Although the salient groups are not necessarily the same, the underlying issues remain constant. Persons in these groups feel they are considered to be different and this perception has implications for them as graduate students. Class issues are also pertinent as all three countries are based on a capitalist system. Class and race and ethnicity interact in complex ways.

**Considering Graduate Students**

Several authors remark on and speculate about the impact of the neglect in the literature of the graduate student experience and particularly the minority student experience. For example, Nettles suggests that:

> Beyond the data on enrollment and graduation rates, the data and information available for describing the backgrounds, experiences and performance of graduate students from various ethnic groups are very limited. As a result, we not only know very little about the similarities and differences among black, Hispanic, and white doctoral students, but we also have little understanding about how differences affect experience and performance while students are enrolled in their doctoral programs. (Nettles 1990: 495)

One area that Nettles suggests needs more study is “how their backgrounds prior to entering graduate school are related to their graduate school experiences and
performance" are required. He conducted a study of minority and white doctoral students at four major universities in the United States. He found minority students had poorer relationships with faculty and mentors and less likelihood of receiving assistantships. These disparities, he concluded, affected minority students' well-being in graduate school as well as their completion rates. He defines the minorities in his sample as Black and Hispanic students, and he also found some differences among them based on socioeconomic class. This type of breakdown based on varied backgrounds and economic classes is important so as to acknowledge that there are a variety of minority experiences.

Louis and Turner recommended qualitative research as an effective means to explore the experiences of graduate students in general. They note: "[although] there is a rich tradition of research on the effects of the college experience on the undergraduate student (...), the experience of graduate students in higher education has been largely ignored" (Louis & Turner 1991: 51). In beginning with a theoretical framework which includes consideration of personal characteristics such as gender and race of the students, they attempted to bring the issue of difference into the discussion of graduate student experience. Rather than study the experiences of all graduate students as a homogenous group they suggest considering what factors may influence a student's experiences. In their study they considered difference represented by race and gender and built that into the theoretical framework in much the same way as I have done with isolating Italian Canadian women as a focus of study. In this way, our research not only studies graduate school experiences but does so in a manner which recognizes difference.
In the British context, Singh reiterates the above sentiments in reference to literature on ethnic minorities and higher education.

The experience of ethnic minority children in British schools is well documented and has been the subject of many research reports at local and national level. However, very little is known about their experience in institutions of higher education, either in the public or independent private sectors. (Singh 1990: 344)

Singh, calls too, for research on minority students' experiences in higher education. His review of available literature is an attempt to raise questions on this issue and bring about more research on the topic. The situation in Canada is very similar. Although studies of multicultural education in the elementary and secondary years are prevalent, less emphasis has been placed on these same concerns in higher education and in graduate education in particular. This current study is one attempt to fill this gap in the research.

In a review of the literature on American graduate students, Friedman notes that some topics have been relatively well researched. Student “socialization,” she claims, is one such topic. Friedman found that:

The research in this area touches on such themes as how entrants learn to become graduate students...; the stresses and strains of the graduate years...; how neophytes come to view themselves as professionals...; how faculty see their roles vis-a-vis students...; and how mentors can shape careers in very concrete ways... (Friedman 1987: 6)

Friedman provides several references for each of these topic areas. However, she continues by noting that significantly less attention has been given to what happens during the period of time when a doctoral student is preparing his/her thesis (Friedman...
In her opinion, this stage of the doctoral program requires more consideration. She argues that since statistics indicate that many students drop out of their graduate programme while preparing their dissertation, this may be the most difficult stage for them.

In his consideration of graduate school students' development, Baird (1990) also provides an overview of literature on the topic. He makes use of American literature and distinguishes between professional and graduate programs. Baird reviews a study by Cronbach (1949), which among other things found that successful graduate students had varied approaches to their academic program. That is, he found no one particular strategy which all graduate students used in approaching their work, their relationships with faculty or problem solving. His review of several other studies leads Baird to conclude that, “with its emphasis on academic performance, scholarship and independence, the graduate school is a difficult place for a student who is oriented to interpersonal relations” (Baird 1990: 373). In relation to the "role of graduate students", Baird suggests also that "the lack of clarity in the role of a graduate student seems to create difficulties" (Baird 1990: 373).

Baird goes on to discuss research on the student-supervisor relationship. Several studies are used by Baird to suggest that this relationship is often characterised by coldness and distance on the side of faculty. In a study of graduate students and supervisors conducted in Britain, Acker, Hill and Black (1994) found that students in education and psychology departments vary in what they expect from and how they
conducted themselves in the supervisory relationship with faculty. The investigators
discerned "five student styles," each suggesting different needs and concerns. The five
"ways to be a student" they discovered are: "the rugged individualist," "the academic,"
"the supported," "the taking charge" and "the buffeted about" (Acker et al. 1994: 235).
They found some variation across the two disciplines included in their study (education
and psychology) which may be related to age since students in the education department
tended to be older than those in the psychology department. Yet "there were not
obvious gender or individual department differences" (Acker et al. 1994: 236).
Research on the relationship between student and supervisor should consider both
participants to provide a clearer picture. Students will have different approaches to their
studies and different needs in the same way that supervisors will have different styles of
carrying out their roles.

In tracing the progress of research on graduate students, Baird (1990) notes that
since the early 1980s researchers have become more concerned with studying particular
such groups of students. In most of his review, though, he considered research which
had been done, over twenty years prior to his study. Several of these studies will be
reviewed below. Research on graduate students now includes studies of various types of
students and perhaps this tendency towards greater inclusion reflects a change in
composition of the student body. Regardless of the reason, studies of minority students
are important not simply because their experiences may differ from those of other
students, but also as a means to uncover whether or where this is indeed the case.
Collections such as those edited by Fay and Tokarczyk (1993), James and Farmer (1993), McKenna and Ortiz (1988) and Pearson, Shavlik and Touchton (1989) take up the call for research on minority students in graduate education. These collections include chapters on the experiences of women students who are outside the mainstream culture either due to race, ethnicity or class. For the most part, literature on difference in graduate education focuses on visible minority individuals. For this reason the research on working class experiences is very useful to our understanding of the experiences of those who are less obviously identifiable as different. The experiences of working class students, as outlined in these collections, relate to this study as several of the participants came from working class backgrounds and they are all the first generation in their families to attend university.

Defining Difference in Educational Research

In order to conceptualize the experiences of minority graduate students, we must first understand how literature on students and minorities defines and includes concerns regarding difference. In the following section I will outline some literature which discusses issues of difference in terms of education. How to incorporate difference into the research framework is also a strong consideration in this section. In Chapter One, I discussed my theoretical framework, which begins with the idea that some students confront a border surrounded by barriers when attempting to become graduate students. In suggesting that barriers exist for those students who fall outside of the mainstream, my research study addresses and incorporates difference as an integral part of the experiences of Italian Canadian women in graduate education. Throughout the
subsequent analysis of research data, difference will be attended to carefully in how the
women describe their experiences. In this present discussion those definitions of
difference in the literature which are based on class membership, race, and ethnicity
will be given attention. In understanding how others have defined difference and
studied, it my own current research will be informed and enriched.

Studies of education which consider ethnicity and race contribute greatly to the
definitions of difference available in the literature (eg. Li, 1988; McCarthy & Crichlow,
1993; Ng, 1981). In their discussion of Hispanic women in academia, for example, Leal
and Menjivar define “ethnic identity” as broadly based on three “aspects”:
“endogenous,” “exogenous” and “reality” (Leal & Menjivar 1992: 94). The first aspect
relates to “how individual members of the sociological group perceive themselves” and
the second is “how members of the group perceive themselves as distinguished from
others” (Leal & Menjivar 1992: 94). The “reality aspect” refers to the existence of a
shared history, culture and language (Leal & Menjivar 1992: 94). Leal and Menjivar
also caution against ignoring the subgroups among ethnic and racial groups. For
example, in their study of mentoring and networking they looked at two groups of
academic Hispanic women: “Latina” women who are those who are “born and/or raised
in the United States” and “Latin American women” who were those “born and raised in
a Central and South American country” (Leal & Menjivar 1992: 93–94). They found
that “there is reason to believe that Latina women and Latin American women in higher
education do not spontaneously network or mentor each other” (Leal & Menjivar 1992:
102). Despite others’ perceptions of the group as monolithic, Hispanic women do not
see themselves as such. Leal and Menjivar’s caution regarding overlooking subgroups within ethnic and cultural groups is an important one for any research study.

Literature on educational experiences shows that membership in the working class can also lead individuals to feel different within a system that they perceive as designed for and by a middle class existence. Both Payne (1980) and the authors in the collection edited by Fay and Tokarczyk (1993) write about their experiences of originating from a working class background and pursuing an education. Payne’s work is based on her experiences of being a working class person in England in the 1960s attending a grammar school. Within the British system of that era, this type of secondary school was more academic and potentially led to university as opposed to a trade. She discusses how often the values she learned to adopt at school were different to those to which she was exposed at home. Language was also an area in which she found the home/school dichotomy particularly distinct. Over time this disparity led her to feel different from others both at home and at school (Payne 1980).

Fay and Tokarczyk (1993) bring together a collection of essays by American academic women from working class backgrounds. Their backgrounds influenced how they experienced academia and how others perceived them. It should be noted that for some of the authors, race and ethnicity may have added to their feelings of difference. In some cases this factor was discussed while in others it was not. One of the contributors to the collection, O’Dair (1993), criticizes what she perceives to be a lack of class analysis in academic literature regarding higher education unless class is
subsumed under issues of gender and race. She suggests that this is the case because it is difficult to judge an individual’s class background based on appearance or on information provided on an application form. It is difficult, in her opinion, to decide how to apply equal opportunity initiatives to working class individuals. Her contention is that class membership is often difficult to ascertain particularly once a person has achieved a higher level of education.

Class, in O’Dair’s opinion, should be studied and explored independently of race and gender. Others do not necessarily share O’Dair’s view and subsequent discussion will show that in fact her suggestion may be very difficult to carry out, as she herself acknowledges. By bringing forth issues of difference the collection serves a very real purpose and I believe that O’Dair’s concerns that class is not examined closely enough as it relates to higher education are important and class issues should not be overlooked. Often students from a minority racial or ethnic group, for example, are compared to their white or “mainstream” counterparts, with little consideration given to this latter group’s class composition. Wotherspoon (1999), reflecting on the Canadian context, also notes that “a surprisingly small body of systematic data exists to document those relations with respect to Canadian education” (Wotherspoon 1999: 179). His concern is with the lack of consistent modes of defining and measuring class. He notes two approaches used to define class in current research. The first “emphasize[s] social stratification, relying on such indicators as income, occupation, parent education, and other variables that can be empirically measured and compared”; while the second approach “emphasize[s] class as a relational concept that requires much more intensive
scrutiny of what people do and how they do it in relation to other people, productive property, and labour processes" (Wotherspoon 1999: 179). Both O'Dair and Wotherspoon demonstrate that studying class differences in educational experiences is challenging. In my opinion, class must be taken in consideration when looking at students' experiences, and yet as noted above it is often difficult to view in isolation from other factors. For example, in this study it is difficult to tease out the influences of class from those of ethnicity and immigrant background.

Feminist research has become concerned with how to include issues of difference beyond gender. Acker, for example, in her review of feminist research on academic women in Britain up to the early 1990s, found the area of race and ethnicity underrepresented (Acker 1993). She suggests that:

There is a near-silence about 'race' and ethnicity in terms of impact on British academic women. (...) there are only a few references to black women students in higher education (...) and an almost total absence of information about the ethnic composition of the academic profession.

(Acker 1993: 158)

She goes on to note that in North America, feminist work on women academics has taken up the issue of diversity more so than in Britain. We still find examples of North American feminist research which give little consideration to diversity among women, but it is true that we can also find current work which attempts to include a variety of voices. In Gascell and McLaren's second edition of *Women and Education* they have included work by minority women writing about their experiences in academia. They contend that:

An understanding of the diversity of the female experience means deconstructing the unified category of female. It means listening to the
voices of Native women, girls, older women (not just "thirty-something" women), disabled women, immigrant women, poor women, lesbians... It means valuing difference based on structured divisions in society, placing difference rather than commonality at the centre of feminism and rethinking the whole based on those differences. (Gaskell & McLaren 1991: 10)

According to Gaskell and McLaren, feminist research should define difference broadly and attempt to incorporate it into its framework.

Several authors have also contemplated the question of how to include issues of difference in research in the most effective manner. Some have also considered how to do so in a manner which would be "meaningful" for other individuals who share their background. hooks for example maintains that:

If we are to reach our people and all people, if we are to remain connected (especially those of us whose familial backgrounds are poor and working class) we must understand that the telling of one's personal story provides a meaningful example, a way for folks to identify and connect. (hooks 1993: 103)

She suggests beginning with our personal story and moving on to apply a theoretical and critical analysis. Applying a theoretical framework to this type of analysis can be a challenge. In their consideration of Hispanic women in academia, McKenna and Ortiz decry the lack of "an appropriate conceptual model for research" (McKenna & Ortiz 1988: 15) on minority academic women. In the previous chapter I outlined a theoretical framework which relies on existing literature to shape my research. By considering that minority students will have barriers to overcome in crossing the academic border and reviewing some explanations of how the border can be crossed, I open the door for my research which will explore some of the barriers that exist for Italian Canadian. As well I will focus on strategies the women use for surviving graduate education.
Collections which incorporate diverse viewpoints are one viable option for recognizing difference. For example, McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) bring together work by and about groups who have traditionally been "silenced" within academic literature. This compilation provides the reader with a variety of vantage points from which to think about academia and also allows those defined as different to relate their experiences to others. James and Shadd (1994) edited a similar text in Canada. Contributors to this collection include immigrant and native born Canadians from a variety of racial, ethnic and religious groups. Although their chapters are not specifically based on academic experience several contributors do discuss their minority status as it pertained to their educational experiences. Both of these collections are good examples of employing a wide definition of difference.

We have seen that there are various ways in which difference can be incorporated into academic literature. Current definitions of difference encompass issues of race, culture, ethnicity and class as well as gender. Within each of the categories based on these concepts we must also be aware of the existence of different groups, for example, immigrant versus native born persons. In the following section I will examine how the various approaches to difference are applied to literature on minority graduate students.


Experiencing Difference

The preceding section showed that there are many ways in which the literature defines difference. Similarly, there are as many ways in which students experience this difference. Studies of minority graduate students suggest that their difference, regardless of its basis, plays a significant role in their academic experience. As I suggest in Chapter One, the border they must cross to enter graduate school will look different for students who are different—in this case daughters of Italian immigrants. The studies discussed in this section have brought the issues to the fore and have made difference more visible in an attempt to understand how it influences educational experience.

Schooling is more than learning certain skills and acquiring information. In fact, some would go so far as to claim that ‘schooling is more socialization than education’ (Madrid 1992: 7). What happens when the socialization we receive outside of school and that which we receive at school differs and in some cases conflicts? For many minority students in North America and in Britain the culture of the school varies from that of their home. The studies reviewed in this section take up some of the issues discussed in Chapter One around barriers to higher education for minority students. For example, they consider around cultural capital and culturally specific behaviours.

In his autobiography, Richard Rodriguez, the son of Mexican immigrants to the U.S., speaks extensively of this dichotomy (Rodriguez 1983). In particular, Rodriguez recalls how the different language of the home and that of school represented the
separateness of the two spheres for him. He claims that he suffered the "loss" of his first language and of his parents' culture in order to become a "scholarship" student. In later years, he considers the implications of this loss against the gains he has made by becoming educated.

Delpit refers to the "culture of power" (Delpit 1993: 121) in her discussion of education and minority students. Her views are similar to those espoused by Bourdieu around cultural capital. She claims that "issues of power are enacted in classrooms" and that there are specific "rules" to this "culture" which are best understood if they are "explicitly" explained to those who currently are not members of a powerful group, while those who are part of this group are often least aware of their power (Delpit 1993: 122). She gives examples of minority graduate students who claim that it is often difficult to speak and be understood about issues such as racism. Being different in these cases reflects itself in subtle but meaningful difficulties in communication with authority figures. Other studies of minority students have found that communication can be one area where out of school socialisation has not prepared graduate students "appropriately" for graduate work (eg. Bronstein, Rothblum & Solomon, 1993; Melendez & Petrovich, 1989).

In their study of female doctoral students, Turner and Thompson (1993) provide another example of how educational socialisation can be experienced differently by minority and majority students. They interviewed thirty-seven minority women doctoral students and twenty-five majority women doctoral students. They used self-
identification to distinguish between minority and majority women. That is, the women were "invited" to self-identify as either black, Native American, Asian American and Hispanic. In their analysis they did break down the minority group into these categories for consideration but rather looked at the minority and majority groups as two units of analysis. Further examination of how the women self-classified may have indicated that the women in fact came from a variety of diverse backgrounds not well captured in these dichotomous categories and that experiences may have varied within the groups. Class background was also not considered.

Turner and Thompson studied "four indices of social opportunity" in the experiences of women they interviewed (Turner & Thompson 1993: 357). The four included, "recruitment of students by department," "participation in apprenticeship and mentoring experiences," "perception of the departmental environment as competitive or cooperative and whether they found support networks in the department" and "experience of discrimination" (Turner & Thompson 1993: 357-358). They found that minority students had fewer opportunities in terms of mentoring and professional development and were less likely to have a support network. Although a few minority students mentioned having been recruited by their departments, "the social environment for majority women was generally much richer" (Turner & Thompson 1993: 358) as related to the four indices mentioned above.

Socialisation in academic settings, these studies suggest, does not provide minority students with the same opportunities to develop their academic and
professional skills as it does for other students. Again further investigation may have uncovered differences within the minority and majority groups. The research briefly touches on some of the strategies the women used to overcome some of the barriers imposed by the limits in their socialisation, for example, actively seeking out mentors.

There are a variety of other ways in which difference exercises an influence over the experiences of minority students. For example, a large scale study conducted in the U.S. regarding the “chilly climate” for women in academics found specific issues for minority women.

The twin problems of “underattention” and “overattention” experienced by women students generally are often exacerbated in the case of minority women. While on the one hand, minority women have reported being studiously ignored, even in small seminars, on the other hand, they have been singled out, not as individuals, but as representatives of their particular ethnic group - as when a minority woman is called upon to give the “black woman’s view” of an issue or problem rather than her own view. (Hall & Sandler 1982: 12)

The study also found that the minority students had to deal with stereotyping about their capabilities and behaviours. The presence of a “chilly climate” for female minority students was also found by Guy-Sheftall and Bell-Scott (1989) in their study of Black female graduate students. They found that Black women attending predominantly white universities experienced a “chilly climate” due, in part, to the lack of Black female role models among faculty members (Guy-Sheftall & Bell-Scott 1989: 52). The authors also mention the classroom “environment” as a source of this “chilliness” although they do not give details beyond their personal experiences (Guy-Sheftall & Bell-Scott 1989: 52-53). They do not pursue the notion of chilly climate to include other aspects of student life. The problem of being seen as a representative for all of one’s cultural or racial
group was noted by Ferron who tells of her discomfort in having to explain “Indian-
ness” to other graduate students (Ferron 1989).

The studies reviewed show that the notion of “chilly climate” has been applied,
albeit with a limited scope, to the experiences of minority graduate students, particularly
women. Further consideration and definition of this issue is required in order to
understand fully how it impacts on minority women.

Assimilation and Identity

For minority students, and presumably their peers, the decision to assimilate to
the school culture is driven by the desire to succeed in the public sphere of education
and subsequently that of employment, as well as by a general desire to be accepted by
others. In an earlier national study undertaken in the United States, Baird discovered:

That the three most important reasons for pursuing advanced study were
interest in the field (82 percent said it was important), the fact that their
desired field required an advanced degree (78 percent), and improving
the chances of receiving a good salary, promotions, etc. (61 percent).
(Baird 1990: 362)

Baird goes on to note that more detailed studies he has reviewed suggest the pursuit of
knowledge is also an important reason why students choose to pursue a graduate
education (Baird 1990: 362). We can assume, based on Baird’s discussion, that students
have a variety of practical and personal reasons for pursuing a graduate education and
for being successful. Minority students will also want to do well in graduate school for
some similar reasons. In their case, however, they confront certain barriers to this
success. One manner in which they may chose to surmount some of these barriers is by
assimilating to the mainstream culture of the education system. As mentioned in
Chapter One, assimilation involves adopting the behaviours and attitudes of the
dominant group despite how they may differ from those valued in your own minority
culture.

Assimilation to a mainstream mode of behaviour and conduct, then, can be part
of a minority student's attempt to succeed. In some cases, the wholesale acceptance of
"cultural deficit models," which hold that "culture, family background, and parental
attitudes are the culprits responsible for the group's social, educational and occupational
immobility" (Del Castillo & Torres 1988: 45) can influence a student's inclination
towards assimilation. Under this model the only way for a minority student to succeed
is to assimilate completely to the dominant culture. Students may or may not be aware
of how their background is being sacrificed for their academic success. But if academic
success is their goal, accomplishments towards this goal may override, in the short term,
consideration of how assimilation is changing their behaviour patterns.

Feelings of "cultural ambivalence" or "both pride and shame" in one's culture
(Nieto 1994: 402) often arise within the minority student and can lead to assimilation.
In her research with high school students who belonged to a minority group, Nieto
found that, "Although almost all of them were quite clear that their culture was
important to them, they were also confronted with debilitating messages about it from
society in general" (Nieto 1994: 402). Nieto's findings are very useful to our
understanding of assimilation. The same phenomenon was discovered by Mutchnick
and Anderson (1991) in their study of graduate students. They note that one of the more difficult dilemmas for minority graduate students concerns the ambivalence between maintaining one's cultural integrity and progressing academically within a program or department that does not acknowledge the perspectives that culturally and racially different students can bring to that program (Miitchnick & Anderson 1991: 52). This lack of recognition is a significant "dilemma" for minority students and one that inadvertently affects their educational experience. If we consider the strong pull of academic success for some students it is not difficult to envision how assimilation may be a seemingly inevitable choice. They want to succeed, they want to cross the border and assimilation appears as a solution to overcoming some barriers. In speaking of Black students in particular Carty expresses a similar view about academia not "recognizing" the contribution of this group in its "discourse" (Carty 1991: 17).

For some minority graduate students the experience of assimilation is one of "first the desire to be like others and then the realization that it can never be complete" (Torgovnick 1994: ix). Torgovnick, the daughter of working class Italian immigrant parents, notes that despite her doctoral degree and academic position she has never quite been able to assimilate completely to what she perceives as the dominant culture. One reason for this inability to assimilate may be that in an attempt to assimilate there is always the danger of 'losing' something, as Rodriguez shows in his autobiographical account of this process (Rodriguez 1983). As an immigrant from Egypt who has been in Canada for nearly thirty years, Khayatt, in speaking of her experiences as an academic, notes:
I have been assimilated well. I do not stand out. (...) I have learned to use cultural referents to project the messages I want to convey. Consequently, I become invisible because I am recognizable. What is concealed is my history; what is hidden is my Egyptian-ness. (...) Consequently, although I can be heard, a part of me is silenced. (Khayatt 1994: 86-87)

Khayatt goes on to acknowledge that her “assimilation” has garnered her a position of relative privilege which would not have otherwise been readily hers. The “price” for this position has been a denial or “hiding” of her history and culture. As I discussed in Chapter One, this practice of disguising oneself as a member of the mainstream is one that LePage-Lees suggests leads to minority students feeling they are the only ones who are “different.” I may find that this is one technique which may be used by the Italian Canadian women to become successful graduate students.

Many of the authors in the collection edited by Fay and Tokarczyk (1993) speak of assimilating to a middle class culture by means of higher education. Their working class backgrounds defined them as different and so the stage was set for their assimilation. Sowinksa discusses how she attempted through a variety of behaviours and actions to “pass for middle class” throughout her life and particularly as a graduate student. She says that, “Nowhere did I feel a greater need for disguise than inside academic institutions” (Sowinksa 1993: 151). The feeling of needing to “hide” one’s background and culture appears to be prevalent among minority students as they pursue a graduate education.

Success in the academic setting is obviously a goal for those students engaged in graduate studies. The notion of who is defining or granting this success has been
considered briefly in literature on empowerment (see Acker et al., 1994). More study is needed which looks at power relations among graduate students and faculty and whether minority status plays any role in these relations. Assimilation is often part of minority students’ strategy for success. Langston, a working class woman, has observed through her experiences both as a graduate student and now as a faculty member certain differences between the graduate experience for working class and middle class students.

The culture of most working-class kids places them at a disadvantage in an educational setting. Most privileges are the result of class advantage and in order to gain these privileges, the working-class students must be willing to become middle-class impersonators. They have to learn not just the course content, but a new culture as well. Students from middle-class backgrounds have a jump on them. (Langston 1993: 69)

Langston goes on to discuss her own fear of losing her working class identity. This fear arose along with her desire to become an educated middle class person.

Some of the literature on and by minority graduate students seems to indicate that assimilation, as I defined it in Chapter One, is a prerequisite for success in academia for those defined as different. Academia can be an intimidating and daunting institution for all students. Literature on women in academia suggests it can be an unwelcoming place for women. At the same time, literature written by academics from a minority culture (Arias 1993; Fay 1993; Gardner 1993; hooks 1993; Khayatt 1994; and Rodríguez 1983) includes strong challenges to the view of assimilation as a solely positive and rewarding phenomenon. They call for a more inclusive environment. Work by these individuals leads us to wonder how in fact assimilation takes place. Have minority academics found a manner in which to be successful in academia while
maintaining the appearance of complete assimilation? One real possibility is that having undergone a period where assimilation appeared the only route open to them, they are now in a position to question the path they have taken to achieve academic success. This issue will be further explored as it pertains to the subjects of this study. How have they managed to “survive” graduate school? Is it through being assimilated or through some other means.

Some of the literature regarding graduate students speaks of “transformation” which is similar to what others refer to as assimilation. Aisenberg and Harrington, for instance, devote a section of their discussion of academic women to the notion of transformation. They also understand the adoption of new behaviours and attitudes as part of the graduate experience (Aisenberg & Harrington 1988: 26-27). Although they acknowledge the difficulties which can arise in adopting a new identity, they do not relate these difficulties specifically to class or race but to all women. Transformation is also the term used by Fay in her discussion of graduate school as “The Factory” which will “produce” academics (Fay 1993: 281). Here again we see academia represented as disregarding students’ individual backgrounds and instead attempting to mould them all in a similar and acceptable fashion. Studies which look at issues of assimilation or transformation are useful to our understanding of how minority students experience the graduate process. Again we may note that many of these studies are written by those who are supposed to have been fully “transformed” or “assimilated.” The very fact that they are writing on these issues demonstrates that they have not been fully “transformed” or “assimilated.” Perhaps they have become aware of or critical of the
circumstances which have lead to their current positions. It is difficult to judge the relative position of these individuals in academia. On the one hand their work is being published, but they may argue that it is being marginalized in overall academic discourse.

Several authors have noted how their own identity came under close examination during the process of becoming “educated.” In these cases, identity seems to hinge on class, cultural and ethnic background. Langston notes that during her years as a graduate student, “Something about obtaining that piece of paper and having an official job title was frightening because they seemed to have the ability to change my identity” (Langston 1993: 69). Other working class academics in the same collection share Langston’s sentiment. They too felt ambivalent about crossing certain milestones in their academic careers in light of what meaning this might have for their working class identity. Joining the ranks of academia symbolized for these women a change in class affiliation. This shift was not as unproblematic as they may have believed it to be as they strove to reach their goal.

It would be difficult to conceptualize the issues around identity and assimilation without consideration of family background. Essentially, all discussion of minority students’ experiences is based on a particular understanding of their family background. The definition of their “difference” is based on the family from which they came. Studies of minority students often turn to family characteristics to define the students and to discuss their difference. But in literature written by those who have themselves
been minority students, experiences with their families often become more central. Hooks, for instance, speaks about how her parents had mixed feelings towards her receiving a higher education. They were pleased that their child was finding success and yet they were concerned about the effect it may have on her and her relationship with her family (hooks 1988: 74-75). Her parents’ concerns would appear valid in light of the literature on assimilation and transformation previously discussed.

In the research literature on minority students, it is often noted that minority graduate students do not receive support and understanding from their families in regards to their educational goals. One study of minority doctoral students found that, “Most believed that while their families did not oppose their decisions to pursue a doctorate, the families were perplexed and ‘just didn’t understand’” (Louis & Turner 1991: 60). As a doctoral candidate, Valle (1994), an Italian Canadian woman, says:

It seems that few of my accomplishments in life are worthy of discussion around the kitchen table. According to my culture I have not yet proven myself as a ‘real’ woman, whose success is measured not in academic terms, but in how well I tend to my beautifully furnished home and well adorned children. I have not yet been given the seal of approval by the culture that holds me in captivity. (Valle 1994: 49)

Further investigation of family relationships during and upon completion of a graduate education is carried out in this study. By using the Italian Canadian women’s experiences as a starting point, the discussion on assimilation ties into many other important areas. In examining their experiences, using their own words, I detail their participation in graduate school and understand if assimilation is truly the main strategy they use to be successful and whether complete assimilation is likely to be an outcome of their studies.
Conclusion

This discussion has shown how relatively recent research has taken up the concerns of minority students pursuing a graduate education. Certain groups, for example Hispanics in the United States, are taking serious steps to insert their own experiences into the dialogue on higher education. Feminist, postmodernist and cultural studies on higher education have begun to include issues of diversity and difference. These frameworks attempt to incorporate a variety of viewpoints and experiences within their discourses. Writers using these perspectives strive to make research on higher education more inclusive and reflective of the experiences of all those involved. Our understanding of difference and how it is experienced has been expanded by the literature, particularly that written by minorities themselves. In exploring this difference we make the border visible. We begin to demonstrate that a border exists for some students surrounded by barriers which work to keep students who are different out of graduate education. These barriers are a reflection of the students minority and underprivileged position in society. The barriers are there for those who do not approach the border with the appropriate capital but with capital which is different due to race, class, gender or ethnicity. The literature reviewed in this chapter discusses the existence of this difference by documenting the various experiences of students which differ according to their background. My research will add to this body of work by eliciting the experiences of one particular group of minority women.
Several important topics have been identified as significant to minority graduate students’ experiences, such as assimilation, identity and family background. There are suggestions in the literature of a paradox concerning those minority students who are pursuing a graduate education. These students have been “successful,” thus far, in the educational system. In light of the alienation and ruptures which studies show that minority students often undergo in their educational careers, how is that these students have been able and have chosen to remain in the system for an extended period of time? This study will explore the women’s decisions to pursue a graduate education and how they manage to be successful.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

The following chapter is a description of and a reflection on the research process. I will review my choice of methodology and consider how my own subjectivity and role as an "insider" influenced the research process. I will outline specifically the processes of selecting a research topic, enlisting participants, conducting interviews and analysing interview data.

Subjectivity

In his discussion of subjectivity Alan Peshkin makes the claim that "researchers should be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivity" and not simply "acknowledge their subjectivity" (Peshkin 1988: 17). As I discussed in Chapter One, I have a personal attachment to this research, so the issue of subjectivity has been a constant concern of mine. Peshkin claims that we should remain attentive to it and he gives useful suggestions for researchers. He suggests, firstly, that subjectivity is not necessarily a negative factor but, "is the basis of researchers' making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (Peshkin 1988: 18). Secondly, he suggests we "actively seek out [our] subjectivity" in order to assess "its enabling and disabling potential while the data was still coming in, not after the fact" (Peshkin 1988: 18).
I have attempted to consider my subjectivity at every stage of the research process. In this vein, I have consistently kept field notes as well as a personal journal to record my thoughts and preliminary analysis of the data. The following discussion is partially based on these records. I have attempted to “resist notions of myself as an ‘objective’ researcher when what I research is so intricately linked to the life I have lived and continue to live” (Ladson-Billings 1997: 52). Throughout the interviewing, analysis and writing stages, I have tried to be aware and to incorporate in my research some self-reflection where I believe it is appropriate and it adds value to the study. With participants in this study and in writing this dissertation I have identified my personal location from the start.

**Selecting a Topic**

There are a number of reasons why I have chosen to do this research and many reasons why I have chosen qualitative research as my means. This research topic is one which I feel is important for me because of its relevance to my own story. I also believe that this project is significant because it will begin to explore the experiences of a group of people who have been granted little consideration in academic literature. It is daunting, as I am sure other minority students have noted, to find so little documentation of one’s particular social or ethnic group in academic writing. Although Italian Canadian writers, mainly poets and novelists (Mary DiMichele, Nino Ricci, Frank Paci), have begun to surface, they remain largely ignored by mainstream society.

One participant in this research seemed to sum it up well when she said that one thing that she liked about being Italian Canadian was the fact that she was an educated
Italian Canadian and perhaps something she wrote or said in one of her classes might influence or inform someone's thinking about her culture. In many ways my modesty precludes me from voicing such aspirations and yet admittedly it is my hope that in encountering my research others will begin to have a deeper understanding of Italian Canadians. Readers will most likely also find similarities to their own experiences regardless of cultural background. Undoubtedly some individuals will be able to relate more closely than others to the experiences of these women. In effect this research explores the relationship of Italian Canadian women with education, particularly how their experiences with education have been influenced by their personal lives.

Participants

The participants in this study are Italian Canadian women who are currently engaging in graduate studies or who have recently completed a graduate degree. The group of women I interviewed were those who were born in Canada and whose parents had immigrated from Italy in the Post World War Two period or who immigrated to Canada at a very young age with their families during this period. As described in a previous chapter, the majority of Italian Canadians currently residing in Canada are those who immigrated during this period and their direct descendants. As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, those who immigrated during this period shared for the most part distinct characteristics, namely that they originated from Southern Italy where they engaged in farming and they intended to enter Canada in order to work as labourers. These characteristics have had particular impact on their patterns of settlement and employment in Canada (See Iacovetta 1992; Jansen 1988; Richmond 1967). I was interested in this
particular group, then, firstly because of my own background but also because they comprise the majority of Italians living in Canada and because their patterns of immigration were distinct.

Prior to making a firm decision about participants I conducted a pilot study. In the context of this pilot study the opportunity arose for me to speak to a woman who fit all my criteria in regards to education but she herself was an immigrant from Italy to Canada as a school-age child. Her family came to Canada in the mid-1970s as opposed to during the post-war period. For several reasons I chose to interview this woman and consider her experiences. This decision was made because the research at that stage was meant to be a pilot study. As Glesne and Peshkin suggest the pilot study is an important aspect of the research endeavour. They suggest that one use of the pilot study is to "revise your research plans" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992) and in including this woman this was my intent. Depending on the outcome of her interview I could decide whether or not to broaden my scope. I proceeded, heeding the advice of Bogdan and Biklen, who suggest that the researcher should "have preferences, but do not be single-minded in choices. In the beginning you never know what you are going to find. Do not rigidly adhere to prestudy plans" (Bogdan and Biklen 1992: 61).

In interviewing this woman I discovered that her experiences were considerably different than those of the other two participants in the pilot study who had all the characteristics of the group I intended to focus on. Having immigrated to Canada in the 1970s she came from an Italy that was quite altered from the country it was post-World War Two when the immigrant parents of my other participants had left. This person found
Italian Canadians "old-fashioned" and more like her grandparents than like her parents in their values and practices. As I have discussed Italian Canadians clung to the beliefs they brought with them to Canada from Italy as a means to maintain their culture, while this participant suggests that in the decades subsequent to their immigration Italians had become more "modern" in their views. Eventually, I chose not to include this participant or others like her in the study, as it appeared that although she was an Italian Canadian, the timing of immigration had an impact on her experiences. In this study, I want to focus on a particular group in an in-depth manner in order to bring to light their experiences and recognise that they may be unique due to certain factors.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect. (Glesne and Peshkin 1992: 1)

Glesne and Peshkin continue by stating the importance of beginning with one's "personal stories" and this is what I have attempted to do in this research project. The motivation for this research comes from doing graduate studies and observing that there were very few women in my courses who shared my cultural background. Very few of my Italian Canadian female friends and acquaintances were pursuing graduate or professional degrees. I began to consider what propelled those like myself to do so. My interest in how these women reconciled their roles in the community, in their families and in education began to grow as I struggled towards this end myself.

Up until recently I resisted acknowledging that my cultural background made me any different from my peers. I attempted throughout my elementary, high school and
undergraduate years to maintain an image of a white middle class Canadian as I interpreted it from the media and from those around me. The neighbourhood in which I grew up was populated mainly by families belonging to this group so my attempts were shaped by the strong desire to "fit in." In her case studies of youth from a variety of backgrounds, Sonia Nieto also found that students' feelings regarding their culture were not straightforward. She states:

Cultural ambivalence, both pride and shame, were evident in the responses of many of the students. Although almost all of them were quite clear that their culture was important to them, they were also confronted with debilitating messages about it from society in general. How to make sense of these contradictions was a dilemma for many of these young people.

(Nieto 1994: 402)

With this present research my aim is to explore the underlying issues which elicit these feelings and how they contribute to one's educational experiences. My "cultural ambivalence" is played out as I select my Italian background as basis for academic study and yet feel unsure and at times even "ashamed" of my choice of topic. It is difficult, after many years of downplaying my cultural background, to bring it to the fore in this important academic endeavour. As I discussed in Chapter One, my experiences, both personal and academic, have brought me to this decision I still feel the need to justify the study as legitimate. I believe that to deny the sociological curiosity that many of us have about our experiences would be limiting to academic literature.

As Glesne and Peshkin suggest, qualitative research attempts to draw out stories of people's lives and relate them to each other and to the world around them. This is particularly significant in this instance, as I wish to shed light on the experiences of Italian Canadian women in academic settings and to explore how these experiences have been
shaped by their participation in a particular culture. I have chosen qualitative research as the means for this exploration because it allows me to gather a multitude of details regarding these experiences and to include the women's own voices in my discussion. "A qualitative approach," in my research study, "allowed for latent meanings, interpretations, and the dimensions of experience to be explored" (Erwin and Maurutto 1998: 56). I did not set out to examine the women's educational experiences in isolation from other "dimensions" of their lives. Again, Glesne and Peshkin, in reference to qualitative research, discuss the "openness" of this type of inquiry and how "it allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992: 7). My aim to do "justice" to the complexity of these women's lives is strengthened by my own membership in this group.

Qualitative research also allows me to consider my role in the research pursuit, as well as in the analysis. How to conduct myself in this role has been an ongoing concern for me. Due to my close association with my subjects because of the cultural status we share I struggle to include my own experiences in the analysis. To rely on their words to the exclusion of my own seems unfair and unethical. To encourage them to share their experiences for inclusion in this project without also considering my own does not sit well with me. I realise the emotional and intellectual exploration that is necessary to discuss this topic fully and do not wish to ask them to undertake it while I simply record their views.
Narrative inquiry also seems to lend itself to this research project. Inclusion of personal narratives is an important part of this process. During the research I have kept a journal. This journal was an ongoing interview with myself where I probed the same issues about which I ask my participants to reflect. In this manner I felt that I too was becoming a participant in the research and was not simply "taking" from my subjects. This reflection also included consideration of similarities between my experiences and those of my participants. If narrative inquiry is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2) then this study fits with this method of inquiry. In this research I attempt to use narrative and qualitative inquiry to speak about my and other Italian Canadian women's experiences. I tell our stories as they relate to the pursuit of a graduate degree. This type of inquiry appears to be a meaningful manner in which to approach this topic. As Stivers suggests:

The sense of self is an essentially narrative phenomenon: people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it. (Stivers 1993: 412)

Therefore, in using this approach I hope to portray these women's experiences in a manner that they would recognise and appreciate and which is most authentic to their own self-images.

Ethics

As I have stated, I have had some concern about how to deal with the research participants in a mode that did not exploit or take advantage of their contribution. During the interview process I did indeed find that the women found the process often thought
provoking, as well as emotional. My concern was in eliciting certain reactions from the participants and then quickly moving on to a new topic without having honoured their response. As I will discuss in the section regarding interviewing, I proceeded with my plan to relate to the women experiences I had had which mirrored or related to the ones they were sharing with me. I felt that this was particularly relevant since the subject group I had chosen shared many characteristics with myself and to pretend otherwise would have been, in my opinion, unethical.

Confidentiality was of course another area in which I had some concerns. Participants’ names, as well as some other personal details they shared with me, have been changed for the final report. In thinking about the anonymity of the participants I considered any possibilities of how it might be comprised. As I have mentioned, there are not large number of Italian Canadian women in graduate studies. I wanted to ensure that the women were not recognisable by details I provided. I speak about their disciplines in general terms, for example languages or social sciences, and do not mention their particular areas of research. Although I do for the most part give the pseudonym for the participant who has made a particular comment, in a few instances I refer simply to a ‘participant’ who made the comment. I used this approach to avoid the possibility that a participant could be recognised by a reader piecing together their comments to reveal a more comprehensive portrayal of the participant. This extra precaution is most likely not necessary as I have taken care not to reveal too many personal details, but again, given the relative small number of women who fit the characteristics of the sample (Italian Canadian women in graduate school), I wanted to avoid any breaches of confidentiality.
Interestingly, it was at times the participants themselves who announced their participation in my study to others. For example, I was sitting and talking with one participant after our interview and when another woman approached she began to discuss my study and her participation in it. Acker and Feuerverger (1999), recalling similar incidences with their participants, suggest that it can be difficult “maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, in part because the participants themselves do not always observe the boundaries” (Acker and Feuerverger 1999: 6). It is within a participant’s rights, of course, to discuss their participation in a research study with whomever they please. The steps I have taken in the writing of the research results are meant to maintain the promise of confidentiality that I made to participants.

Collecting the Data

In the following section I describe how I went about gathering data from the study participants. Feminist research methods greatly influenced and shaped how I conducted the research. I attempted to adopt many of the suggestions in feminist writings on the topic that would lead to ethical and reliable data collection with female participants.

Designing questions

The questions that were used for these interviews were designed in order to allow for an open-ended discussion with the women regarding their educational experiences. Questions were centred on the different stages of the women’s education from elementary
school onward to graduate studies. At each stage, the participants were questioned about their educational experiences, as well as about their relationships with others during that time. How educational decisions were made was also explored. Some areas for general discussion concerned their views on selected topics pertaining to their cultural and personal lives. Information regarding their age and their current educational pursuits was elicited at the start of the interview. In beginning with these questions, which are for the most part common ones in many people’s lives, I hoped to begin to get to know the women and also to make them feel more comfortable. This approach seemed useful and in many cases the women were ready to proceed and answered these questions with more information than was expected.

It is important to note that although much of the rich data I collected stemmed from the women’s “desire” to tell their stories, the line of questioning was also an important influence. I did not simply ask the women about their graduate education as if it existed in a vacuum. I also asked them about their personal lives as they proceeded through their education. I allowed them, through verbal and non verbal cues, to reflect on a broader picture of their educational lives, one which included personal relationships outside of the educational context. As Munro (1998) discusses in her study of women teachers, it is important that in order to study women’s lives we must include “aspects of their lives that have traditionally been dismissed” (Munro 1998: 5). I believe that by asking the questions I did about the women’s relationships with family I captured in their stories details that could have easily been “dismissed” had I understood their educational decisions and experiences to be isolated elements of their lives.
**Interview Process**

The interviews were all arranged over the telephone with the women for a time and location that was convenient for both researcher and participant. The discussions lasted approximately one hour and were tape recorded and later transcribed. Only one woman left shortly after the interview, as she had a previous engagement. In the other cases, the women stayed behind and talked with me after the interview was complete. I made notes about their comments in my journal but do not intend to use their direct words from these conversations in any written report, although inevitably these discussions may have shaped my thought processes. In one instance a woman did recount something to me which was very powerful in regards to the research and I asked her permission to use this experience and she agreed. In fact, the same woman encouraged me to turn the tape recorder back on after our interview when the conversation turned back to relevant aspects of the research. This indicated to me that she placed a considerable value on my research. In light of the women's responses, I feel that the interview process was a positive experience for them and that they felt that the research was worthwhile.

In many ways it became evident that the participants placed a high value on the research I was conducting. One participant typed out and sent her responses to my questions as we were not able to meet in person immediately, although we did subsequently. In her note Olivia states:

I would like to remind you that it is an honour to participate in this study. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to not only participate but also articulate many contentious issues that have been repressed within me.
This sentiment was repeated in some manner in all the interviews I conducted. The women thanked me for the opportunity to discuss their experiences as daughters of Italian Canadian immigrants. In the process of conducting research I also then validated and recognised the experiences of these women for whom this recognition is not often available. I was also able to validate their experiences by my first hand knowledge of being the child of immigrant parents. In the next section I will explore how my identity influenced the interview process.

**Researcher's Role**

How I took up my role as interviewer was an important consideration of the research. I was concerned about the power relations which can naturally arise when one person as the researcher guides the discussion and then will be the one to take the words and document them. My goal was to avoid the "take the data and run" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992) approach to research. There were several ways in which I attempted to achieve this goal. Firstly, prior to the interview I shared with the women my reasons for wanting to do the research and what I hoped would come from it. Although I did not go into detail regarding my own experiences at the start since I did not want the women to shape their responses to my descriptions, I did indicate to the participants my personal and cultural background. Secondly, during the interview process I did share with the women some of my own experiences with education. This disclosure occurred either when I felt that a woman had shared something very personal with me and needed to be reassured that their feelings were valid or when a woman directly asked me a question. For instance the women might preface their response by saying, "I don't know if you found this but..."
might finish a response adding “it's hard to explain, do you know what I mean?” In these instances I felt obliged to respond to the women's queries.

Several of the women also indicated that answering some of the questions could be emotional and I did not feel it was appropriate to simply sit and listen with no verbal response if only to say “I know what you mean.” One woman said, “I don't know if the other women have found that these things are emotionally draining, [it is] emotionally draining for me to be answering these questions.” In my response I tried to convey that her reaction is perfectly natural and that I appreciated her making this effort to respond to my questions with such depth. She assured me that she feels the questions are important and that she is glad that I am doing such a study. Needless to say I would not have felt comfortable allowing her to continue answering the questions while I remained unresponsive to her honesty.

Oakley’s suggestions were also quite useful in thinking about the interview relationship. She states that:

The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley 1981)

She also suggests that the interviewer should share with the participant relevant aspects of her own life and respond to any direct questions of the interviewee to the best of her ability. In their research, which involved interviewing mothers, Griffith and Smith also discuss how they shared their experiences with their participants. They state that “we have deployed our own experiences as mothers to establish ‘rapport’ by indicating shared...”
experiences and a common knowledge of typical situations, problems, etc." (Griffith and Smith 1987). They too shared membership in a particular group with their participants, in this case motherhood, and found the sharing of experiences useful and appropriate.

Phoenix (1995) also makes the point that often the rapport that is developed with participants in feminist research is not simply an consequence of being a woman interviewing other women but that “shared social class and/or race” are also part of it (Phoenix 1995:50). In my case a mutual ethnic background would have impacted the interview process. By including my own experiences in the interview process and answering the women’s direct questions, I feel that I was both ethical and fair in asking them to respond sincerely to my questions. It was also a manner in which I strove to make the relationship between the participant and myself more equitable.

The manner in which I presented myself as researcher was what Cotterill (1992) refers to as the “friendly stranger.” I was a stranger to the women and although our dealings were very friendly we did not have an intimate relationship. Cotterill suggests, that “the ‘friendly stranger’, unlike a friend, does not exercise social control over respondents because the relationship exist for the purpose of research and is terminated when the interviews are complete” (Cotterill 1992:596). She goes on to argue that “indeed, respondents may feel more comfortable talking to a ‘friendly stranger’ because it allows them to exercise some control over the relationship” (Cotterill 1992: 596). The women probably did feel open discussing with me details of their educational and personal experiences since I was not part of their everyday reality. But of course, the fact that I
shared with the women a very similar background did not go unnoticed, as I already mentioned. In this sense I was a familiar in some way to the women and this may have made the experience of speaking to me more positive.

Another interesting outcome of interviewing women similar to myself was that I, like Cotterill, "would have welcomed the "transition to friendship" with some of my participants (Cotterill 1992: 596). As I have stated, I too was a graduate student at the time of conducting the interviews. I only had a few friends who were pursuing a graduate education and none of them were Italian Canadians. Although obviously friendship was not the goal of the research, I would have welcomed a continued relationship with the participants who shared similar backgrounds and current life situations similar to mine. As in Cotterill's research, these friendships did not materialise. Although I did contact most of the women after the interviews in order to discuss their participating in a focus group and wrote to all of them to thank them and inquire about their post interview thoughts, I received very little feedback and no overtures towards friendship. These results support Cotterill's argument that the participants may feel comfortable 'opening up' to a person with whom they have no ongoing relationship.

My participants spoke of the isolation they often felt as they progressed through their programs. They did not often have the opportunity to discuss their education with anyone outside of the school setting and no one to discuss their personal lives within their graduate programs. This absence left them with little opportunity for meaningful conversations that reflected their daily lives as students or as Italian Canadian women. In a
discussion of their study of the socialisation of minority women graduate students, Louis and Turner (1992) found that while the women reported that their families “just didn’t understand” their decision to attend graduate school, they also reported that “they did not typically have close friends on campus” (Louis and Turner 1992: 61). The research interview with an engaged listener may have been a welcome occurrence. As London explains in his study of first-generation college students:

The interviews addressed issues they found difficult or impossible to discuss with family and friends who they said, could not identify with their new experiences. Nor were these experiences easily discussed with their middle- and upper-class counterparts. Already feeling out of place and unsure of themselves, they did not want to call further attention to themselves as somehow ‘different’. (London 1989: 146)

The women do admit in their interviews that they discuss their education with few people in their lives and their cultural background rarely in their graduate programs. It is possible then that the interview process was one of the few opportunities the women have had to express their experiences.

Another aspect of the relationship which I needed to consider was brought to light by Finch, who also shares the view that women in interviewing each other should “abandon the mystified role of researcher and instead presents herself as an ordinary woman with many of the same concerns as the woman she is interviewing” (Finch as quoted in Riddell 1989). This was indeed the case with the women I interviewed and myself, for I did share “many of the same concerns” with them. Finch goes on, however, to warn that when we establish this type of rapport with the women we are interviewing they may be more likely to share more intimate details of their lives with us than they otherwise normally would. This rapport places the researcher in a position more powerful.
than if she had conducted her interview in a more distant manner. It appears that Finch is speaking particularly about women conducting research with women who are in a lower social position than they are and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation (Finch 1984 cited in Riddell 1989). However, this concern became real for me through my own discussions with the women. I became aware that due to the similarities in our backgrounds the women were sharing aspects of their lives with me about which they, by their own admission, rarely spoke. One women clearly stated "and if you were somebody else maybe I won't be saying these things," a clear indication to me that I had developed rapport with this person and that she was being sincere in her responses. At the same time, I realised the responsibility I had undertaken in collecting these women's accounts with the promise of a project that would reflect their experiences accurately. If they were being as truthful with me as they could, admitting things out loud which perhaps they rarely voiced, I must then strive to be as authentic in the retelling as they have been in the telling.

The flow of the interview was also influenced by the similar backgrounds of the participants and myself. I found that although always willing and agreeable there was a moment in the interview when the participant shifted from pat responses to more detailed and richer explanations. This shift usually occurred after a few questions had been asked and when I asked a question which resonated with their experiences. For example when I asked them about their current roles in their families, after a series of questions about their educational pursuits, the women had a "moment of recognition" in which they realised that I was aware of the important place family held in their lives despite their advanced education. It appeared that in some cases the women were expecting a clear-cut discussion...
about educational choices and experiences from this interview. When I introduced the
topic of family the women realised that they could express themselves more fully and that
the interview would represent a balanced picture of their lives, one which involved a
discussion of both their educational and personal lives. In a sense I gave the women
permission to situate their educational experiences in the context of their actual realities. I
noted that this “moment of recognition” occurred for the women fairly early on in the
interview and allowed for me to collect rich responses to my questions.

Much of the preceding discussion on my role as researcher points to my position as
an insider with this group of participants. Simply put, “Insiders are the members of
specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social status” (Merton
1972:21). I fit this description as an Italian Canadian women pursuing a graduate degree.
I am at a similar life stage with most of the women I interviewed, I grew up in generally
the same geographical area and I share an immigrant background with them. In some
cases we knew some of the same people and had grown up in the same neighbourhood.
Some level of rapport was inevitable. Acker (in press) describes a similar research
situation in which a professor in a pharmacy faculty conducts qualitative interviews with
other faculty in her field but not necessarily in her university. The interviews conducted
by this investigator were different in some ways than those conducted with pharmacy
faculty by co-investigators not in that academic field. “It appeared that the interviewer’s
extensive knowledge of the field and the people in it, plus her own experiences, put her in
a better position to generate trust, sharing, and emotional expression than interviews
conducted by ‘outsiders’” (Acker in press). I believe that my own experiences and
background put me in a similar position to the interviewer discussed by Acker and I had many of the same outcomes.

Listening and Questioning

The questions that were prepared to guide the interviews were, as I have mentioned, open-ended, and I was flexible in the order as well. Glesne and Peshkin caution the researcher with "At no time do you stop listening" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992: 76). Listening to my participants did not present a problem for me perhaps because I was so interested in their responses. I perhaps listened too attentively and my one fault in this area was perhaps losing my direction for the next question. This lapse was often remedied by probing a comment from the response they had just given rather than moving on to a new topic. I often chose this tactic so as not to forget something that appeared important and also so that the respondent could follow through with her thought process, rather than being asked to move on and then return again to the idea. By listening carefully I was able to see patterns arising by the interview with the second participant and this buoyed my confidence in my questioning.

Glesne and Peshkin insist that one must be constantly "analyzing" throughout the research process including during the interview, which I attempted to do. They also discuss being "naive" in the research process. In becoming a "learner" one asks and probes areas which may already appear clear but which may be more opaque than suspected (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). In interviewing these women I did ask questions of them to which, in some cases, I already knew the answer and at times this kind of questioning did
further elicit information which I may have otherwise overlooked. Admittedly, due to my close tie to the research group I may have fallen into the trap of not being "naive" enough on some occasions. It was not necessarily that I knew the women intimately, but at times their responses were very close to my own experiences and I may have assumed I knew what they meant. One woman, for instance, mentioned that her mother advised her on her wedding day not to mention that she was not changing her name. I was able to quickly understand her mother's adverse reaction as her disapproval of her daughter's untraditional decision.

Overall, however, I think I did resist assuming too much and learned more than I suspected with the simple statements "Tell me more" or "What do you mean?" By the same token, any feigned naivety was picked up quickly by participants. When asked if she feels her parents would have treated her differently if she had been a male, Patricia good-naturally says to me:

Oh god yeah, come on you're going to sit there and ask me that question. You're an Italian Canadian please don't make me laugh! (…) I know you have to ask but I'm sorry I have to laugh. Are you kidding of course.

This exchange did not hurt the rapport I had with Patricia as it was light hearted, but it does illustrate one drawback of being a "insider" conducting research. There is a fine line between a "naive" researcher and an insincere one. One must find a balance between asking questions necessary to gather comprehensive data and alienating a research subject with an obvious question.
Journal writing was another method by which I documented information and ideas regarding my research. The journal was not necessarily only a reflection on the activities of research but also a place where I would make notes regarding my approach to the research and how affected my thinking process. Often the entries would include incidents from my personal life which seemed particularly poignant to me and which in some way related to my research although perhaps not directly. As one student of Glesne and Peshkin mentions, often insights regarding the research topic do not arise while in the field or while one is actively considering it (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). Often these thoughts occur when one's mind is wandering while doing something else and it is at these times that having a journal on hand can be useful.

Another manner in which I found the journal useful was that its format, which was completely unstructured and for my own personal reading, allowed me to write freely about aspects of my research which I may have been hesitant to note elsewhere. Areas around my personal feelings about the topic and my participants perhaps would not have been documented had I not created this outlet for myself. Journal writing or "Memo Writing" as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call it, was productive and relevant to the research process for me. In preparing to write about my research I reread most of the entries and was reminded about many details which might otherwise have been lost in the ensuing time.
Prior to beginning the analysis phase of my research I had the opportunity to become intimate with my data. I conducted the interviews, I also transcribed my own interviews, and I kept notes written both immediately following an interview and during the transcription process. In coding I followed the "two different phases" outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Although their discussion is based on fieldnotes it is relevant to coding transcripts. In the first phase or "open coding" I read each transcript through “line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 166) As I read through the transcripts of the interviews and highlighted certain sections of the data with a code word, I made a note of the word on a separate sheet of paper and kept adding to the list with each new finding. I also referred to the list whenever I came across something that looked familiar and coded it with a code word previously used. In this manner I was able to ensure that data which were connected could later be accessed together.

In the second phase, “focused coding” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 166), I re-read the transcripts and began to code eventually creating a code list which was used to code chunks of data in each interview. After the first few readings I began to code things more specifically and in more detail by using code words which reflected this deeper analysis. Finally, themes began to arise and I began to write about them using the women’s words as a starting point. By collecting the themes together I was able to write about the women’s experiences in a manner which provides insight to many important
topics, for example, their early school experiences, their ongoing relationships, their experiences in graduate school and their ethnic identities. The quotes from participants found throughout this dissertation are samples of those which I used in uncovering each theme. They capture the sentiments of participants and illustrate in their own words the findings of this research.

**Conclusion**

Through ongoing reflection on the research process, I gained many valuable insights. Various considerations regarding participant characteristics, ethics and interviewing techniques were addressed during this project. This reflection has enriched the study by making me aware of how my role as a researcher and the research methods used can both influence and enhance results. I believe that this type of reflection can be very useful for the researcher. Furthermore, constant awareness of the research process and how the researcher's role is carried out can lead to a more ethical and thoughtful process. In particular, in conducting qualitative research with a group where one shares a common background or some other connection, consideration of one's role is especially significant. I also believe that a detailed discussion of not only one's methodology, but also some of the topics I reflected on above (researcher's role, selecting questions), provides important insights as to how the findings of the study were derived at.
CHAPTER FIVE
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter provides an introduction to the women who participated in this study. A general description of the women's experiences in childhood and early schooling, as well as of their parents' history, is followed by more in-depth profiles of a few of the participants. Subsequent chapters will build on the information provided here.

The women who participated in this research ranged in age from 26 to 50 years old, although the majority were in their late twenties and early thirties. They were enrolled in a variety of educational programs, including natural and medical science, languages and social sciences. Despite busy schedules and numerous obligations, all the women were eager to participate in this study. The women were mainly single or recently married and only a few had children. Of those women who were not married, most lived at home with their parents. Diane, a woman in her thirties, had recently moved out on her own and spoke about her family's reluctance to accept the move. All worked either part time or full time. Several of the women were engaged in work related to their studies while others worked in retail, banking or office jobs in order to support themselves. Most of the women were currently pursuing a graduate degree and the few who had already completed a graduate degree had done so in the last 5 years. Of those who had previously completed the degree, one was currently teaching elementary school, one was enrolled in medical school and another had recently completed a law degree and was seeking employment. Most of the
women had continued directly from high school to university to graduate education but there are several exceptions.

The women interviewed for this research are all daughters of post-war Southern Italian immigrants to Canada. As we saw in the Chapter Three, the majority of Italians who immigrated to Canada did so during this time and were from the southern regions of Italy. Thus, the experiences of the participants, although not representative, are most likely typical of their cohort. Most of the immigrant parents came to Canada as young or middle aged adults and settled in Southern or Central Ontario. For the men, work experiences included factory work, construction and general labour. For the women, work consisted mainly of household labour and childcare within the home, and factory and domestic work outside the home. Kate’s story of her parents’ immigration is typical of the other participants’ accounts:

My parents came around ’57, ’58, actually my dad came in ’56... two years earlier than my mom, and then my mom came here and they got married here... They knew each other [in Italy], they were dating... And then my dad came here to work and then my mom came two years later.

Like many of the other women’s parents, Kate’s father had a sister who was already in Ontario who sponsored him. Most of the women have at least some extended family in Canada, which is to be expected due to the pattern of what is known as “chain migration”—a practice where immigrants continue to sponsor friends or family, creating a chain effect with one person coming after another to the new country.
Unlike Kate’s parents, who came to Canada as young adults entering the work force directly and ready to marry, Connie’s parents were much younger when they immigrated to Canada:

[My parents immigrated in] roughly 1953, ’54, separately, with their individual families at different times and they met here. My dad was 17 and my mom was 13.

Kate and Connie’s parents’ experiences reflect the two most typical patterns of immigration. The first common pattern is where the male immigrated alone and then within a few years “called for” his future mate to join him. The other common pattern is to have whole families immigrating who were most likely sponsored by close kin. For the most part, this close bond illustrated in sponsorship was maintained in the new country, as participants report continuing close relationships with extended family and “paesani.”

As will be shown in the discussion of participants’ graduate school experiences, the act of immigration, although carried out a generation earlier, continues to influence their lived experiences. The daughters of post-war immigrants felt their parents’ immigrant experience keenly, living on the surface of the participants’ consciousness. From the first day of school, when many of these Canadian born children could not speak English, to years later when they tried to explain the graduate school system to parents who were not familiar with that system, these women were shaped by their parents’ immigrant experience.
Parents' Education and Employment

What were the educational experiences of the participants' parents? For the most part, parents had completed an elementary school education prior to immigration. Some parents had immigrated at a younger age and had attended school in Canada, with a few completing high school. Several parents attended English classes in the evening after arriving in Canada with no English language knowledge whatsoever. As was discussed in Chapter Two, these experiences were characteristic of immigrants of this era. Diane's parents' experience was typical for some of the women whose parents had immigrated at middle age:

They [my parents] were not well educated; I mean my mom had a Grade 3 if that, my father maybe a Grade 5. As a result, they were not skilled and it was hard for them to find [employment]. They had to find a lot of manual work and as a result my father was unemployed for long periods of time in the winter when there's no construction.

Anne's parents who immigrated at a younger age "both completed high school and then my dad went to an apprenticeship programme... to become an auto mechanic." Anne's father is now self-employed and her mother, after spending many years at home raising Anne and her younger brother, works in a support role in education. This experience of having parents who have completed high school was less typical of the women I spoke with than having parents who only had an elementary education.

Obviously, employment was influenced by many factors, such as education and current economic climate. Both factors were most likely to lead to manual or factory work for the immigrants of the post war era. Since they had little education, low level jobs were most readily accessible. Many participants discuss parents moving, over the years,
from one manufacturing job to another, or as Diane mentions above, into seasonal employment. Female immigrants also were employed in factories or in domestic work, both fairly unstable occupations at the time. As time passed, however, several of the women's parents became self-employed. Although their means of employment did not make their families necessarily more stable economically, it allowed the parents a certain degree of autonomy. Approximately the same number of women reported that their mothers were at home tending to the children while the children were young as those who said their mothers went to work outside the home. In the cases where mothers worked outside the home, children were cared for by grandmothers or aunts. Several of the women report a close bond to a grandmother who was the primary caregiver in their younger years.

My grandmother was the principal caregiver when my parents were working. She took care of my brother and I. My father felt it was his duty to take her in because he was the oldest son, and she still does the cooking and cleaning.

Although she speaks warmly of her grandmother there were strong ramifications of having her as a primary caregiver while Beatrice was growing up. As other women mention, Beatrice felt she had a great deal of responsibility for herself and her younger brother, particularly outside the home:

When my mom would go to work and my father, my grandma took care of all of us but my grandma doesn't speak English and so I sort of had to take care of them.

This sense of responsibility persists for her as it does for other women. When parents or grandparents do not speak English daughters are the ones who are expected to act as conduits to the world beyond the home. The more education these women receive, the
more their families rely upon them to navigate a variety of Canadian institutions and systems.

In regards to the current financial situation of the family, none of the women I spoke with indicated that their families were wealthy, although a few were very comfortable economically and would probably be considered upper middle class. Financial security was achieved through working in blue-collar jobs for many years and rigorous saving. For the most part, these jobs were easily obtained during the post World War Two era when parents began their working lives in Canada. Over the years, parents maintained these jobs and often moved into managerial positions or started their own businesses. Several of the women’s parents are currently retired while a few have passed away. Only two parents had moved back to Italy, both fathers where the parents had divorced many years earlier. Again, this pattern is typical of immigration patterns which do not indicate a large number of immigrants returning to Italy after several years in Canada.

**Childhood Neighbourhood**

Most of the women who participated in this study grew up in the greater Toronto area, which is, again the part of Canada where one finds the greatest concentration of Italian Canadians. Women had very different childhoods, depending on whether they grew up in a neighbourhood which was predominantly Italian or in one which was predominantly Anglo-Saxon. Experiences varied from having a father who participated actively in the school parents’ association to having parents who felt too awkward to
attend any educational events. For those women who attended school in a
neighbourhood where there were many other second generation Italian Canadians,
making friends, acclimating to school life and having parents who were involved in
their school were likely consequences. Parents could mingle more easily with other
Italian parents, although interacting with school personnel could still be a challenge, and
children shared similar home lives and could relate to each other’s experiences.

Women who were raised in neighbourhoods where they and their family were
among the only Italian Canadian residents found integrating into school life more
challenging. They speak of the “foreignness” of the school setting, not only in terms of
the language, but also in terms of school procedures. Friends who shared similar home
lives were hard to come by so they avoided inviting peers home. One woman describes
not wanting to have to “explain” her grandmother, her primary caregiver who lived with
the family to schoolmates; other women speak of the boisterousness of their homes
compared to those of school mates and how this led them to avoid having guests.

These types of feelings can be common among children regardless of their
specific ethnic background but they are more likely to occur when parents are different
from the mainstream. Rodriguez describes his feelings of childhood embarrassment
over his immigrant parents:

I am tempted now to say that none of this mattered. In adulthood I am
embarrassed by childhood fears. And, in a way, it didn’t matter very much
that my parents could not speak English with ease. Their linguistic
difficulties had no serious consequences. My mother and father made
themselves understood at the county hospital clinic and at government
offices. And yet, in another way, it mattered very much it was unsettling to
hear my parents struggle with English. Hearing them, I’d grow nervous, my clutching trust in their protection and power weakened.

There were many times like the night at a brightly lit gasoline station (a blaring white memory) when I stood uneasily, hearing my father. He was talking to a teenaged attendant. I do not recall what they were saying, but I cannot forget the sounds my father made as he spoke. At one point his words slid together to form one word - sounds as confused as the threads of blue and green oil in the puddle next to my shoes. His voice rushed through what he had left to say. And, toward the end, reached falsetto notes, appealing to his listener’s understanding. I looked away to the lights of passing automobiles. I tried not to hear anymore. But I heard only too well the calm, easy tones in the attendant’s reply. Shortly afterward, walking toward home with my father, I shivered when he put his hand on my shoulder. The very first chance that I got, I evaded his grasp and ran on a head into the dark, skipping with feigned boyish exuberance. (Rodriguez 1983: 15)

Like Rodriguez, in hindsight, most of the women spoke of their childhood embarrassments as unfortunate and somewhat unreasonable given their parents’ cultural disadvantage. Despite regrets about not showing more empathy toward their elders, the fact of the matter is that at the time the participants felt and still believe that their parents’ immigration marks them as different in mainstream society. Some came to this realisation early as they entered a kindergarten classroom where they did not understand the language, spoken or unspoken, and everything was “strange.” Others began to feel the strain of difference in high school following a relatively homogenous grade school experience.

Women who attended schools where fellow students were also predominantly children of Italian immigrants did not notice many differences in familial lifestyle. Francesca describes her positive experience in the Catholic school system as follows:

... the ethnic background, the majority of us were Italian, Roman Catholic, we shared a lot of interests, not only religiously but tradition too, like customs.
Francesca goes so far as to attribute her positive experiences to this lack of diversity. When asked if she had any negative recollections of grade school, she responds: “Not at all because I was never a minority; the majority of friends or classmates were all Italian”. Unlike Francesca’s experience of being in a homogenous environment, Emma notes that although her overall experience of grade school was positive, having school mates that were from a different cultural background did, at times, lead to some discomfort.

In elementary school they [her friends] were not Italian, they weren’t. And I think that really influenced the way you thought and stuff just because there would be sleepovers and things like that and I wasn’t always allowed to do stuff like that whereas my other friends it was just normal.

Emma goes on to talk about how this was not only difficult in terms of her friendships but also how it often led to conflict at home as she became argumentative with her parents over these issues.

Like Emma, most of the women accepted their parents’ rules despite the dissatisfaction it caused them. For example, Diane shares how she has always felt “held back” by her parents from experiences that were even slightly out of the ordinary or risky. To support her contention, Diane reveals that she participated in swimming lessons at a local community centre without her parents’ knowledge since they would have deemed it too dangerous. Yet in hindsight she says, “but they did provide some structure that I knew there was always a home to go home to and I guess that’s more [important] than anything else.” Patricia is also forgiving of her parents’ strictness while she was growing up. She explains that she “grew up with a very strict set of values, old world, old fashioned parents...
and my mangiacake friends were very liberal. So there was always conflict with my parents. (...) [These] old fashioned values may seem laughable to us now but it's very important to them.” Although some felt anger towards their parents at the time, most now, as adults, are more understanding as they see their parents' strictness as part of the experience of being immigrants adapting to a new culture while attempting to maintain an identity and a sense of control.

In high school, many women had good relationships and friendships with students of various backgrounds. Yet they related most closely with those students who had similar academic aspirations to their own. Rita, who grew up in a neighbourhood she described as “ethnically mixed,” discusses this experience of high school and peers:

Most of them [friends] did [have an Italian background]. The only time I noticed the difference was when I got to grade eleven, in high school, some of my friends were still in the general level and the rest were in the advanced and there’s where I felt that I was in between but then when I realised that I wanted to continue on to university I could relate more to the students that were taking advanced level courses.

Academic pursuits and the commonality in those shared activities became more important than other shared traits as the women moved along in their education. Another participant credits her school peers for her motivation in school. Selecting friends who were doing well academically pushed her also to do well. “I had a really good strong peers. I was always in with a very determined group of students. I had friends whose parents spoke English, I also had English speaking friends.” By interacting with peers who either were Italian but whose parents spoke English or friends from English speaking homes, she was able to "pick up" some of the "cultural capital" that was lacking in her own home life. The
selection of friends was instrumental, to some extent, to the women's educational success and is a strategy used to increase the possibility of this success.

Early School Experiences

For many of the women, Italian, not English, was the first language they learned. Some were exposed only to Italian simply because it was the language their parents were most comfortable speaking, others because their primary caregivers were grandparents who only spoke Italian. For still others, parents made a conscious effort to speak Italian to them as a means of maintaining a language which the parents believed would be lost once the child entered the school system. For those women who did not speak English, entering the school setting appeared all the more daunting, and learning English was their first step towards becoming educated in a system that was often foreign to their parents. Connie has a vivid recollection of her first foray into the school system and the effects of not knowing the language despite being born in Canada,

In kindergarten I didn’t speak a word of English. When I started kindergarten, and I will never forget that day, I remember starting kindergarten and not knowing what they were talking about and just, I was terrified. I didn’t want to be there. (...) I didn’t know what I was getting into. I just walked in and there were all these kids dancing and doing weird things, what I considered weird, and then I just remember the door closing, my mother leaving and she coming back like it felt a week later, (...) it was hard.

It may seem odd to some that Connie, a Canadian born child, would have this type of experience, but given that she lived in a neighbourhood with many other Italian Canadian families, that her parents spoke little English when she was a child, and that she was the eldest in the family, her experience is not uncommon. Although she eventually
"caught on," she and other women maintain that this lack of early English language has long term effects. Kate describes these effects in the following passage:

I can't remember what it was like to learn English. I can tell you what I think that impact has had on me now. I just don't think I have the command of the English in the same way as, let's say somebody who grew up in a middle class English family has. And I think I've noticed that more primarily because I'm doing a Ph.D. and other people think in a much more eloquent way, talking, conversation is much more easy for them ... which for me I find it is a little more difficult. And I think it stems from partly growing up in a working class family as opposed to a middle class family, but also living in an area where you’re speaking Italian most of the time and your interactions at home and even from an early age are Italian. So you don’t have the range of language that children from English homes would have.

It is important to note the impact linguistic background has had for the women even as they pursue a graduate education. Although in early childhood they eventually learned English, their initial efforts to catch up to peers at the start of school life and the subsequent years of not having English as the main language at home have had long term effects on the women’s language skills and confidence.

These women, born and raised in Canada in cities where English is the dominant language, are what Feuerverger (2000) refers to as “invisible ESL students”. “Invisible” because they are not recent immigrants who one would expect to be acquiring English as a second language, but rather are students who come from a home culture where English is not spoken. They did not receive any remedial assistance with English but were expected, and did for the most part, “catch up” through exposure to the language in school and in the community. Rather than being recognized as students who would need assistance with the language, they were left, as Connie recalls, to be “terrorized” in an environment they did not comprehend. Interestingly, when
discussing their introduction to the English language, none of the women who had
Italian as their first language mentioned having another language as a potential asset.
Although in the present they appreciated being able to speak both English and Italian,
the participants did not express and having two languages was never presented to them
as children as a positive factor.

Despite some early struggles with the English language, the women in this study,
currently or recently graduate students, all describe being engaged as young students with
learning and subsequently doing well in school. Over and over again I heard the women
describe themselves as “good students”. The women had the drive to do well in school, be
it due to a desire to learn or simply to be well behaved, and they all considered themselves
successful in their educational pursuits. Immigrant parents stressed the importance of
doing well at school to children as a means for doing well in society and in life in general.
These daughters, often eager to please, also worked hard in order to make their parents and
family proud. As Helen says, “I liked school in grade school, I liked being known as the
smartest girl in the class.” Although some of the women do not feel that they were
particularly gifted students, few of them report being problem students in their younger
years or in high school. There is a need to please among the women which in the early and
teen years could be best evidenced by their doing well in school. Parents, although not
usually able to track the women’s progress closely, did show an interest in their education
which included checking whether homework was done and whether the teacher was
satisfied with their work.
In-depth Profiles

Although it would be tedious to elaborate on each of the participants’ respective backgrounds, I will provide several profiles which represent many of the typical characteristics of women who participated in this study. The following four stories represent women at different stages in their life course and in their education. Given that the overall sample of this study is relatively limited in age range and life circumstances, three of these four women are unmarried and their ages range from 27 to 40 years. The women represented in the following stories are in different academic programs: three are in the midst of doctoral work while one has recently completed a Master’s program.

Kate

When Kate and I met for an interview, she was recently married and near completion of a Ph.D. It took several attempts for the meeting to occur due to a household move in which Kate was involved, as well as interviewing for academic jobs. Kate was clear that an academic job was her goal upon completion of the degree. She had been diligently pursuing her graduate degrees straight from undergraduate studies, and her employment history was comprised of part-time work as either a teaching or research assistant at the university where she was enrolled. She has a close relationship with her advisor and feels comfortable with the woman in both academic and social settings. Kate is extremely close to her mother. While Kate’s older sibling has been married for several years, Kate continued living with her mother. Getting married and moving out of her mother’s home was difficult for Kate because she worried about her mother living alone,
even though her mother continues to work and is not reliant financially on Kate. Kate describes her mother as dependent on her in other ways, for emotional support, company and assistance in daily tasks.

Even before she was married, Kate found it difficult to meet the obligations of family and education. She realised that completing her doctoral degree would require devoting a lot of energy and uninterrupted time to her studies - often in the evenings and on the weekend when employment responsibilities are not an issue. This study schedule makes it difficult to spend time with her family. She reports that her family is not entirely understanding when it comes to this schedule and she often finds herself taking time away from her studies to accommodate them. Kate’s husband is entirely supportive of her pursuits and often finds it difficult to understand her perceived obligations to her family.

Kate describes the graduate education system as being based on an assumption of the independent graduate student who is free to pursue her studies with few other obligations. It is a model which she feels does not reflect well her reality or that of many other Italian Canadian women. Kate appeared to be a very bright, ambitious person who at present seemed tired but hopeful about her future.

Francesca

Francesca is a young woman who throughout our discussion was entirely positive in her outlook despite the challenges of graduate school. Francesca’s mother works in healthcare and her father is a general labourer, while her younger brother works in the
Francesca describes her immediate family as close and supportive, and they try to have dinner together each evening. Her parents are extremely proud of her pursuit of a graduate degree and have supported her both financially and emotionally throughout. She continues to live at home with her parents and brother and does not have any immediate plans to leave the home she grew up in. Her graduate education has given her the opportunity to pursue a course of study she is passionately interested in as well as to travel to some interesting locations.

Despite her positive feelings about her education, she reports having made no close friends during her graduate programme. She feels other students are competitive and focused on winning grants and getting good grades to the exclusion of working collaboratively with other students or making friends. Francesca abandoned the idea of pursuing a professional degree because she believed people would be even more competitive there than in graduate school and this did not match her personal style. She does have a group of friends to whom she has been close since elementary school and sees them often, however she reports that she does not discuss her educational pursuits with them beyond generalities.

Aside from her parents’ ongoing support, Francesca works in a service job in order to have some financial independence. She feels at ease in her workplace. This job is one she has held for many years and is one in which she is supported by her co-workers in her educational pursuits, although, again, she does not spend much time discussing the particulars of her graduate studies with them. Francesca misses the opportunity to have
close friends with whom she feels comfortable enough to share her academic experiences but does not appear to be particularly hindered by this deficiency. Despite the compartmentalisation of her life into two very different spheres, one academic, one social, Francesca's life is complete due to her ability to balance the competing demands of these two worlds.

Rita
Similar to Francesca and Kate, Rita is pursuing a Ph.D., although in her case, the degree is in language arts. She completed her Master's degree in the same department in which she is currently enrolled as a doctoral student. In her years in the department, she has gotten to know many of her professors and feels comfortable approaching them for guidance, which she does only occasionally given her independent nature. Rita's schedule is very hectic. She is a full time graduate student, a teaching assistant and a part time employee in the retail sector. Along with these roles, she also has many responsibilities at home where she lives with her parents. Neither of Rita's parents is currently employed as her father has been retired and her mother disabled for many years. Working in order to pay her tuition, taking care of her personal needs, and avoiding being a burden on her parents is a real necessity for her. Despite the constant struggle with conflicting demands, Rita has no regrets about pursuing a graduate education. She sees it as a means to a comfortable and thoughtful life and not one which revolves only around family.

Rita finds that she discusses her studies mostly with other students in her programme. At work in the retail sector, she withstands the gentle teasing that she "will
always be in school" and the "aren't you finished yet?" comments to which many of the participants report being subjected. Rita becomes agitated when discussing the attitudes of extended family who she feels do not respect her choice of graduate education. There are often demands placed upon her for translation from those relatives who do not speak English. Others question her lengthy stay in school while she could be contributing more to the care of her family. The pressure from these attitudes have caused her to lash out a few times and now she feels that these outbursts have raised her parents' awareness of how important graduate education is to her and the time commitment and focus it requires.

**Diane**

Diane is in her mid thirties, she is working as a schoolteacher and has recently completed a Master's degree. She thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of graduate school education as it gave her the opportunity to expand on her consistently positive educational achievements. Until recently, she lived with her parents who have now retired. In the past year, she decided to leave her parents' home and now lives on her own, a decision which her parents saw as an affront to their family values. Since Diane is unmarried and has no children, they did not perceive it as necessary or perhaps "appropriate" that she live alone. Diane feels that in time, her parents will be comfortable with this arrangement which has allowed her to feel more independent and more "her own person".

Diane has always done well in school and enjoyed educational pursuits. Despite her positive educational experiences, she feels she was not given the opportunities, as a daughter of working class immigrants, that some of her contemporaries had. At this point
in her life, she is mildly dissatisfied with her career and would like to make a change. She did not intend to become a teacher when she entered university but once having completed her undergraduate studies, she took the oft given advice of her mother and pursued her teaching degree. Due to their own limited opportunities, Diane believes that her parents were not able to offer her a wide range of possibilities for her future. As they understood it, teaching was the best option available to a woman who pursued higher education; this type of employment would allow for the flexibility of a home life and children. Diane seems to be struggling after completing her graduate degree to find another challenging pursuit.

**Conclusion**

These profiles form the basis of an initial analysis of Italian Canadian women's experiences in graduate education. As I have shown, early educational experiences, both academic and social, were often wrought with challenges for these women from immigrant homes. Although successful academically, they struggled and continue to do so with expectations that reflect their lived reality as children of immigrants. The challenge to balance home and school life began when they first entered the school system and although parents tried to be supportive, social factors caused hardship. The women have confronted barriers in their educational progress similar to those discussed earlier in this dissertation. They often found that their home culture had not adequately prepared them for schooling and that it continued to be incompatible with the education system.
One obvious difficulty is the problem of language. Some of the women had little or no English language skills when they entered the school system. This deficit obviously caused some hardships. Ongoing conflict between their cultural background from which they take so much of their identity, and their educational pursuits also poses a barrier for the women. As Rita pointed out, her continuing pursuit of higher education is unappreciated and even challenged by loved ones who believe she should be taking up responsibilities related to her family. Many of the women, by their own accounts, have triumphed due to or in spite of these challenges, while others do not seem as fortunate. The following chapter will continue to explore the women's experiences with education, in particular graduate studies.
CHAPTER SIX

UNIVERSITY AND GRADUATE STUDIES EXPERIENCES

In the preceding chapter, I outlined some of the barriers to academic success that the women faced early in their education. For example, language was a struggle for some women who entered the school system not speaking English. In this chapter, I will discuss some more barriers that the women faced as they proceeded through elementary and secondary education system and on to university and graduate programmes. As has been mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the Italian Canadian participants all described themselves as “good students” throughout elementary and high school. They strove to be well behaved, studious and admired by their teachers and parents. Looking back, most smiled as they thought of the young girls they were, eager to please and trying not to be a nuisance or a source of shame for their immigrant parents. Parents, in turn, encouraged the girls to do well at school and to take their education seriously in these early years. Kate describes a scenario that was typical for many of the participants when asked if school was discussed at home in their early years.

Yes all the time (school was discussed). … I would go home and talk about my day so I would talk about various things that I learned or if I had projects coming up I talked to my sister about them sometimes. … They (parents) wanted to know how I was doing, what I was doing. They were very interested in my grades particularly.

Kate’s experiences were similar to those expressed by other participants. Family dinner discussions which centred around what the children were learning in school and how they were doing in terms of grades were typical. What was lacking for
the participants was the possibility of receiving assistance from their parents in regards to school assignments. Many women, as Kate suggests, would turn to older siblings, when available, for support. If extended family were accessible, older cousins were also called in for assistance with homework or school work in general. A distinction can be made between women in the study who were the eldest in their families and those who had older siblings. As described in an earlier chapter, Connie, being the oldest child in her family, was quite traumatized by her first introduction to school having had little or no previous exposure to this type of setting or to the English language. She notes that for her younger brother, the situation was better as she was able to introduce him to the English language and different types of play based on her experiences with school.

Perhaps due to the “foreignness” of school for them, the women adhered to the rules of school quite strictly. When one is unsure in a surrounding, it is much safer to “play by the rules” in order to be able to participate and make sense of the environment. I know this is true for myself, for I became confused when others broke the very rules, which I clung to as a means of functioning at school. A certain amount of understanding and confidence, which, for the most part, these Italian Canadian women did not have, is required in order to veer from the standard. They treaded lightly and in a straight path. This adherence to the rules is also a reflection of the lack of cultural capital the women possessed. They foraged for whatever “capital” (in the form of rules, information and processes) that was offered to them as a means to become successful students. They may have been ill-equipped with cultural capital but they were well
equipped with the desire to "do well" and make their parents proud. We will see below that veering from this path had consequences for the women in both the arena of school and in that of family relations.

In order to illustrate the point of how important it was for these women to stick to the course laid out for a good student, I offer an exception. Olivia describes her experiences of deviating from this course and the consequences.

Up until grade 8, I was a diligent student. After that, for a period of three years, I became a very rebellious student. My parents were very strict with me, and so I chose to spite them by failing grade 8 and 9 in order to shame them. I was the talk of the family, and the neighbourhood for that matter! This made matters worse with me, because my extended family members, specifically my aunts, decided to label me as an unworthy daughter. Until today I have not yet received the recognition that I merit for my accomplishments. I still hold the stigma of fourteen years ago. This angers me tremendously.

Although Olivia's example is an exception to most of the stories I heard from participants, it does show how important doing well in school was to the women's position in the family. And as Olivia points out, failing to do well meant shaming one's family, an action that was very serious for immigrant families attempting to establish themselves in a new country. The stigma of being immigrants, and, for the most part, uneducated, drove immigrant parents to push their children to do well in the public sphere of education.

Kate offers an explanation of why doing well in school was so important to her parents and why going to university was seen as crucial.

I think because they had such a hard life here. They didn't speak English when they came. My mother was working as a maid in homes
and couldn’t speak English so it became very important to them that both my sister and I become educated, that was the only avenue out, that’s all they could give us. Oh, I’ll just say one more thing. My mother worked for people who lived in (a wealthy area of the city), for millionaires who sent their children to private schools in England, and she thought if I was ever going to make it in this world it meant I had to go to a really good university. And for her that meant (large university), so that part really had an influence I think. The whole idea that you know the rich send their kids to university so I had to go to university.

Kate’s avowal that education was “all they could give us” rang true for many of the other women. The idea was that only through education were these women going to be able to have a life that was different from that of their parents. The opportunity to become part of mainstream society and to participate fully in it was what parents believed a university education would offer their daughters. In discussing my earlier study (Mazzuca 1995), I mention how important it was to the immigrant parents that their children do well in school. They clung firmly to the belief that education was the means by which their children would reach a status in society that alluded them as immigrants. Parents were willing to “risk” sending the children out into a system they knew little about for the good of their children’s future, not an easy undertaking for any parent.

The description of Kate’s parents’ insistence that she attend university also resonates with what Helen, when speaking of her mother’s strong push for her and her sister to attend university, described as her “mother living vicariously through us”:

My mother doesn’t have that much education. She has a Grade 5 education. I think she lives vicariously through us because she claims she was a good student, but of course they didn’t have money so she had to go to work. So I think with our degrees, she lives vicariously through us, her two daughters.
Anna, like Helen, also felt that her mother's lack of education played a role in her decision to attend university. Although Anna's mother had been in Canada longer and had attended high school here, university was not something that was encouraged in her immigrant family which was still attempting to establish itself and which perhaps had not let go of traditional ideas about a women's place.

My mother wanted to go to university. Her parents didn't see it as something worthwhile. . . . My mother graduated from her high school programme class valedictorian . . . in terms of university material, my mom is more university material than I could ever dream to be in terms of her work ethic and her desire to do it. I think a lot of the push to university came from that.

Tears welled up in Anna's eyes as she spoke of her mother's missed opportunity to attend university, again reinforcing the strong sense of empathy that the women had for their immigrant parents' struggles. As the participants were women, they showed a particular concern for hardships faced by their mothers. Helen and Anna, like many of the other participants, do not begrudge their mothers' sense of living vicariously through their experiences, but they do admit to feeling the pressure of their expectations.

Among participants there is a strong sense of empathy for immigrant parents whose own education was cut short and who suffered the indignity of low skilled labour when they held the potential or desire to strive for more. This tension permeates the decisions these women make. The desire to please their parents and to assure them that their sacrifices have been worthwhile can be in conflict with the urge to make their own decisions. Because the women feel a strong sense of responsibility and loyalty towards
their parents, they are keenly aware of the sacrifices their parents have made, such as coming to a new country, struggling to learn a new language and making a life for themselves and their children. By becoming successful individuals, the daughters want to ensure that their parents' sacrifices were not made in vain. If these women fail, in the eyes of their parents, to "make something of themselves", they are, in effect, rendering their parents' sacrifices worthless. This burden weighs heavily in every decision made by the child of immigrant parents.

The support then of immigrant parents has played a key role in the women's educational progress. Despite some of the challenges they face in education due to their background, there are also benefits. As described above, from an early age onward, the women were taught that education was important and they were encouraged to do well. While being rewarded for following rules and not questioning authority may not be seen as completely unproblematic, it did serve the women well in their early schooling. This behaviour allowed them to be seen positively by parents and teachers. At a basic level, the women were "assimilating" to the rules of the school with their parents' support. As has already been stated, these immigrant parents placed a high value on obedient children who behaved well at home and at school. As Beatrice points out, her parents were working hard at trying to make a living and insisted that they did not want to be worried about their children's behaviour. In many of the choices they have made in their lives, the women have considered the good of their family foremost. Choosing to do well in school may have been another one of these choices.
The above discussion points to many of the familial influences which existed in the participants' decisions to go to university, but there were others. Many of the women had always assumed they would go to university because they were "good students" and had friendships with other students who also did well in school. This identification often led to others around them also assuming they would be university bound, thus contributing to the "obviousness" of their choice to pursue post-secondary education. Several of the women were fortunate enough to attend schools with high academic standards and this also reinforced their decisions to go to university, since "everyone was doing it". Living in a middle class environment, which many of the women did, this sense of "everyone is doing it" in regards to university entered the psyche of both the women and their parents. Emma talks about her decision to go to university in this vein:

I didn't labour into the decision; it was kind of like, well, this is what you do and so the decision was kind of made. I mean it was expected, like I knew I was going to go. I'm not going to say it was expected that my family demanded that I go, but I know that they would be really disappointed if I didn't.

Attending university then was something that both parents and others expected of the women. It must be said here that many of the women I spoke to had been influenced by middle class values, either because they belonged to this class or were on the periphery of it. Many Italian immigrants prioritized home ownership over other ways of using their money, and whether they were labourers or other types of workers, most owned their own homes, usually in middle class neighbourhoods. As discussed in Chapter Three, class membership is not a straightforward concept. Many of the
participants lived in middle class neighbourhoods and homes despite the fact that their parents were labourers. Their experiences, when compared to the literature on working class experiences with education, are very similar.

The definition of "class" is complex but I considered Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" (see discussion in Chapter One) to place the women's experiences in context. Although not lacking financially in many cases, the participants did lack much of the cultural capital one would find in a middle class home, and, as this study shows, this deficiency had many implications for their education. Another important point relates back to the composition of the sample in this study. As I have already mentioned, most of the women in this study grew up in a major urban centre (Toronto) where the possibility of attending university loomed large due to the proximity of higher education institutions. Also, Ontario has approximately ten times the number of university graduates (both undergraduate and graduate) than any of the other Canadian provinces except Quebec (Statistics Canada 2000). The women's location in the Canadian context is also highly relevant in considering their university participation. University education is publicly funded so tuition is not as high as it would be, for instance, in the United States. Although it does become more difficult if one engages in a lengthy program of study, at the undergraduate level at least, it was plausible for the women to rely on parents and their own earnings in part time jobs.

Women were also influenced by older siblings or other relatives in their decision to go to university. I know for myself, my brother's decision to go to university not
only influenced my decision to go but also my choice of university. Many of the 
women talk about older siblings and cousins who had been to university before them, 
making the choice to go to university a more “obvious” one. Like grade school, 
university seemed less foreign for those women with family members who had forged 
the way. For most, but not all the women, their siblings attended university either 
before or after them. In a few cases, women were the only ones in their immediate 
families to attend university and this did cause some strain, as we will see, as they went 
on to graduate studies which took up a substantial amount of their time.

Overall, the women report that their decision to attend university was not 
particularly difficult. The decision gave them a direction in life and made parents and 
those around them proud. They knew they wanted to pursue a higher education and for 
some, this was clarified by what they did not want to do. As Rita points out,

There were some girls in the school that wanted to get married right 
away and I guess that helped me continue on the fact that I didn’t want to 
do that. I didn’t want to get married right away and I didn’t want to be a 
hairdresser which a lot of the girls did want to be and I didn’t want to 
settle for something like that.

Interestingly, in the women’s talk of their decision to go to university and their 
subsequent plans to pursue graduate education, there is an absence of any recognition of 
the changes these choices will entail in their relationship to those around them, 
particularly their family. Although they recognize now how their educational 
experiences have impacted on personal relationships, they were not aware of this as 
they were making decisions about educational pursuits. As will be shown, through their 
experiences while pursuing a higher education, particularly a graduate education, their
relationships change and they find it increasingly difficult to maintain both their roles as student and as daughter of Italian immigrants. At the point of making the decision to go down this path, none of the women seemed to have been exposed to any information which may have made them aware of the life changes that awaited them. A few books or journal articles on the topic of “first generation students” may have given them some hints.

**University experiences**

Most of the women were satisfied with their choice of university and courses. Often times, the reputation of the university overall led to their decision to select it. They chose courses that interested them, for the most part, while a few of the women had specific plans in mind for graduate or professional studies and so were more focused in their selection of courses. Although, to some extent, all the women chose courses primarily on the basis of interest, they did have an eye to practicality and gave some thought to what they would do once they completed their undergraduate degree. Shifts occurred after the first year, which seems natural, once the women had the opportunity to experience university studies. For some, this meant moving into a different area than the one they originally intended. Another interesting finding in talking to the women was that their decisions were often fueled by not wanting to fit into a stereotype that they described as Italian Canadian women only choosing to study languages or education. Like Rita quoted above, women often made their decisions based on what they did not want to do. Connie describes:

(Choosing courses) was more difficult (than choosing a university) because I found that most of my friends were doing Italian and French
and that's okay but I have other interests and it was hard to kind of break free from that typical Italian French. (…) At that time, it was typical because about 90% of the people were doing Italian and French and wanted to be teachers and that’s fine but I knew that deep down that wasn’t really my choice. And so I got, I think it was second year, I decided to try something else, and I sat in different courses, psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and I knew that politics was always interesting. So in second year I was resolute enough to say I don’t want to do the French and Italian teacher thing, this is what I really want to do and that was hard. For myself because I think, at the time, there were mostly males in my political science course- I didn’t find that many females - and it was a very weird feeling compared to the Italian French route which was completely opposite. So I had courses in Italian and in political science in the same day and I would be running back and forth on campus and the composition, the class composition, discussions were (so) different that I found it overwhelming at times.

Many women, like Connie, expressed the desire to break out of the mold of what would be typically expected of them through their choices of study. They wanted to study topics which were not typical for Italian Canadian women. This desire to be "different" in their educational choices was another way in which some women expressed the desire to "prove" something. Having said that, I did speak to women who had pursued the route of Italian and French as Connie describes it. In most cases, these women were aware that others perceived their choice of study as typical and, in some ways, as less valid than more uncommon educational pursuits. There was a sense of "why do you need to study Italian" if you are from an Italian background and questions about what does one do with a degree in languages. One participant describes people’s reactions in the following manner, “Some are just surprised, they’re shocked. I still get comments: Why do you need to study it? Why are you going on?” The message is that studying Italian is somehow less important than other academic pursuits. For some women this pushed them into studying other areas. For others, being disrespected for
their choice of study, was simply another hazard of pursuing a higher education. The idea that some topics are more highly regarded than others relates back to an earlier point I made about privilege. Studying the Italian language, the language of a minority group in Canada, is not considered a significant scholarly pursuit. When the minority language is also one's home language, however, one's decision to study Italian is further devalued by the fact that it is not as if one is pursuing an "exotic" topic to legitimate the choice. This phenomena also relates to the early school experiences of some of the women who did not speak English when they entered the school system. Their Italian language skills were not valued then either but were merely something to "get over".

Women who were studying in what they described as more "traditional" areas did find a greater comfort level with fellow students and with professors than did the others. One woman I spoke to who was studying sciences describes her first years of university in the following manner:

I was somewhat pleased (with her choice of university and courses) but they're very impersonal. Not that I felt like a number, I always got to know my professors every year but the competition after first year, even the biology course, that's why I didn't go to med school because the competition was so heavy. We would have labs and people would, if you were turning around, they would take your equipment or sabotage your experiment. I'm serious. So there was a lot of jealousy and competition at school.

This type of climate was present for other participants as well although it did not seem as extreme. As mentioned above, Connie, for example, talks about being one of the few women in political science and how the atmosphere was very different from the courses she took in Italian or French. I did not find that women were particularly put off by
environments that were more challenging; instead they persevered and found other outlets for support, including family and friends outside of school.

Most of the women I spoke to spent their undergraduate years continuing to live with their parents. Parents encouraged this living arrangement and for many women, it met their economic needs. For most the decision, although admittedly strongly influenced by parents' desire for them to remain under the familial roof, was not terribly problematic. Most of the women lived in large cities and were able to attend reputable universities near their homes. For a few, however, the pressure to stay at home was keenly felt and resented. Beatrice talks about this arrangement:

Yes I had to go to university; this was fine; they (parents) thought this was very good but they didn't want me to leave the city. I had to be in the city. I actually got accepted to all the universities but I couldn't go because I needed to be in the city. (When I got to university) I was disappointed that I was there, I really wanted to be living on my own. It's the cool thing, I wanted to be away. All my friends had gone away and I really resented being in the city. I really resented still being at my parents' place, not changing the environment.

Perhaps one important difference between Beatrice and some of the other women was that she grew up in an Anglo-Saxon, upper middle class neighbourhood where she had no Italian friends.

Other women, for the most part, lived in middle class or working class neighbourhoods where many of their friends were other children of immigrants. For this latter group, the idea of going away to university was not as pervasive. In fact, most of their friends would have attended the local university also. When Diane reflected on her decision to live at home during university, her feelings are more
ambivalent than Beatrice’s:

I think from a maturational point of view, it would have been probably a little bit better to be on my own back then, but it wasn’t something that was easily done as a girl growing up in a traditional household where girls didn’t necessarily fly the coop that early. I think if I had pushed it a bit further -but like I said, I kind of weighed it, was it worth the fight?

Again, perhaps fueled by the desire to please the immigrant parent and to avoid causing them any pain, women made decisions that took into account the family’s desires, in some cases, placing them above their own.

The women continued to perform well in undergraduate studies as they had in their earlier years of education. They took a keen interest in their studies and strove to do well. Often, like many students, they found the first year a challenging transition but managed to overcome those obstacles. Continuing on to a graduate degree was obviously greatly influenced by their successes in undergraduate courses.

**Deciding to Pursue a Graduate Degree**

Baird (1990) found that graduate students decide to pursue a graduate degree for a variety of reasons but mainly because an area of study interests them. This pattern was also evidenced among participants in this study. Many of the women mentioned an interest in the topics they had chosen to study in graduate school and stated that they wished to pursue them first as an area of study and subsequently, as a career choice. Practical matters also came very much into consideration when women decided to pursue a graduate education. The potential for expanded career choices due to a graduate education was considered seriously by the women. As Francesca explains,
liking" the educational process and school in general was also a factor in the women's decisions.

(I decided to do) my Master’s, not only to further my education. It's beneficial, it's easier to find a job and I didn't mind school. I didn't think school was a bother or hindering me whatsoever and I had the time [and] I had no pressure.

Francesca’s comments illustrate several factors which were important in the women’s decisions. They enjoyed pursuing an undergraduate education and expected to enjoy graduate school. They saw the benefits of pursuing a higher education for the purpose of having better career options. Finally the women, for the most part, were confident that they would be able to attend school for several more years with few constraints, such as finance. Although not all the women lived with their parents, most did receive financial support from their families. All the women had part or full time jobs during graduate school, but most were able to live with parents to reduce costs.

Unlike Francesca, some of the women did not attend graduate school immediately after undergraduate studies. This smaller group of women completed their undergraduate degree, then worked for a period of time, and then, for various reasons, mainly the desire to advance their education and their careers, decided to pursue a graduate degree. Diane explains her decision to pursue a Master’s degree part time while maintaining her full time employment in the following manner:

So then I decided to do my Master’s (...), I was finding that I wasn't being challenged personally (in my job). I mean professionally you could do a lot but for my own satisfaction, I liked the idea of being with more peers and I wanted to go back to school. I don't have any regrets that I did it. I think I used it more as a networking kind of. It was good to see what was out there, it was good to see what people were working on.
Although Diane did not use her Master's degree as a vehicle for a career change, but rather as a path for personal and career advancement, a few of the other women did have a career change in mind. What is clear from Diane's and Francesca's comments - which reflect those of the other women - is that education is something which is enjoyable to them. Although both acknowledge the practical value of an advanced degree, the sense that they take personal fulfillment from education resonates in their comments. As good students who have consistently worked hard to do well in school from an early age, they expect graduate school to be a positive next step in their educational pursuits.

For a few women, the decision to pursue a graduate degree was not a first choice. They would have preferred to obtain a professional degree, for example, in law or medicine. Either the women were not admitted to these professional programmes and consequently chose a graduate degree in a similar field, or, as Emma explains below, discovered that getting into graduate school was less "intimidating":

At first I really thought I wanted to go to law school and I was just really intimidated by the process. I didn’t think I was smart enough or I didn’t think I could make it so I deferred writing the LSAT. I just didn’t want to know whether or not I could do it or not. I was afraid of that. So I said I’ll just go for my Master’s, that was kind of easy, and decide (then) if I want to do this or not.

Emma’s feelings were not unique among the women. Similar fears are particularly in evidence, as we will see later in this chapter, when the women speak about their graduate school experiences. Insecurity about their ability as students peaks in graduate school where the system makes demands which are beyond those that made the women
Another factor which played into a sort of default choice to seek a graduate degree was the desire on the part of the women to escape the traditional roles they saw open to them if they did not continue in school. Many of the women mention that unlike other Italian Canadian women, they knew they did not want an early marriage and motherhood until they had pursued a higher education and established some sort of career for themselves. Thus, a rejection of these traditional expectations clearly played a role in their decision to pursue graduate studies. Rita (quoted earlier) made this distinction when discussing the other women students in her high school, explaining how her allegiances shifted from those who wanted early marriage to those who intended to pursue a university education. Beatrice describes her decision to continue onto a graduate education as a rebellion:

I just felt the pressure to get married and I didn’t want that. I chose none of these things but I chose to rebel. I didn’t do drugs, I didn’t sleep around. I didn’t dye my hair pink, I didn’t have lovers all over the place (…) I did none of that but I chose to rebel in the most respectable way possible — going to academics, not embracing marriage and motherhood.

It would be inaccurate to say that Beatrice’s decision to do a graduate degree or the decision of any of the women was based simply on “escaping” traditional constraints; however this is an important consideration. In Chapter One, I quoted Pichini (1987) who argues that in a new country, immigrant parents cling to traditional beliefs about gender roles in an attempt to maintain an identity. In the pre and post World War Two culture in Italy prior to immigration women’s roles were still fairly "good students" in their previous educational experiences.
limited to family and home. In Chapter Two I explained that many of the Italian immigrants who came to Canada were poorly educated, manual or agricultural labourers from Southern Italy (which was more traditional than other parts of the country). They had not lived in urban environments where they might have been exposed to more modern notions about gender roles; so, in clinging to values from their home country, they saw a women's role as closely linked to family.

If the notion of “rebelling” through education was pronounced by a middle class person from a non-immigrant may seem odd, but for Beatrice and the other women in the study, staying in university beyond the four year period required for an undergraduate degree was seen as interfering with taking on the traditional roles which would match more closely parents' expectations. Making educational decisions in the context of contradictory familial expectations leads to women viewing their decision to pursue a graduate education as a form of rebellion, albeit a respectable one. For these daughters of Italian immigrants, pursuing a graduate education appeared the most appropriate manner in which to gain respect, both in their immediate environment and in society at large, while allowing them to break free of some of the traditional expectations placed upon them. Nevertheless, as shown later in this chapter many familial obligations remain.

Clearly, for these women, others' reactions to their decisions are important. Having grown up in an environment which held family in the highest regard, in many cases placing the needs of the family over those of the individual, they consistently
consider the impact of their choices on others. Many women made the decision to
attend graduate school based on some of the factors discussed above, however quite
often they made this choice in the absence of meaningful input from close family
members, as Diane’s comments illustrate:

As far as education was concerned there were no expectations for us,
none. The expectations were basically set by ourselves, like our
parents didn’t have any expectations for themselves (...). I don’t think
they really contributed very much to my major educational decisions.

Family members were more reactive than proactive when it came to the women’s
educational choices. Although the women are consistently aware of their relationships
with others, as they are often central to their lives, the choice to pursue a graduate
degree is often made in spite of these familial ties. The decision to further their
education is not something on which immigrant parents would independently comment.
Quite often, the women made their decisions on their own and only then shared it with
family. In most cases, it was one of the few decisions they would make without direct
input from loved ones, although the decision was not made without an understanding
that it would be reacted to by others.

Although for many of the women, family members were proud of their pursuit
of a graduate degree, they were not often intimately involved in the women’s decision
to undertake graduate studies. Many commented that family members were not aware
of the intensity of study that would be required for a graduate degree. Whether or not
relatives saw the degree to be worthwhile or not, they saw it as an extension of the
undergraduate degree and wondered when the student would be done and move on to
“real life”. As Anna explains, her family tolerated her continuing education as part of
her personality and her record as a "good student", but they believed that one day soon
she would be done with it and take up more traditional pursuits.

It’s difficult for my family to understand what I’m doing. My
grandmother and grandfather, they don’t understand it, but they think
it’s really cute what I’m doing. They kind of demean it. They think
it’s really cute, and one day I’ll finish school and then I’ll get married.
I’m kind of in it for the long haul here. They don’t get it, you know.

Other women’s families were less tolerant of their choice of graduate education
since they did not see it as a pursuit which would lead to a clear cut career. Joanne
experienced this type of reaction from her family when she decided to go to graduate
school. She describes her family feeling that she “was wasting her life with this degree
since it does not lead to a specific, direct profession.” Joanne was very disappointed by
her family’s reaction since up until then they had always been supportive of her. “All
of the sudden they were so negative,” she laments. Beatrice had a similar experience
when she broke the news to her family that she would be continuing on to do her
doctoral degree:

They really liked the idea of university and they really liked the idea of
the B.Ed. They started to have questions and doubts - what’s this
Master’s - okay, they thought, maybe better job, maybe even more
money. When I told them I was applying to the doctorate that was the
last straw. Like what is the purpose, what is the purpose and what are
you trying to prove?

Again, given the importance that family has always played in these women’s lives, this
type of reaction is particularly devastating. What is at the heart of these reactions?
Perhaps it is the anxiety about women branching out into areas of which the family has
no knowledge. The women are moving away from relatively familiar choices to those
with which the family is unfamiliar. Families worry that the women will change in
some fundamental way which will make them less connected. As a woman from a
working class background, Annas (1993) describes how her family "didn’t understand
much of" her graduate school. While they were pleased for her:

They did worry about whether I would become someone they didn’t
know. And every time I come home to visit, at some point my mother
says with relief, ‘Pam, you haven’t changed at all’. She means this as,
and I take it as a compliment – though, of course, it’s not entirely true. I
have changed. (Annas 1993: 169)

I will discuss how women’s relationships to family do change later in this chapter.

Due, in large part, to the reactions discussed above, several women mention that
they do not discuss their graduate education within the family context, to the point
where for some, close family members are not even aware that they are pursuing a
graduate degree. They choose to keep that aspect of their lives separate from family
and even sometimes close friends who are not also pursuing a graduate degree. As
Helen explains it, she does not discuss her studies with her cousins because “none of
them went to university and they feel like oh you think you’re so much better” if you do
talk about your education. For most women, it was not so much that they worried that
others would not be interested in their studies. Like Helen, it was more the case that
they were extremely anxious to avoid any perception that they were bragging. Again
given the important role that interpersonal relationships play in the lives of these
women this action is significant in that it closes off a major part of their daily lives from
those they are close to. The implication of rendering part or all of their school life
invisible is that they feel they have dual roles or worlds that they must live within.
Graduate School Experiences

The participants report that graduate school is quite a different experience from undergraduate work in its intensity, commitment and general day to day activities. A few of the women report struggling in graduate school more than they ever had in any other educational setting. For the most part though, the educational aspects of their programmes were demanding but manageable. What was more challenging for the women was the more informal expectations of graduate school, namely the time commitment and the emotional commitment. All the women reported that, in one way or another, they felt challenged to meet the requirements of the graduate student role as they perceived it. Suddenly, being a “good student” and following the rules was not enough. Although they were aware, they were not always able to articulate the difference between graduate school and their previous school experiences.

Whether it was their challenges with language, their issues with cultural capital, or their culturally determined behaviours, the women began to question their ability to survive graduate school. Noting that all levels of schooling require some socialization, Egan (1989) notes:

That graduate training may be distinguished from earlier education because of its goal of professionalization. This intended outcome, which requires changes in students’ self-images, attitudes, and thinking processes, affects the structure of graduate education, leading to student’s and teacher’s roles that are different and socialization aims that are more complex and often more central than developmentally defined educational goals. (Egan 1989: 201)

The women are not alone then in sensing that there are different expectations for students in graduate school than there are for students in undergraduate programmes.
Academically, most of the women enjoyed the graduate studies they chose. They felt stimulated intellectually and did well in terms of grades. Beatrice describes "graduate school" as "a turning point for me. I finally started to connect with professors and programmes and started to realize my reason for being here and I loved it. I loved it so much so that's why I applied to the doctorate because I felt my work was unfinished." They approached their studies as they had throughout their educational careers by working hard and wanting to succeed. Francesca also talks about how much she enjoyed her graduate studies and how after her Master's she began to work in the field of her studies before deciding she would like to pursue a doctorate in the same area. Participants enjoyed the topics they chose to study to the point where many went on to pursue a doctorate or to work in the field. Although better job prospects were often mentioned, they were not the sole reason for pursuing a graduate degree, as the women's comments demonstrate how much they enjoy their studies.

Though course work was often very challenging, most women do not mention having any actual difficulties with the course content but more with the work load and the structure of graduate studies. Many women actively sought out necessary information within their programmes. In the case of getting information about their programmes, the women seem divided. Many developed close relationships with professors and felt fairly competent in maneuvering through the graduate process while others never really felt that they fit in or had caught on to the workings of their departments. An example of the former experience is Kate's description of the small sub-department she came to belong to while working on her doctorate.
I was really fortunate and I think my graduate experience might be a little different from other people in the sense that I belonged to this group. (...) They’re all women in this area, all young faculty and other Ph.D. students but we were all women and that was a very different environment working in there than doing my M.A. while I wasn’t part of that environment and I was sort of working on my own with other graduate students who occasionally give you information. But here it was much more of a, I don’t know how I would describe it, much more of an intimate relationship in the sense that you became friends with faculty members and other graduate students and then you would get information and you’d get support from them in ways that other students didn’t have support because they wouldn’t see faculty on a regular basis.

Kate’s experiences are, as she suggests, fairly unique since she developed close mentoring relationships with other students and faculty.

About half of the women I spoke to had the type of experience described by Kate. They did find working closely with faculty and other students very rewarding as it allowed them to make their way through the graduate experience more smoothly. Furthermore, by enabling the women to focus on their studies without the pressure of struggling to figure out the processes of graduate school, these connections opened up opportunities for them that many others did not have. For example, this group of women was much more likely to participate in academic conferences and to be exposed to opportunities to publish their work than students who did not receive this type of mentoring on a regular basis. These women were more likely than students who did not share these types of opportunities to plan to pursue an academic career.

Emma’s experiences were somewhat different than Kate’s. She has found it difficult to get information in her department; she does not feel that an effort has been
made to welcome her into the department, and she notes that information is difficult to
access. Emma seems to be making a conscious effort to acclimate herself to the
department, but when asked about choosing a supervisor, she responds that, “no I really
have to do more about that, I really don’t know how the process works, like I just really
feel in the dark about that.” Emma’s experiences were not unique. Kate’s comments
above include her belief that feeling well connected and informed is not the norm.
Many women struggled to locate information about the programme requirements, to
find out what courses would be interesting, and to obtain information about conferences
and publications. Women who did not have some sort of employment at the university
were particularly disadvantaged in this area as they often had to rush off after classes
and did not have opportunities to develop more individual type relationships with
faculty. Some women expected graduate school to be much like undergraduate studies.
Initially, they believed that if they simply studied and did well in their courses, they
would do well in graduate school overall. They were unaware that success in graduate
school and the possibility of an academic career require expanding their educational
activities to include conferences and publications.

Although their grades may have been high, they were not always engaged with
the important informal aspects of graduate work. For example, only a few of the
women I spoke to had taken advantage of or applied for bursaries or scholarships; only
about half had participated in academic conferences; and a handful had attempted to get
their work published. These findings are similar to those of Turner and Thompson
(1993) discussed in Chapter Two. They found that minority women had fewer
opportunities to develop academic and professional skills than other students. If, as stated above, professionalization is a major goal of graduate education, these women are less inclined to be meeting this goal due to limited opportunities. So again, while they may have been keeping up their grades in the manner to which they were accustomed, they were not being socialized in the world of academe. Having overcome some of the barriers to graduate school, they continue to face barriers as they progress through their programmes.

There was a sense among the women that they needed to do well in graduate school both for themselves and to prove to others that they could it. There was definitely a feeling among the women that they must do well in their studies, which included dedicating considerable time and energy to their education. Obviously, the women I spoke to cannot represent every Italian Canadian woman's experience in graduate school. For example, since they were all still enrolled or had completed their programmes, they cannot tell us of the experiences of those who may have chosen to leave a graduate programme. Although one can certainly understand how some of the barriers discussed would dissuade some women from remaining in graduate school. But the women I spoke to did not seriously entertain the idea of not completing their graduate studies. Such an outcome rarely came up in our discussions and there was a real sense that they themselves did not think of graduate studies as something one attempts and possibly finishes but rather as a serious undertaking with a clear goal.

Unlike other women they knew in their programmes, these women remained
focused on studies, more so than on other aspects of their graduate departments. Very few were involved in student groups or politics, although many were teaching or research assistants who met with informal student groups. All the women had paid employment of some sort during their graduate studies. Helen was one student who was having some difficulties in her programme, but she knew “she could never live with herself” if she left her studies without completing a graduate degree. About her current studies she says:

They (her friends) are all out of school and they’re all having this great time and they all managed to find jobs and I’m like yeah I’m still in school. But I don’t regret it, I don’t regret being in school. I just wish, I wish, I found it easier, I’m just finding it very hard.

When asked why she is doing the degree, Helen speaks about what it was like to grow up in a single parent home and be one of the only Italian Canadian students she knew to have parents who were divorced. She says that in speaking of her extended family:

My sister and I, we call ourselves the lost children because we’re nothing, we always laugh, like if we weren’t there, nobody would miss us. So I think honestly - I don’t know if it’s arrogance - it [graduate school] just brought me one step higher. I don’t know; I just felt that I could do it and I’m doing it for my own reasons. Like I’m not doing it to get a better job because I know I probably won’t, but I’m doing it because I always say I just want those letters behind my name. So if I finish, I think I’m going to prove a lot of people wrong.

Beatrice also expressed the feeling that she would continue her studies, regardless of the challenges, as a means to prove she could do it:

I’m not sure I am cut out for academia, I’m not sure if I have the strength to play the game. But then you know what, sometimes I am at home, I’m in the shower, I’m brushing my hair or I’m in the car and I’m thinking why, why am I going to let them win? You know, in so many ways, I’m never going to be more than a little immigrant girl.

Similar to many of the women, Helen and Beatrice felt they had something to prove,
both to themselves and to others, that as Italian Canadian women they could pursue a
nontraditional path and complete a graduate degree. Although thoughts of quitting were
only natural, they were not taken as serious considerations for the some of the reasons
mentioned above.

Another factor which influenced the participants' experiences of graduate school
was the fact that they were often the only Italian Canadians in their courses. All the
women have, of course, lived in a multicultural society and have had the experience of
being around persons from a variety of backgrounds. Why it should matter if there
were other Italian Canadians in their courses is not an easy question to answer. It would
be simplistic for me to conclude that the women wanted to be around others like
themselves for reasons of comfort since, again, they have consistently been exposed to
other cultures throughout their education. Instead, it is more accurate to say that the
women sought reassurance that people "like them," especially women "like them,"
choose this type of pursuit and could be successful at it. When asked what was most
difficult about her graduate studies, Connie, an extremely confident, articulate women
who went on to earn a professional degree, responded that it was being the only Italian
Canadian woman in her programme. She did not mention the course work nor the hours
as a source of hardship, however, she found it difficult to be the only Italian Canadian
in this group. What she describes below is a moment that many of the participants
would recognize, the moment they look around the group and think to themselves "why
is there no other Italian Canadian here?"

This is probably off the wall, but I guess the first day we started, we
went around the table and we all had to introduce ourselves. Not that I
Connie’s comment brings out two important points: one her immediate realization that she is the only Italian Canadian in the group and her sense of disappointment, and two the difficulty of facing others’ scrutiny as the only member of her ethnic group in the class. This latter point is something that other women also made note of. They often felt they were providing the “Italian perspective” which was not always their desire, and they felt that their presence was seen as a novelty or anomaly. Emma had similar experiences when she went “looking” for others from an Italian background in her programme.

Well I noticed because number one [her University] tries to espouse, as having a structural approach, race, class and gender embedded in everything, (...) so that’s one of the things that attracted me there and you know when I got the list of students in the programme, I just went through it looking for last names that kind of sounded Italian or just, you know ethnic and there weren’t many, (...) but there were no Italian women or men in the programme at all.

Like Connie, Emma also notes early on in her graduate career the lack of Italian Canadian women in her programme and it disappoints her given her school’s mandate to take seriously issues of race, class and gender. In her mind and the minds of the other participants, ethnicity belongs in that discussion, particularly in dealing with issues of immigration. Given the difficulties the women expressed in getting to graduate school and being successful once there, it is likely that many other Italian Canadian women did not make this decision.
Emma’s comments also speak to a wider issue, which other women also discuss, that “ethnicity is never taken up.” Another participant illustrates the invisibility of ethnicity when she describes her situation of living with her mother and the responsibilities she fulfilled towards her widowed mother but she says that:

> If you live at home they [faculty and other students] see you as not being independent and an individual where I find I had more responsibilities than people who don’t live at home. So they assume that you are like them, and they don’t appreciate or don’t have sensitivity to your difference.

The “difference” of being an Italian Canadian woman may be recognized on the surface, as Connie describes others seeing her as a person of a certain ethnicity, but there is a lack of understanding of the implications for the women that this difference has. As I will show in the next section, the experience of being a graduate student and an Italian Canadian woman is not a cohesive one but one that often makes the women feel she is consistently playing dual roles. The women missed the opportunity to witness others like them who were from the same background and who also were experiencing graduate school. In other words, the opportunity to not feel like the only representative of your entire ethnic group and the opportunity to discuss the experience of graduate school with someone from the same background was lacking. Prompted or unprompted, all the women I spoke with could easily respond as to whether there were other Italian Canadian women in their graduate programmes, indicating that it was something which all noted. Of course, the women did often find others to whom they could very much relate on several levels in graduate school. Nevertheless, for the majority of participants, the connection with other Italian Canadian women was found outside of graduate school.
Dual Roles

When asked if being a graduate student and being an Italian Canadian woman were compatible, all the participants responded with a resounding “no.” The women were continually struggling to meet the demands of their educational and personal roles. These struggles are present for all students since most play out multiple roles. For Italian Canadian women, some of these roles were in conflict and demanded inordinate amounts of time and energy while at the same time, generating quite a bit of guilt about not meeting all demands. As Kate explains, graduate school is based on a model which does not reflect the reality of an Italian Canadian woman:

> It [family obligations] takes an incredible amount of time. (...but I love doing it. I think you are always fighting to make room for that when you’re a graduate student. The whole philosophy of being a graduate student by most people is that you’re an independent individual, it’s part of the Protestant work ethic, you just work hard, you’re an individual. Your family, you’re supposed to have moved out and distanced yourself from your family and that kind of philosophy contradicts Italian cultural philosophy. So you’re always finding tensions where there’s this sort of conflict because you’re not expected to have commitments but you do, and they are time consuming and they’re draining, they’re emotionally draining; it takes a lot of time and it eats into your time for school work, which then causes tension because then you’re working, working hard to get work done and you don’t have a lot of time so you’re under pressure.

Kate describes so well what all the women experienced in pursuing a graduate education while, simultaneously, continuing to be important members of their families.

The women talk extensively of the important roles they play in their families, both immediate and extended, such as, translators, caregivers, chaperones, and
companions. There are all roles the women were expected and, in most cases, wanted to continue to fulfill. Rita describes her role in the family as “the responsible one” and “the driver of the family; I’m a bit of everything, the one that works; I guess I am the most dependable one.” The women often relish the roles they play in their families and do not seriously consider relinquishing them but they recognize the toll it can take attempting to satisfy all the demands can take. Anna describes the conflict this way, “It’s hard to understand what an Italian daughter is expected to do and have to write a twenty-five page paper for that Friday, it’s hard.” For the participants who have been used to being “good students” as well as “good daughters”, the intensity of study required in graduate school causes conflicts which they have not encountered in the past. They are balancing both roles and attempting to do them both well. They are also typically working for pay in some capacity.

These tensions are acutely felt when it comes to supporting parents through serving as translators or mediators to the wider society. The women are wracked with guilt if they let these roles slide. Connie discusses how this role has evolved for her.

I think because being the oldest I was like the link to the ‘so called’ (...) English community. You know the dependent thing. I was like their link to the outside world.

Connie, along with the other participants, continues to play this role in the lives of her parents. It is a taxing role and one that does not mesh well with the time and commitment needed to be a successful graduate student. This linking role is one that is most likely well known to the child of immigrant parents. Educated in Canada, the child is better versed, even at a young age, than their parents in the norms of Canadian
society. One of the obvious practical constraints of immigrant parents is language which, again, the child will have a better grasp of than the parent. How then does a daughter who is invested in maintaining this role in the family also make time for personal and educational pursuits? How to do this is exactly what the participants’ stories tell us. They “manage”; they stretch themselves, they perhaps sacrifice personal and social time. Many also begin to restrict the duties that they engage in with their families. They pick and choose and attempt to sort out the most crucial aspects of the role, interpreting at a doctor’s appointment, for instance, but missing a family get together.

This dual role does not only impact the women’s relationships with family, but also influences the types of relationships one can have with educational colleagues.

Given the image that Kate describes of the independent scholar committed to academic pursuits that is expected in graduate school, the women strive to live up to this image. In attempting to fit in with this mold, the women often do not ever share with others at school the constraints they may be under or even what their life outside of school is really like. Emma describes herself as a “walking contradiction” when discussing her roles as an Italian Canadian daughter and granddaughter and as a graduate student.

Oh yeah, I’m a walking contradiction. This is one life and then I live a totally different life outside of these walls and it’s like you don’t practice what you preach and you don’t walk the talk, I always feel that.

When asked to elaborate on the contradictions that she sees in her life, Emma talks about the aspects of her personal existence that she keeps from her colleagues at school.

I don’t like, for example, telling people that I’m engaged or I’m getting
married. I don't wear a ring or anything. I just feel it's bourgeois or something.

By the same token, Emma is not comfortable sharing these concerns with friends she has who are not graduate students.

They don't understand all of it. If I were to tell them and say well I feel weird wearing make up to school or I feel weird saying I'm a practicing Catholic, they just don't understand why I would say that.

Emma's comments exemplify the manner in which many participants shift from one role to the other and often attempt to minimize overlap. One participant described phoning home from school to check on a sick grandparent as feeling like a insulated booth came down around her as she called him, separating her from her current setting and conjuring up the home one. There is very little opportunity for the women to interject one role into the other. This caution extends to those with whom they choose to discuss their graduate studies, for in most cases, participants report that there are certain people in their lives with whom they never discuss their studies despite the fact that this is how they spend most of their time and energy. Rita keeps her school life separate from her life outside of school because "my friends outside of university, I don't think they understand what I'm going through, especially my work friends. They've been out of school for awhile. Every time I say I've got this to do at school, or that I like school they say to me that I'm always going to be in school." Keeping the two worlds somewhat separate is a coping strategy these women use almost consistently to move through the various roles they play in each. One can see that there is an element of choice in the women's decisions to do so, but from their point of view, it is a choice they feel they must make. It is stressful to maintain this type of segregation in
one's life and often the women felt torn between their two roles. The next chapter
explores how the influence of “becoming educated” plays out in the women’s lives.
CHAPTER SEVEN

"SURVIVING" GRADUATE SCHOOL: ROLES AND STRATEGIES

The women in this study are members of what Gardner (1993) refers to as a "transition class" because they are the first generation in their family to pursue a higher education. What does it mean for these women to "become educated"? How do they describe the changes they witness in themselves and in their relationships with others? For the most part, the women are able to see clearly what it means to be part of this transition class. There is a varying level of uneasiness with membership in this group. Some of the women understand it as a natural consequence of taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them, while others struggle with what it means for one's place in family of origin and in society in general. In this chapter, I will explore the various ways in which the women adapted to being members of this transition class.

"Crossing the Border"

Inevitably, one experiences changes in thought processes, beliefs and an overall approach to the world through an undertaking such as graduate school. Intellectual growth and social maturation are also parts of this endeavour. One becomes socialized in the ways of the institution in order to function within it and be successful. Graduate school, being a public sphere, is never completely in sync with one's private world. For most students, this venture will involve some level of "border crossing." As discussed in Chapter One, Ogbu points to levels of discontinuity and argues that some discontinuity is unavoidable as we make certain transitions. But the relationship between school and home is more
strained for some students than for others. For students like the ones in this study, who are
the first generation in their family to be educated in this country and then to pursue a
graduate education, the dissonance is much greater. As I noted in reviewing the literature
on this “class” of students, most investigation focuses on their academic experiences and
less so on the private spheres of their lives. In this study, I explore how the changes
required in one sphere, graduate school, impact the private sphere, which in turn,
influences how a student performs in and experiences graduate school.

What does it mean to be a graduate student and a member of this “transition
class”? In his investigation of Italian Canadians in Toronto, Nicholas Harney (1998)
recognizes how education may affect the relationship between immigrant parents and their
Canadian born children:

While more than 70 percent of Italian immigrants arrived with less than
ninth-grade education, in the last twenty years the children of this
migration cohort who had been educated in Canada showed considerable
movement towards attaining or surpassing national educational levels.
This dynamic emphasizes the value immigrant parents have placed on
education for their children. It also indicates conditions that could lead to
conflict and misunderstanding between the migration cohort and their
children because of linguistic, cultural, and aspirational differences.
(Harney 1998: 24)

Although we have seen that there is more involved in the choices of Italian Canadian
women than the values immigrant parents hold regarding education, Harney is correct in
his suggestion that conflict and misunderstanding may arise between the two groups. In
the following section, I will discuss the barriers that exist for the women and the strategies
they use to survive despite the difficulties. I will demonstrate how these strategies of
survival and sometimes resistance form a life approach which the women use in different
spheres of their lives.

In the previous chapter, I quoted Emma, who describes herself as a "walking
contradiction" in that she maintains one public image in her private life and another in her
educational life. This description is one which most of the participants would recognize,
and yet they acknowledge that the shifts that have occurred in their thinking are not easy to
put aside in certain contexts. For example, many defined themselves as feminists, a stance
deply influenced by their experiences in graduate school. Their feminist beliefs were too
important to be enacted or shed depending on the setting. Similarly, the women
considered themselves to have a greater awareness of politics and social issues based on
their educational enterprises. One participant spoke about her summer job in the travel
industry and how her superiors were often surprised by her astute ability to discuss
political and philosophical issues. Her knowledge of world events was not something she
turned off because she was in a situation which did not require such awareness.

As members of a transition class, the women often see themselves as conduits
between their parents' generation, that has had little formal education either in Italy or in
Canada, and the world of educated persons. It is more likely, from the women's own
accounts, that they attempt to bring some of the latter into the former than the other way
around. As we saw in previous chapters, the women were careful about how much of their
personal lives they revealed in their educational settings. As I have discussed, I myself
have struggled with this choice of thesis topic: it has brought my two worlds together and
it has often been daunting and "messy." Overall, the women appear less threatened by making small attempts to share their educational growth with loved ones than they are by the thought of introducing their private life into that of academia. Emma gave an example of this sense of mistrust. Here she discusses how, in her opinion, society seems to work against the maintenance of cultural values:

I’ll give you an example. I was talking to this prof and he didn’t know I was engaged or getting married. (When I told him) he said ‘Oh so do you live together?’ and I said ‘No.’ Live together? Yeah right. And he said ‘Oh my God I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who didn’t live together before they got married.’ You know that kind of stuff, like ‘you’re a nerd’ I felt he was saying to me. Why is that? Whereas if it was my grandmother was sitting there she would be like ‘Are you crazy, live together.’ I don’t think people in these kinds of circles value stuff like that.

Repeatedly in my discussions with the women, they described subtle and overt signals they receive from others in terms of how to conform to the graduate student role. Adapting to this mode of behaviour does not often allow for the reality of being daughters of Italian immigrants. Their lifestyles are not ones that are viewed as the “norm” for graduate students. Fitting into the role comes at a price, but it is necessary to pay it if they are going to succeed as graduate students. If they are to survive in their educational endeavours, they either have to adopt some of the behaviours that are privileged in academic circles or keep their choices hidden.

Patricia sums up well what it means to be a member of the transition class as an Italian Canadian woman:

The second generation is growing up and becoming more affluent. More like less old world, less the country hick, the paesane. And it’s tough because you sort of think to yourself I’m not really ashamed of my parents but I don’t really fit their values. I don’t know if you’ve experienced that?
Because, I mean, all my cousins and I, we were the first to go to university, our parents were working class stiffs who immigrated and had nothing.

Some of the terminology Patricia uses may seem harsh, "country hick" and "working class stiff," but her words speak to her struggle with defining the distance she feels between her current role as graduate student and the family life she has shared with her parents. She is very warm and respectful when she speaks of the upbringing she received and the hard work of her parents. She relies on extreme labels to emphasize the distance that exists between herself, as an academic, and her parents, as uneducated persons. Listening to Patricia, one might make the inaccurate assumption that her relationship with her parents is less than loving when, in fact, this is far from the truth, for as an only child, she is extremely close to her parents. She is merely attempting to sort out for herself what type of relationship with her parents is available to her, they being uneducated "working class stiffs" and she being an educated, upwardly mobile young woman. Like Patricia, all the women adopted certain strategies for carrying out a meaningful life. Below I will outline what I found to be the most typical roles taken up by the women as they negotiated their private lives and graduate school. The four roles I discovered are the teacher, the caregiver, the defector and the good daughter.

Adopting a Role

The roles I will describe below represent the women's attempts to cross the graduate school border by overcoming the barriers confronting them. Overcoming the barriers does not always take the form expected. As Egan (1989) points out in his discussion of graduate school socialization, "For some individuals, adaptation to the new role of professional student may be complicated by the expectation that this role will
supersede all others” (p.203). The Italian Canadian women are such “individuals.” Often they themselves understand that “outside roles generally are seen as a hindrance to progress in the program; other sources of identity are subordinated voluntarily and in some cases forcibly” (Egan 1989: 203). These women are, for the most part, not prepared to relinquish “other sources of identity” and resist having them removed “forcibly.” For example, rather than whole-hearted assimilation of the values and behaviours of graduate education, the women accommodate their behaviour in such a way to be successful educationally while still maintaining control of their own lives. A definite tension exists as they strive to “fit” the role of graduate student and the role of Italian Canadian woman. The tension requires the women to expend a considerable amount of energy on managing it which can often be overwhelming. But the other option, total assimilation to mainstream culture and a rejection of their cultural values, is not a viable one for them.

Like all human dynamics, as contexts change, so do behaviours and relationships. For the most part, however, the women’s behaviour in their personal relationships and educational pursuits fell into one of the four categories mentioned above. The “teacher” role is one that many of the women adopted routinely. While many of the participants resist conveying anything about their educational experiences to their families, “teachers” do so in the hopes that they will be able to impart some of their learning with those who are part of their private lives. For those who adopt the teacher role, it means sharing the educational learnings with loved ones rather than to sharing their culture with people in the educational setting. As noted above, the latter circumstance comes up only rarely.

Women who adopt the second role, the “caregiver,” are those who desire the demands of
pursuing a higher education continue to play an important role in their family in terms of providing for others. Tasks performed are practical as well as emotional. They are the ones to whom others turn when the family experiences even the most minor crisis and for many day to day activities.

Another role, that of the “good daughter,” is exemplified by those women who throughout their educational experiences maintain “the status quo” as it relates to their family and friends. The good daughters are those who keep their lives, educational and private, separate more so than any of the other women do. They do not impose their educational experiences on their families, nor do they impose their cultural background on those in the educational setting. Women who maintain this good daughter role are the least likely to express concerns about role conflicts or struggles with becoming educated. They present a “rosy” image of their lives.

In contrast, those in the “defector” role are the “rebels” of the group. These are the women who during the course of graduate studies pull away from their families and the expectations their families hold for them. Although, to some degree, all the women who participated in this study considered themselves to be rebels, this particular group either made a conscious effort to rebel or, at least, acted in ways they knew would be considered rebellious by others and they recognized the implications of their decision.

These roles reconcile, to a certain extent, the notion of “culturally determined behaviours” (Melendez & Petrovich 1989) with the academic requirements of graduate
education. Although I call them roles, they are truly survival strategies, forms of resistance to the notion that academic success only comes when one turns away from their minority culture. It is critical for these women to maintain significant relationships in their lives as they become educated. In the following discussion, I will elaborate on the four roles I have briefly described. Although we must keep in mind that the women may slip in and out of these roles over their life course, these definitions help illustrate the daily experiences of this “transition class” of women.

The teacher role

The teacher role is one that many of the participants readily adopted. They want to share their knowledge, gained through higher education, with others and expand the horizons for those who have not had the benefit of education. These women often serve as mentors to younger siblings and cousins. They see themselves as pioneers and would like to encourage others to pursue an education. On a wider scale, women who adopted the teacher role are the ones who were also the most likely to belong to community organisations geared towards Italian Canadians, as they felt they had something to "give back" for the opportunities they had received.

Adopting the teacher role can be seen as an attempt to reconcile becoming educated with maintaining a close family relationship. Rather than feel as if one is turning away from relatives by becoming the first to obtain an education, the women who assumed the teacher role attempted to bring this experience to bear on their family relationships.
Emma, who lives with her grandparents and has done so for most of her life, describes how she shares her educational experiences with them on a daily basis:

In terms of my relationships with my grandmother, (as a) student, I’m home a lot during the day so I’ll have lunch with them and so it’s kind of an ongoing discussion. She’ll raise something in the news and say ‘well what do you think about that?’ So I try to explain it to her in the way I kind of see it. So it’s interesting to see how we play off each other and how you’re able almost to, not influence, but kind of inform them on something that they probably never had that perspective before. So in that kind of way I think that they respect me and you know it’s weird, I’m not saying that they take what I say as gospel, not at all, everyone’s entitled to their own opinion but I never saw my grandparents as being political in their opinions. This whole program has given me an opportunity by being there to talk to them about stuff.

Beatrice has a similar experience with her parents. When discussing how her parents’ habits have changed over the years, Beatrice offers the following observations:

Now my parents are listening to CBC but they always used to listen to CHIN (a multicultural radio station); now my parents watch CNN but they always used to watch channel 47 (a multicultural television station). I get them to critically think about sometimes remarks they make, like sexist ones. The fact that I chose not to be a traditional wife, they’ve had to think about those sexist views. I’ve shared some of my writings with them. They haven’t always liked it. I give my mother things to read sometimes on gender socialization and on things around health issues. For the longest time, I didn’t share things with them but then slowly, I would start to in a non-threatening way share things with them.

When discussing how they see themselves influencing their parents’ thinking, the women are hesitant. We can sense in Emma’s piece her hesitancy in describing her actions as influencing her grandparents; instead, she prefers to see her behaviour as “informing” them. For Beatrice, as well, the teacher role is not one she easily assumed upon becoming a graduate student but rather one to which she came to discover as meaningful for her life. Sharing their knowledge and views does not come easily since
these ideas often differ from the ones held in the home. The "teacher" does not want to be seen as better than her "pupils" but simply as someone who has some alternative information and insights available to her. It is a fine line for the women to balance, trying to avoid being perceived as arrogant or patronising rather than generous. Given the importance of these relationships in the women's lives, they are careful not to risk crossing this line. Having said that, the women who assume the teacher role do so with genuine desire to share their opportunities with those around them in order to bridge the gap between the private and public spheres. As a personal benefit, they may find it easier to live in these two spheres if they allow aspects of one to slip into the other. The teacher role is the one that allows the greatest degree of interaction between the two lived spheres. Although, as I have mentioned, the teacher role does not extend from the private lives of the women to their educational ones, it does allow for some continuity in their lives by bringing educational experiences into private life.

The teacher role extends beyond sharing to mentoring. For instance, Anna, who described how her mother had been denied the opportunity to attend university despite having been an excellent student, routinely encouraged her mother to take courses at the local college. Anna was one of the only participants whose parents had any educational experience in Canada. Through her own trials and tribulations with education, Anna came to realize how much her mother had missed. She is greatly disturbed that others in her family did not encourage her mother to pursue further education at this stage of her life when her children were adults. For most of the participants, encouraging parents to pursue further education was not a possibility. Their parents had not been educated in Canada and
many were older and possibly retired. At any opportunity, though, the daughters did encourage their parents in their jobs and in being independent in society in general.

Mentoring of younger relatives was a more prominent trend among participants. For many, the teacher role was one adopted early when it came to younger relatives. Olivia describes the influence she has had on her younger brother’s intellectual development:

As his older sister, I have served as his role model throughout the years. He became exposed to many new things. For instance, he became exposed to my academic work which I must add is feminist in nature, then he became exposed to my poetry and finally he is very conscious of the type of individual that I am – non racist, non-sexist, very generous with friends, always willing to help people.

Many participants suggest that their decision to pursue a graduate education has had a positive effect on the younger members of their families. Younger siblings and cousins see them as a role model and often come to them for advice. Participants saw this interaction as an opportunity to encourage other Italian Canadian young adults to pursue a higher education. As I mentioned earlier, none of the roles I am describing are clear-cut. Although the women chose to take on the role of teacher and mentor, there is, at times, a downside to this role as they see those around them becoming too dependent upon them.

One participant, currently a doctoral student, talks about how her younger cousins turn to her for advice regarding educational choices. All her life, she has provided guidance to them but occasionally now finds it taxing as she feels she “does not have all the answers” and that too much is expected of her as she herself tries “to figure things out.” As the “teachers” become more educated, the role of mentor can become overwhelming as they are expected to use this knowledge to interpret all the intricacies of the system for others as well as for themselves.
The teacher role was taken up by a number of the women, particularly those who were the oldest child in their family. The role extended beyond family members to friends and community members. Once the women entered graduate school, their teacher role became more geared towards “educating” others in terms of critical social thinking. Adopting this role often was a means to control the frustration of “living one life at school and another at home.” Rarely was there a concentrated effort among the women to “educate” their academic colleagues regarding their culture. Instead of sharing aspects of their cultural heritage at school, the women felt more comfortable in their occasional attempts to bring their academic learnings to their private lives. As I have stated, a genuine desire to share their educational opportunities with others is at the root of the teacher role behaviour.

The caregiver role

The caregiver role is not to be mistaken with the teaching one. In taking on the caregiver role, the women “do” for others rather than encourage others to do for themselves. The role of the caregiver can involve translating, taking family members to various appointments, as well as helping out with day to day living in Canadian society. Unlike the teacher role, the caregiver role does not include a desire to bridge the academic world with the private one. In assuming the role of caregiver within their private lives, the women often find that it conflicts with their role as graduate student. For the most part, the women who take on the caregiver role keep it separate from their lives as students as much as possible. For example, one woman gives an example of being late for a graduate course
session and blaming it on traffic rather than admitting to her peers that she was tending to an elderly grandmother. It is more appropriate to give an impersonal explanation than to explain why, as a thirty-year-old woman, she is living with her parents and grandparents. The caregiver role is one that does not easily mesh with the graduate student profile; yet it was one that is taken up by a number of the women.

When asked to describe their current role in their family of origin, women who were caregivers described themselves using terms similar to a participant who said she was her "parents' confidante, listening to their worries, concerns and giving them support."

Kate describes her role as caregiver in the following manner:

I'm the one who takes care of everyone. I take care of most of my mother's finances. I'm kind of responsible for making sure that everybody's okay. So if something goes wrong, I'm the person they call either if it's because of the work that I do that I'm much more flexible than other people. So I'm the kind of person who makes sure that everything is going on.

Connie also provided a vivid description of how she carries out the caregiver role in her family and how it began early for her:

I know that, on occasion, when they would go to parent teacher meetings, they [her parents] would come back and they would tell me everything the teacher told them about the two of us (her and her brother). Then if they had a question or something, they would ask me what I thought. Should we call the teacher about this and I'd say, 'no don't worry about it.'

It is difficult for some to imagine the sense of accountability a young child would feel when burdened with this information. Only a few years older than her sibling, Connie is expected to act in a parental role in terms of her brother's education and is obliged, to a great extent, to assume responsibility for her own education. Connie is not only required to know those aspects of student progress usually reserved for teachers and parents, but
also to make decisions about whether a school issue is serious enough to warrant contacting a teacher. For her parents who have no experience with the Canadian school system, Kate becomes the "expert" on educational matters. Many of the women who were the eldest child in their families described having this type of obligation at a young age.

Women who had older siblings also report that they often relied on these siblings for assistance with school matters. I myself recall sharing my school concerns with my older brother almost daily as an elementary and high school student. Although it is not unreasonable to expect older siblings to assist younger ones with schoolwork, what these women describe extends beyond the tutoring I outlined in the discussion of the teacher role. These women took on the task of decision-making regarding their siblings' education. Immigrant parents, unsure of the system, depended on their older children to guide them in their role as parents within the school system. One can envision how taking on this charge from an early age would translate into being a lifelong caregiver within the family. Again, for these women, being oriented towards family and others' needs is a large part of their lives. Repeatedly, I have shown examples of how the women have kept their responsibilities to their families and their family lives hidden in the academic context for fear of being misunderstood, ridiculed and not considered "serious" students. The caregiver does her work in private and receives no recognition for it despite the tension it may create in meeting her educational goals.

When asked about the current situation, Connie continues by stating that "I always have felt a lot of responsibility, always." This sense of duty propels the women to
continue in the role of caregiver regardless of other responsibilities, including advanced
education. For most women, this role extended beyond their immediate family. Rita lists
many of the tasks that she performs for her extended kin: “They’re asking for checks to be
written, or to read a bill. Today it was filling out an application for having someone shovel
snow in front of their house. So there’s always something like that.” Women are loath to
relinquish these roles, although they are very aware of the toll it takes on their lives and
that, often, family members can be overly dependent on them. The caring behaviour
appears to be an attempt by the women to remain a central figure in their family’s lives
while they venture out into more foreign territory, namely, graduate school. By carrying
on the role of caregiver, they are providing a service and comfort to those close to them
and maintaining these important relationships. The behaviours of caregivers are not
unfamiliar to women in general, since they incorporate the nurturing of others, something
which women in our society often supply.

In providing care and thus, being needed by family members, the caregivers enjoy
the sense of fulfilment which can result from this type of behaviour. In many ways, these
relationships provide the women with practical and emotional support as well. The caring
behaviour may also be viewed as a defensive response taken by the women to keep them
connected to their family members as they move away from them in many aspects of their
lives. Unlike the teaching role that attempts to bridge the gap between private and
educational life, caregivers keep their two lives separate.

*The defector role*
The third role I discovered among Italian Canadian female graduate students was that of the defector or rebel. In taking on this role, the women moved away from their families and their culture and became more strongly identified with their academic pursuits. To some extent, all the women were rebels as they pursued a less traditional path by attending graduate school. But the 'defectors' chose to move away from their backgrounds rather than attempting to bridge their educational and private lives as did others. Nevertheless, it was rare to be a total defector and some moved from one role to another over time. What is interesting is that for some members of this group, it was other people, more than themselves, who describe them as rebels. Often membership in this group had more to do with how others perceived them than with how they perceived themselves. Rebels suffered consequences for their actions that others did not seem to confront. It is difficult to decipher whether their behaviour was actually more extreme or if context led to their being defined as rebels.

For Helen, this conflict played out in many ways. In her choice of universities, she disappointed her mother, particularly when in graduate school she decided to leave her home city. In turn, she has refused to learn to speak Italian fluently by speaking in English to family members and has never taken courses in the subject. She suggests that by making different choices, she has resisted fitting into the mould expected by those around her. She says that as a consequence she is given less respect in her family than others her age receive. In fact, as means of isolating her from them, her extended family refers to her as the "mangiacake." This term is one that Italian Canadians have adopted in referring to non-Italians, in particular, those from an Anglophone background. Although the term is
not necessarily derogatory, it does serve as a strong marker of “other” in the Italian Canadian community. The message to Helen is clear, then, that through her choices and her independence, she no longer qualifies, as an Italian Canadian but has become an other. To some extent, the use of this label may be less of an attempt at exclusion than a means to pressure her into reclaiming her roots by changing her lifestyle and some of her choices.

Rebelling by attending graduate school was also how Olivia’s behaviour was interpreted, particularly by her father who felt strongly that she needed to pursue paid employment. As the family struggled financially, Olivia’s choice to attend graduate school was seen as a direct affront to her family’s well-being. She felt the sting of this appraisal throughout her time in graduate school and yet persevered in the decision that she felt would most benefit her future. For both these women, it was necessary that they make sacrifices in their personal relationships in order to make choices that made the most sense to them. Although the choice was theirs to make, the manner in which others reacted to them defined their behaviour as rebellious. The women themselves understood that their choices would not meet others’ expectations, but they perhaps did not realize how severe the consequences would be.

Maria is a participant who could be described as having taken up the defector role in a more conscious manner than the others. Although, like the others, much of her rebellion was defined by others’ reactions, she interpreted her behaviour as rebellious and recognized the impact her educational pursuits have had on her lifestyle choices.

The more educated (I have become), the more firm I became with my assertiveness, the no thing, the refusing category. I’m learning to say no
much more. For awhile, (starting) about 5, 6 years ago, there was a lot of resentment from my family because I didn’t choose to play the role and they blamed school for that. My moving away from them, this is how they felt, I was moving away from them was because of school. And the reason that I was saying no to everything was because of school, not realizing that I loved school because I want to say no, I don’t want to play the role. I’m not going to get married and have ten kids tomorrow because I want to go to school. It’s sort of transferring anger or whatever you want to call it but my decision to come to school is because I want to be independent. I don’t want to wait for Mr. Right to come along and I’ve always been that way. I mean, I don’t know why my mom was even surprised. I’ve told her from when I was a kid, ‘I’m not getting married, I’m going to school. If I get married and have kids it will be later in my thirties or something before I can’t have any more’.

In Maria’s view, the choice was stark: pursue an education and be a rebel or get married and have a family and fulfill others’ expectations. Her choice to rebel forces her to lose some of the intimacy she has shared with her family. Like Helen, her family has defined her as different because of her choices. In Maria’s case, her family clearly ascribes the cause of her behaviour to her graduate education. Because she chose to embrace education she automatically became a rebel who forfeited the opportunity to fit into her family’s expectations. Over the years, her family “has gotten used to” her lifestyle and choices, but clearly, she has lost something in her relationships with the people most close to her. They attempt to understand her behaviour and can only conclude that in choosing education, she has rejected them. While we saw above how some of the other women attempt to diffuse this type of interpretation of their behaviour by sharing their growth with others or continuing their roles as caregivers, rebels do not do this. They make a clear choice for school over traditional roles and close relationships with loved ones.

Again, it is not to say that these women did not have relationships with their families, but that they have sacrificed some of the closeness and support available there by
pursuing academics. One can understand why the defector role was not as popular a choice as the other roles. The sacrifices made by the rebels were greater than those made by the "teacher", "caregiver" or "good daughter". Most women chose to be "selective rebels": to rebel by pursuing a graduate education while maintaining an important position in their loved ones' lives by being teachers or caregivers. For example, Beatrice, who I described above as having taken on the teacher role, would also consider some of her behaviour rebellious. She married in her early thirties, has not chosen to have children yet, and lives apart from her husband for most of the week in order to pursue her graduate education. So although she carries out the teacher role in her family on her regular basis, the manner in which she has currently chosen to structure her life is definitely interpreted as rebellious by herself and her family. Therefore, the role of defector is one that is not often taken up fully, the consequences being so severe. What behaviour is considered defiant is not always defined by the women themselves but by those around them and can depend on the context.

The good daughter role

The last role I discovered is, like the rebel, one that is rarely taken up exclusively. Most women adopted the "good daughter" role sporadically. The good daughter role is one in which the women appear to make very few adjustments to their lives and relationships based on the experiences of being a graduate student. They have always been contributing members of their families and continue to be throughout their academic pursuits. These women are less likely to suggest that there is any conflict in their lives due to having made the choice to pursue a graduate education. It did not appear in our
discussions that they were attempting to conceal any conflict from me. The detailed
descriptions of their lives they provided indicate to me that they do, in fact, have little
conflict in their experiences. Again, many of the behaviours of the good daughter role are
in evidence in many of the participants' interactions with others, but few would fit this
category on an ongoing basis. The good daughters, for the most part, keep their academic
and family lives separate, only occasionally bringing some of their academic experiences
into their private life, but like the others, rarely the other way around.

Francesca is one woman who embodied this role. She continued to live with her
parents in her childhood home as she pursued her doctoral degree. She described a close
relationship with them and her sibling who also lived in the family home. The family
continued to have dinner together most nights during which they had lively discussions.
Although time constraints have arisen due to her advanced studying even this has not
cased conflict in the household since her parents “understand.” When asked if her
relationship with her family had changed over the course of graduate school Francesca,
unlike most of the women, suggested “I think we’ve become even closer now.” She goes
on to say that she shares some of her learnings with her parents and feels that they are
interested. In describing her relationship with them, she states, “I feel like I’ve matured
more; they’re not parents but friends now.” Her relationship with her parents is not
strained in any way due to her pursuit of a graduate education. Francesca continues to
participate as a full member of her immediate family and for, the most part, also with
extended family. She also continues to serve as a companion for her parents as required in
their dealings with various institutions.
Francesca did not connect with her graduate school colleagues in the sense that she had any personal dealings with them beyond academics. She maintains relationships with her friends from high school who still live in her neighbourhood. Many of these friends are currently in the workforce having completed an undergraduate or college programme. She did admit that she rarely discussed her academic pursuits with them but did not feel that that was a strain on her friendships. Francesca engaged in paid labour both in her academic department as well as in a retail environment. She has had the latter job for many years and has found the staff there supportive of her academic pursuits and the management understanding when she needed time off for school reasons. It would appear that for Francesca the “pieces” of her life fit more neatly than for many of the other women. She compartmentalized her life, as did many of the other women, but she did not define this separation as a source of conflict.

Diane is also a woman who takes on the role of good daughter. Although she pursued a graduate education, she did so only after becoming a teacher as her parents encouraged her to do. She continues to care for her family as a go-between, mediating between them and society in general. She does not allow her higher education to influence the relationship she has with them. Diane does not share the details of her educational undertakings with her parents. While she was studying for her Master’s degree, her mother would tell people she was taking courses so she could become a principal. For Diane’s mother, the only way of making sense of more education for, in her opinion, her already well-educated daughter, was to understand that she was doing so in order to
advance in her career. Diane clearly stated that her parents had not ever been a part of her educational choices or experiences, although they did offer financial and emotional support. Diane was more critical than Francesca in that she believes that her background limited her choices, and yet she also lives her personal relationships as if her pursuit of higher education was simply a side line activity.

Although many of the women describe close relationships with their families, they often speak of the dissonance that arises as they live daily lives that are completely different than those of their families. This type of disengagement is minimised for those taking up the role of good daughters. They usually speak Italian fluently, are close to family members, and are able to participate fully in family life. On the other hand, these women still do well in school. The one difference that seems to arise is that these women are not likely to be involved in university life beyond their studies. They have the same friends that they had as undergraduates and even high school students; they live lives that are very similar to those they had prior to graduate school in many aspects. Graduate school for these women appears to be a type of activity they go off to everyday as one would a job and then return to a home setting that remains constant over the years.

Conclusion

It is important in considering these roles to keep in mind the influence of gender. Although the women’s ethnicity obviously shapes their experiences, gender does as well. This research does not consider Italian Canadian men’s interactions with education and with their families. We cannot, then, firmly conclude that their stories would be similar or
different to the women's. In the women's accounts, however, they do suggest that the
responsibilities that they take on towards their families are not being met by anyone else.
Some of the women specifically state that their male relatives do not appear to feel the
need to fulfill certain familial needs. These same women do consciously relate their sense
of duty towards their kin to their gender, the others did not. The roles I have discussed are
not incongruent with ones which can be commonly observed being taken on by women in
our society. The roles of teacher and caregiver and the types of behaviors associated with
being a good daughter are all very feminized. Even in considering the defectors, one
wonders if men would be construed as defiant for pursuing a graduate education.
Therefore, although I have used ethnicity as the lens through which to examine the
women's experiences, the findings of this research, particularly the typology discussed in
this chapter, point to influences of gender.

Although the women tended to lean towards one role or another, there was overlap
in these roles and no one person maintained one role steadily. As members of a transition
class, the first in their families to receive a higher education, the women found creative and
meaningful ways in which to live their lives and maintain their relationships. In my
analysis of the data, I have identified four roles in an attempt to make sense of the
women's various ways of adapting to life as graduate students. In adopting one of these
four roles, the women have made choices on several fronts, for example, how much of
their educational pursuits to share with loved ones or how much of their time to allot to
education versus personal pursuits. Inevitably, there were constraints placed on the
women by their families of origins, their ethnic backgrounds and finally their desire to be
graduate students. The roles they took up were based on many factors, including personal temperament, birth order, relationships with family and academic interests. Although some choices may have felt more like necessities than options, somehow they make it work for them. None of the women expressed great despair or sorrow over their lives. There were certainly some regrets or feelings of deprivation but overall the women were positive and engaged in proposeful lives. As I have already described, although their behaviours did not always fit neatly into one category, the women did tend to gravitate towards one of the four roles. The women I defined as adopting the teacher and caregiver roles seemed most self-aware of their behaviours, while the good daughters were much less aware, and the defectors were often the most confused about how they fit in with others, both in their personal and academic lives. Generally, the roles allowed them to co-ordinate their lives in a manner that made sense to them.
CHAPTER EIGHT
EXPERIENCING ETHNICITY

In this chapter, I will discuss the women’s perceptions of their ethnicity and how it has influenced their lives, particularly around education. Ethnicity has been the basis for this dissertation, and in this chapter I will continue to discuss the women’s educational experiences, stressing how their ethnic background has shaped these and other experiences in their lives. Ethnicity has played a large role, as we have seen, in the women’s opportunities, choices and decisions.

While my discussions with the women were centred on educational experiences, ethnicity played a large role in the dialogue. Obviously, the women’s awareness of my research topic and my line of questioning encouraged them to discuss issues of ethnicity. I also asked the women several questions directly about their ethnic identities and how their ethnic background has shaped their experiences, although I do believe that ethnicity is a topic that would have arisen regardless. My membership in the same ethnic group was one factor that would have brought the topic up. Moreover, our discussions demonstrate that ethnicity is a central part of the women’s lives, and thus it would be difficult to negate its influence in their lived experiences. As already shown, ethnicity plays a sometimes subtle, sometimes overt role in their daily lives.

All the women identified with being from an Italian background. As I have described, they all experienced being the children of immigrants as having a profound
effect on their lives. Being of a particular ethnic background also impacted on life experiences. I found that as Ng states, for some, “their ethnicity is forever with them as part of their everyday lives” (Ng 1981: 101). This statement is true not only true for the participants’ immigrant parents, but also seems to describe the experiences of the next generation. Although the women grew up in Canada, their attachment to an Italian ethnic culture is strong. In considering ethnic groups and their survival, Reitz states that:

> In terms of generational succession, the typical ethnic community lifecycle extends over a very long period of time. There is a decline in ethnic attachments, but these attachments do not disappear. The second generation is typically influenced by the immigrant condition; so too is the third. (Reitz 1980:135)

I certainly found that the women in this study had “attachments” to their ethnicity. For most, these “attachments” took the form of family relationships, language, and culture.

The women usually self-identified as Italian Canadian with a strong sense of belonging to an ethnic group which, although a large one in Canada, is still considered a minority group. This identification is what Reitz refers to as “ethnic identification, the feeling of belonging to a nationality group based on ethnic origin” (Reitz 1980: 92). In discussing the women’s ethnicity or ethnic identity, I will be referring to this definition. The women expressed their Italianess in various ways, but for all it was an all-encompassing phenomenon that could not be subtracted from any of their experiences. Their ethnicity permeated all their life choices and lived realities. It also became evident that, as mentioned in Chapter One, the women had multiple identities. They could not separate what it meant to be a woman, middle class, working class or an
academic from their ethnic identity. They were Italian women, middle class Italians, or Italian academics. Sometimes they “blended in”, other times they did not. But whether or not others perceived their difference, it was unlikely that the women could disengage their self-identity from their ethnic one. None of the women looked at me strangely when I asked if they identified more with being Italian or with being Canadian. None asked me to explain the question or repeat it. The question of whether we are Italian or Canadian is one with which, as children of immigrants, we struggle every day. In this chapter, I will discuss how the women described their ethnicity and their identity and how they describe the Italian community in Canada and their place within it.

In discussing ethnicity, the women relied heavily on personal experience. How did they experience their ethnicity? We have seen from previous discussion, that for some, it was something to be hidden and ashamed of, to be engaged in only in the private sphere and even then possibly not accepted. For others, it was a cornerstone of their lives which they currently cultivated and embraced, as they joined clubs and celebrated it in different arenas. In order to understand the women’s experiences of ethnicity, we have to think back to the context in which they would have experienced it throughout their lives. There have been many stereotypes of Italians over the years, from sources of cheap labour to perpetrators of organized crime. Italian food, once thought to be "strange and foreign," is now regarded as one of the most desirable cuisines in Canada. Beatrice sums it up well when she explains that as an elementary and high school student, she avoided inviting friends home so as to not have to explain the “smell of parmesan cheese, parsley and fresh tomato” in her home. Today, she says,
"Now that’s so trendy. Oh, aren’t my parents cool? Everyone’s like you have the best parents, they’re so cool, they’re so welcoming. Take all the wine, look at your dad’s home made salami. Now it’s cool [but] for twenty years I was embarrassed to all hell!"

Beatrice’s experience is quite common among the women. As children and teenagers, they found they were often embarrassed about many aspects of their Italian culture, while today many of these same traits are highly regarded and admired by society at large, particularly when it comes to Italian cuisine. Discussing something as basic as food may seem trite and superficial in this context, but again, it provides an excellent indicator of how, in recent years, things Italian have joined the mainstream. For the women, it is a bittersweet irony that something that has caused them so much discomfort in the past is now regularly accepted. Connie describes how the food she brought from home isolated her and her Italian friends in the highly self-conscious years of high school.

We’d [her friends] open our lunch bags and we’d have veal with peppers or whatever and you know the typical thing, whatever it was rice balls. And they were looking at us like we were from another planet because we were eating something different or the bread was different. We didn’t have you know so-called ‘white bread’ exactly we had buns. (…) Oh now it’s completely different, now they want our lunch.

Again, food was one marker of Connie’s difference which may have hindered her being accepted as a mainstream student in her high school despite the presence of other Italians. She also realizes things have changed. I do not want to belabour the issue of food, but I do want to caution that simply the proliferation of Italian restaurants in most major centres in Canada and the general acceptance of Italian food cannot be
taken as an indication that Italian Canadians are now considered mainstream. That
would be an overly simplistic interpretation of the matter. The popularity of a particular
style of cooking does not disrupt existing power structure and social inequities. But as
the brief discussion has shown, the changes in Canadian society’s attitudes towards
Italian food have had an impact on how the women in this study experience their
ethnicity.

Ethnicity is something that can “interfere” with others’ perceptions. The women
contend that most often by their names and sometimes by their appearance, others knew
that they were from an Italian background. Although the women did not make a
concentrated effort to hide this fact, they expressed a certain level of discomfort about
what they considered to be prejudgment by others. The women discussed how by
simply knowing that they were Italian Canadians, others would make assumptions about
their lives, their skills and their abilities. Here is a personal example: upon being hired
for a job and being introduced to the supervisor, he, after hearing my name, said “oh we
already have four Italians in this department; we had better watch out.” Prior to having
any relationship to me, this person thought he knew something about me, and for
reasons based on stereotypes felt he had “better watch out.” Many of the women
discussed this phenomenon and how disconcerting it could be. One woman asked,
“Why does that person have to have something on me just because of my last name?”
Their sense is that preconceptions are well developed before a person has had the
chance to get to know the women. One woman described it in the following manner.

It fits into that whole pre-notion, like a stigma, you’re labeled. They
know what you’re about. You don’t even have to speak; we’ve already
made a decision, we know what you’re all about, everywhere you came from, you probably have relatives in construction, this, that, boom, boom, everything’s done. You don’t have to explain anything.

The women felt cheated by this attitude as they felt they did not have the opportunity to be judged on their own performance or merit. The women believed that stereotypes about Italians hurt their ability to be well perceived by others, especially in the realms of education and employment. As women in higher education, where they were often the only Italian Canadians in their immediate environment, it was often isolating and demoralizing to be subjected to stereotypes based on their ethnicity and not to be judged on their individual efforts. However, many women resisted the temptation to go “underground” with their ethnicity. They refused to pronounce their names in a more anglicized manner as they claimed other family members did, and they overtly challenged those who expressed prejudiced views based on their ethnicity.

**The Centrality of Family**

What does it mean to the women to be Italian Canadians? Resisting the definitions of others, what attributes do the women attach to their ethnic background? In defining her Italian ethnicity, one woman mentions “number one family, number two friends with a common background,” while another describes that being Italian to her is about “working hard and being a good Catholic.” These four topics, along with language, typically arose when the woman described what it meant to be Italian. Throughout this discussion, we have seen the women describe the importance of family in their lives. This centrality of family is something they ascribe to their culture. They
remark that many of the Italian Canadian families they know maintain this type of emphasis. Some women remark that they do not necessarily witness the same phenomena in families of other cultures, and this is another indicator to them of their membership in a particular group.

Extended family and friends of the same background also play an important role in the lives of Italian Canadian women. Family friends, in particular, are significant for families where a parent immigrated without their extended family. Often friends from the same village in Italy, also living in Canada, step in and fulfill the central role of family. Throughout our discussion, for example, Helen kept referring to a woman as her aunt and then quickly followed up by saying “she is not really my aunt, but I call her my aunt” since this woman served that function in Helen’s family which did not include many extended family members in Canada.

Many of the women also spoke of the importance of Italian Canadian friends in their own lives, as children and now as adults. The women share a certain kinship with these friends that they do not share with others. There is a deeper understanding among these friends and a possibility of retaining some of the language and customs of the Italian culture in their presence. At the moment of immigration, “Groups of immigrants, by banding together, can be indispensable in helping with the practical problems of adjustment to the new society” (Reitz 1980: 17). Like their immigrant parents before them these women are searching for a community which can support them, if not practically, emotionally. The question of who makes up this community for Italian
Canadian women graduate students is not as straightforward as it may have been for newly arrived immigrants. As I will discuss, the women do not always feel connected to other Italian Canadians simply based on a shared ethnic background. Shared goals and life choices are also important in defining a sense of community.

Consistently, the theme of hard work came up in our discussions. Women emphasized the amount of hard work carried out by immigrant parents in order to provide comfortable lives for their families. Also, part of the discussion was the hard work that the women themselves had carried out in order to be successful in Canadian society. All of the women describe some level of struggle both in their parents' lives and in their own where hard work has been involved. This theme is part of what the women consider to be their ethnic identity, stemming both from the original culture pre-immigration and from the newly formed culture in Canada. As has been discussed, most immigrant parents originated from rural families where all members contributed to household maintenance through some form of physical labour. Upon immigration, the type of labour carried out changed, for the most part, from agricultural to industrial (i.e., factory work, construction) but the element of everyone contributing to the household continued and was perhaps even strengthened in this foreign context. There was and, in many cases, there still is a sense that only as a group is survival possible. The idea of the "individual" making it on his or her own is not strong in the Italian culture.

Throughout our discussions, the women mentioned examples of how families came together in the new country as a means of survival. Immigrant parents lived with
relatives, relatives purchased homes together, relatives assisted each other in finding jobs and with childcare. Many of the women were cared for by their grandmothers while others were also looked after by other female relatives at different points in their lives. Indeed, the very act of immigrating was often described as an effort for the benefit of the family. Repeatedly, immigrants in my earlier study (Mazzuca 1995) stated that their own parents had immigrated, bringing their families with them, for the sake of their children. The desire for children to have opportunities not available to them in the country of origin and the possibility of the parents making a better living to support the family were key incentives for immigration. In considering migrations, Noivo states that they are “more often a family rather than an individual enterprise, are generally based on a clearly defined family economic project. Material conditions favourable to ‘having a family life,’ to raise children, and provide them a future are invariably reported as the main reasons behind international displacements” (Noivo 1993: 67).

Although, for most women, a sense of caring and support is still evident in their nuclear families, it is less so in extended families. As the families have become more self-sufficient and even prosperous, there are fewer instances of mutual support. As Beatrice explains, the lifestyles led by most of her extended family today make it difficult to maintain the same types of relationships that immigrant families once had when they relied more upon each other:

We certainly did at the time (when she was a child), I think like everyone else once you come to Canada and start to sort of get a mortgage and pay your bills (…) extended family becomes less important. I started to understand the importance of extended family when I was planning my
wedding and how much support I got from everyone. You still get a lot of b.s., but you get support. There's the give and take. But we're not as close as I wish we could be and I think the main reason for that is that god awful thing called time and I fight it everyday.

Despite the difficulties of keeping up with extended family, most of the women did feel that their relationships with extended family were an important part of their lives. Again, relationships are part of how they define their ethnicity. The nuclear family, as we have seen, does occupy a central role in their daily lives. The notion of the group as more important than the individual has not been completely eradicated with immigration. Although this type of thinking may no longer be necessary, as Italian Canadians become educated and self-sufficient, it does remain within the collective psyche of both immigrants and their children. As one participant noted, the word privacy does not exist, literally, in the Italian language. She goes on to say “my father built the house that we’re in and he should not have put in any doors because they don’t exist.”

Most of the women describe the same situation where the individual is not a concept readily used in the Italian Canadian home. Most living is done in communal parts of the home, bedrooms are simply a place to retire to at night for sleeping and not private sanctuaries for children or adults. Independence was also not a popular notion in their lives. A quantitative study which examined the values of parents from four immigrant groups to North America (Italian-Canadians, Greek-Canadians, Japanese-Canadians and Portuguese-Americans) and their counterparts in each of the countries of origins, found what they called, “the distinctively Italian reluctance to encourage
independence” (Lambert 1987: 15). This finding was true for both Italians who had immigrated to Canada and those who remained in Italy. A collective approach to life seems deeply ingrained in the Italian psyche. It has most likely served many purposes over the years, both prior to and after immigration, some of which I have already discussed, but this approach has strong implications for Italian Canadian women graduate students.

At many levels, the women appreciated the group mentality of their families which afforded them much support and comfort throughout their lives. But Diane provides a vivid description of life as an Italian Canadian:

I’ve always described Italian families as a double-edged sword. The closeness is there and it’s wonderful when you need it but yet if you really wanted to be free of it, it would be a really difficult decision because it’s not something that people would encourage you to do.

Another participant expresses the same view of the culture, “I love the sense of community and in some ways I hate it.” Most of the women would agree with these descriptions of the Italian family. They definitely appreciate the sense of structure and support they have received over the years, but did often find the relationship stifling. The support comes at the price that they themselves continue to be contributing members of the family, mostly on the emotional level, as material survival is not the challenge it once was.

The centrality of family in the lives of the women has been evidenced throughout the discussion on their educational experiences. They have benefited from the support the family has provided while struggling to meet the competing demand of
graduate education, where there are expectations to act independently. Not only does this have implications for them as they attempt to reconcile their cultural values of group cohesion with those of independence, but it also has practical ones. It puts them in a position of being expected to be independent scholars with few outside responsibilities while they are very much participating in family life and all its expectations. As discussed in Chapter Seven, socialization or professionalization are important aspects of graduate education. The image of the independent individual is strongly associated with professionals in many fields and the women express struggling to match this image.

In tracing the origins of professionalization in the last half of the nineteenth century and the introduction of women to professional lives, Glazer and Slater explain that "successful professionals were objective, competitive, individualistic, and predictable; they were also scornful of nurturant, expressive, and familial styles of personal interaction" (Glazer and Slater 1987: 14). Many of these expectations exist today. The women experience difficulties in being "professionals" in the competitive academic setting given their family life based on cooperation. In her consideration of professional socialization in graduate school, Egan (1989), as has been mentioned, discusses how important this process can be to a student’s success. In regards to some of the issues discussed in this section, she states that graduate school serves to “foster independence from fellow students, encouraging an atmosphere of competition rather than cooperation” (Egan 1989: 202). As quoted earlier, a few of the women mention being disturbed by this atmosphere of rivalry. One woman dismissed pursuing a
particular area of study because she worried it would be “too competitive”. In light of
the discussion above regarding the importance of relationships in the women’s lives,
one can surmise that they would struggle with some of the demands of independence in
work habits and work styles required in university.

**Italian Canadian Identity**

Identity is an interesting issue to probe in the case of these women who are from
an Italian background but who have been born or lived most of their lives in Canada.
Despite what appears to be a full participating role in Canadian society and culture,
most of the women identified more strongly with being Italian than being Canadian.
Their sense of identity was anything but clear cut. Even as they claim that they feel
Italian first and Canadian second, there are exceptions and different contexts that
influence their identity. As Kate describes, “I consider myself Italian Canadian. Yes, I
identify more with the Italian culture, although if I were in Italy, I would say I was
Canadian, but in the context here, I identify myself as Italian Canadian.” Identity is
structured around distinguishing themselves from others. Here, in Canada, Kate and the
other women do experience themselves as different from mainstream Canadians and so
attribute this to their Italian culture, although she recognizes that in Italy she would also
be different due to her “Canadianness”.

When discussing why as persons born in Canada, Italian Canadians should feel
less Canadian than others, one participant responded, “they are part of the soil, we are
part of the concrete,” referring to large role Italians have played in construction in
Canada. Connie talks about being an Italian Canadian, “I am Canadian by my birth certificate because I was born here but the essence of me is Italian.” She goes on to say that:

In that definition of the Italian hyphenated Canadian, I feel more Italian than Canadian. That’s how I feel, because of my language, because of my belief system, value system, culture, tradition, whatever.

Most of the women struggled at some level to define their identity. Some recognized that as children of Italian immigrants, they were not quite Canadian and yet they do not identify with the Italians around them. Helen explains:

See, the thing is I don’t identify with my family. That’s the problem because I find that all my cousins my age haven’t moved on, they’re stuck in that mentality of our parents. I think the problem is they only associated with Italians. I find my family very ethnocentric, Italians are the best and nothing else is going to change it. Whereas I think I’ve come to appreciate other cultures. I still think of myself as Italian but I don’t know if I identify with the Italian Canadians. It’s because I don’t know that many and the ones that I know I don’t identify with at all.

In my discussion with a participant who was also studying Italian Canadians in her graduate work I asked her if she felt a connection with other Italian Canadians. Her response was:

That’s a really good question because I sometimes feel like a phony. Throughout this whole process of writing up my proposal, writing up, interviewing people, trying to speak the language, trying to get re-oriented to myself, re-integrate myself in the community, I have felt like a phony, a complete phony. First of all, like you said, there are not many Italian Canadian academics and you know, I’m supposed to be this academic and yet I’m supposed to be this Italian Canadian as well. Like my Italian is okay, it’s passable but it’s not as fluent, I’m not a linguist and I can’t stress that enough, I have felt like a complete phony, like half the time I think I am a mangiacake.

For this woman, straddling the roles of researcher/academic and Italian Canadian
"insider" was difficult, as the roles did not seem compatible. As someone who has moved away from her ethnic background in her pursuit of higher education, she is finding it difficult to re-integrate herself. She has not been an active member of the Italian Canadian community for several years and yet, has chosen a thesis topic which focuses on Italian Canadians. Her Italian ethnicity is an entry ticket to the Italian Canadian community and yet, again, she feels like a "phony" as she struggles to fulfill her insider role.

The question of identity is not a simple one for the women. Although most think of themselves as Italian first it is always within the Canadian context. And in this social milieu, they often struggle with what it means to be Italian Canadian. For many, the lack of Italian Canadians to whom they can directly relate in their daily non-familial activities makes it even more difficult to define themselves. Emma expressed concern for the Italian culture in Canada in general, as did many others:

I think that a lot of things that kept us separate or not separate but customs and traditions that identify us as who we are as a group of people I think you're not going to really see that in twenty years from now. I think it's going to be less and less of an issue. Like look at myself: it's disgusting, you know. I'm really first generation, I'm the first generation born here, and I don't even speak Italian. I mean like that to me is truly disgusting. I think that the processes we go through, work, school, they all seek to kind of destroy that. I don't think consciously, I don't think school seeks to do that but I think it's really hard to be that person in this culture.

The women worry about how the culture will be maintained in Canada and what shape it would take in the years to come. For some, the maintenance of the language was the key to the future of the culture and they made a conscious effort to speak the
language and intended to teach it to their children. For others, simply the continued
closeness of family was seen as enough to maintain an Italian Canadian culture. There
was always an awareness that Italian Canadian culture was something that had evolved
due to the immigrant experience and was influenced by the Canadian context. It was
also evident, then, that over time this culture could continue to be shaped. The
women’s views reveal that “ethnicity and ethnically based ascription are emergent
phenomena” (Yancey, Ericksen and Juliani 1976: 392). Culture was not seen as
something static, and several women commented on how different the Italian Canadian
culture was than the current Italian culture. Many of the women discussed how they
speak regional dialects common in pre-war Italy rather than the proper Italian language
prevalent in Italy today. One woman joked how in a few years, when the older
generation was no longer around, she would have no one left to speak dialect with since
dialects are rarely used today. The women are also aware that the Italian Canadian
culture is one based on the mores and values of a World War Two Italy. Immigrants
clung to these values in an attempt to retain their distinctiveness in a new country.

Early on in this research, I interviewed a woman who I did not subsequently
consider a participant, as she did not meet the criteria outlined for this study (see
Chapter Four). This woman had immigrated to Canada from Northern Italy with her
family in the seventies rather than during the post war period. She spoke of the
differences she noted between the Italians she encountered living in Canada, her own
family, and the Italians living in Italy. She found the Italian Canadians “old fashioned”
in their views compared to Italians currently living in Italy, more comparable to her
grandparents' generation, although they were of her parents' generation.

Therefore, although the women discussed their ethnicity and their identity, they struggled to pinpoint exact definitions of either concept. Both of these attributes are fluid experiences, both on the personal and group level. Just as Italian Canadian immigrants have over time developed a culture, so, too do the women continue to define their ethnic identity in those terms.

**Italian Canadian Community**

In discussing the current Italian Canadian community, the conversation turned to the feelings of this group around education. The women expressed their views on what value Italian Canadians currently put on education. For the most part, the women think that Italian Canadians believe that education is an important pursuit. They value the opportunities that education offers. In particular, immigrant parents perceive education as the chance they never had to be part of mainstream Canada. The possibility of being educated is not one that they would like their children to miss.

Despite the belief that Italian Canadians are supportive of education and view a higher education as valuable, many of the women also have some doubts about how far this appreciation of education goes. When asked about the attitude of Italian Canadians toward education, Rita responded,

That's a tough one. I have some that encourage me ... and then I have those again, the stereotypical, when are you going to get married? How old are you? But I think in terms of education, they all value it, most of them do.
Cornlie expresses a similar opinion that while Italian Canadians believe education is important, they view it on a more practical level, as a means to an end. Yet Connie suggests that Italian Canadians are placing more value on higher education:

> From my personal perspective, yeah, I think they’ve come to the realization that it’s very important. Because I find that just thinking back to groups of friends I had in high school, a lot of their parents encouraged their children to go to college. But the children wanted to go to university, so they made a conscientious decision to go to university. But, for some reason the parents thought just go to college and be whatever, either take over my business or do this, do that, be self-employed. But, I think now, my general feeling is that the Italian community is trying to emphasize the importance of education, higher education.

Olivia describes the views of Italian Canadians and education as being related to social class:

> The middle class Italians encourage their children to pursue a university education. However, graduate study is not seen as important. Most of the Italian Canadians my age enter saturated fields like Accounting, Business Administration, and Engineering. Few women that I know are in the Arts. The lower class Italians have a tendency to discourage university education, but will encourage their daughters to pursue college programs like nursing, administrative assistance, etc.

These three women believe that although Italian Canadians do attribute value to education, it can be limited and with qualifiers. For some, the importance has to do more with the practicality of having a higher education than the intrinsic value of education. As Connie suggests above, this nuance may be changing as more Italian Canadians pursue higher education.

Some of the other women expressed the belief that Italian Canadians do not
value higher education, especially for women. Often traditional views of womanhood were the reasons given by the women for this situation:

"It's rare (an Italian Canadian female graduate student) because I mean we were brought up to believe that you had to get married. Don't get me wrong; there's nothing wrong with marriage. But I mean, like by the time you're twenty-one you had to find a nice husband, settle down and have kids. There's nothing wrong with that life. I'm not trying to sound like a snob but to find an Italian Canadian graduate student is very rare."

Kate shares the view that Italian Canadians do not have a strong appreciation for education, but not so much for reasons of gender expectations as for a concern with being successful in business rather than education:

"In general, I don't think Italian Canadians have a strong appreciation for education. It's useful, but it's not to a certain point there's no sense of pushing students to really pursue it. And I think that we've, given the kind of ethnic patterns, ethnic immigration patterns that we've had, we don't have the high percentages like some other groups in university and in post graduate studies. And that's a problem and I think it's because education is undervalued. Here it's kind of self-employment, getting into business and making money, rather than education. I think most of the expectation is being placed there, although it's changing."

The views of the women suggest the attitudes of Italian Canadians towards education are not homogenous. Issues of social class and gender come into play in the groups' perceptions of education. Although many Italian Canadians are placing a higher value on education, the need to survive and be successful in a material sense can override academic pursuits. Many Italian Canadians view education as a means for the second generation to assume a more integrated role in mainstream Canada, but do not necessarily consider it instrumental in acquiring material comfort. As many Italian Canadians have achieved some level of economic stability through manual type labour, they may not see education as the only means to acquire this type of prosperity. For
some, then, the benefits of education are measured by the material outcomes it can provide. Graduate education can be difficult for the women to justify in these terms.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and identity are two topics that are interconnected for the women. Their ethnic background and the immigrant experiences of their parents are central to the development of their identity. Many experiences throughout their lives have brought forward their difference based on their ethnicity. They have noted their ethnic identity often by contrasting their experiences to those of others. But, their ethnicity has also played a role in the shape of their identity, as it dictated their experiences with family and friends. The centrality of family and a collective approach to life have impacted on the manner in which the women move through the world. The “double edged sword” of family has provided them with support and comfort their entire lives, but also with responsibilities. Overall, the women identify with their Italian selves but not in an exclusive manner, they struggle with inconsistencies in their attachment to their culture and they may often feel that their pursuits are not valued within this culture. The final point about ethnicity which is clear from the women’s talk is that it is not a static event; it has evolved through the immigrant experience of their parents, has influenced their young lives in Canada and it continues to fluctuate.
CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I will review research questions, study objectives and findings. I will also locate the findings in some of the academic literature which informed this research and in the context of graduate education in general. This review will conclude with some ideas for future directions for research in this area as well as suggestions for improving graduate departments.

In my initial research questions, I asked how Italian Canadian women would describe the connections between their ethnic and family background and their educational experiences. What are the roles and strategies they take up in different areas in their lives while they attempt to be successful in graduate school? I then asked how the women’s accounts could inform us about graduate education and minority students in general. Throughout the previous chapters I have detailed the women’s own stories about their educational experiences. I have also gleaned from their accounts the roles and survival strategies they have used to be successful in graduate school and still maintain a personal life of their own design. In the following discussion I will revisit some of these findings and consider their implications for graduate education.
Review of Study Objectives

At the start of this thesis I described why I believed that the experiences of Italian Canadian female graduate students was an important topic to pursue. Through giving voice to a group that had been neglected in academic literature I wanted to find out what happens to a group of Italian Canadian women as they embarked upon a graduate education and to investigate factors that impacted on their educational choices and experiences. I also intended to explore how the women's backgrounds as children of immigrants, and as children of Italian immigrants in particular, had influenced and continued to influence their lives. Lastly, I hoped to gain some insight into how the women shaped their lives so as to be successful in their educational careers despite some of the problems they confronted. I believe that I have fulfilled these objectives in this dissertation.

While many other academic studies of graduate students discuss participation rates and academic achievement, this study made the students' own accounts of graduate education central. With this approach I was able to understand the women's behaviours and develop an analysis of their strategies. Immigration studies do not typically study in an in-depth manner the educational pursuits of the second generation. Although second generation studies are becoming increasingly popular as the post WWII immigrants' children mature, this study took a unique approach in exploring the women's educational choices in the context of their familial roles. It is clear throughout the study that family is central to and has an impact on educational experiences, and to ignore that in favour of a study that simply documents trends would have been inaccurate and incomplete.
My choice of methodology and my role as researcher have also allowed me to realize my research objectives in a rich and insightful manner. I do not believe that I had even imagined the effect my research approach would have on the depth of the findings. Like Munro (1998) I included in my research “aspects of life stories that have traditionally been dismissed: how women’s private and public lives intersect; the impact of the mother-daughter relationships; and the familial and female friendship support networks that sustained women’s public activities” (Munro 1998: 5). The methodology of in-depth interviewing followed by careful analysis of the qualitative data has led to a comprehensive description of the women’s experiences and allowed for the discovery of unexpected findings. Notably, by approaching the women’s experiences holistically, I was able to understand how they negotiated their lives as graduate students and as Italian Canadian daughters. The typology of roles I uncovered would not have become evident had I not allowed for detailed accounts of both the women’s educational and personal lives.

In this research project, I have based my study on a group that I defined to be “different” due to their parentage. I have done so in part to add to the literature which looks at how different groups experience schooling. Although it is true that the women’s lives are often unique to their being the daughters of Italian immigrants it is certain that many graduate students or former graduate students will relate to some of their experiences. In examining this “different” group I have made them visible, while allowing for the possibility that their voices will resonate with other students and inform
us in general about the graduate school experience. I believe that in exploring the educational pursuits of this group of women and in recognizing them as different I also recognize other graduate students either because they can relate to the women's experiences or because in doing so I allow for the reality of heterogeneous graduate students.

In reviewing literature on graduate students for this study I found studies of other minority groups particularly relevant as they also isolated a group of graduate students for study. Although similarities between the experiences of Italian Canadian women and other groups exist, of equal value is the study of the unique features of a particular group. The study of one group can produce theoretical and methodological advances that can be applied to other groups. Throughout this dissertation I have shown examples of studies which can be generalized to the graduate education of minority graduate students. I found these studies important for my analysis of the women's experiences. In turn, I believe that the findings of this study can be enlightening for others studying minority graduate students and for minority students themselves.

**Studying Graduate Education**

As was noted in Chapter Three studies that examine the experiences of graduate students in-depth are rare. Most studies focus on admissions to graduate school, relationships with supervisors or the socialization process graduate students undergo. Studies of graduate students' experiences contribute in an important manner to our understanding of how graduate education is structured and experienced. Studying
graduate education from the students' perspective is important but we must also consider the "whole life" of the student if we are to understand the complexities of the educational process. It is not enough, this study has shown, to consider in a vacuum the educational activities of students. We need to take into account their backgrounds, their current personal lives and the roles that they take other than that of graduate student. Integral to this process are studies that consider specific subgroups of graduate students as opposed to those where graduate students are studied as one group. All though there will be similarities among the experiences of graduate students regardless of particular characteristics there will also be differences.

In 1990 Baird noted a shift emerging as researchers began to look more at specific groups of graduate students. Such studies were at the time more likely to single out women than to look at minority students. In Chapters One and Three I reviewed some of the studies of minority graduate students that have now emerged. Research of the experiences of Black, Hispanic and working class students, for example, have uncovered the alienation that some of these students feel as they grapple, not only with the content of graduate studies, but with the process of graduate education. My study is sited in this vein of research that is looking to uncover the experiences of students who do not fit into the mainstream. The participants are children of immigrants and members of an ethnic minority group. Some of the women's experiences in graduate school are unique to them as a group. As we saw throughout this discussion, Italian Canadian women often struggle to integrate into the educational setting. This struggle is a result of their backgrounds and current lifestyles not being completely congruent
with those of the mainstream. Other experiences are similar to those of other minority students. This research allows others to better understand the complexities of minority graduate students' experiences.

The women in this study reflected on their decisions to apply to and attend a graduate faculty. Baird (1990) found three important reasons why students decided to undertake a graduate education, "interest in the field, the fact that their desired field required an advanced degree and improving their chances of receiving a good salary, promotions, etc." (p. 362). The women in my study shared these motivations and added a few others. Certainly, the women were interested in the fields of study they had chosen, but more importantly they enjoyed education and in particular wanted to gain knowledge and or skills in their area of study. The women also were interested in a graduate education as a means to an end, a professional designation or the opportunity for a specific career. On a practical note, these women, raised by immigrant parents who pushed them to "make something of themselves," viewed a graduate education as an opportunity to achieve a certain position in society that would otherwise not be attainable. Not having the family or social background that easily granted them a role in middle class society, the women perceive graduate school as a conduit to a better position in society and in the job market, one that might not otherwise be available to them.

While it may be true that a "university education" serves as a "badge of ability" (Erwin and Stewart 1997: 217) for many women, for the daughters of immigrant parents
the use of graduate school as a means to achieve a higher social standing is particularly salient. Often, for these women, education was the only avenue open to them in this endeavor. Although, in some cases, parents had achieved a degree of financial stability, it did not necessarily mean a social advance for their daughters. As has been shown throughout this dissertation, the women did not have opportunities to be mentored by university educated individuals. In fact, the women, for the most part, were the ones sharing with the adults around them what they knew of the education system and of potential career paths. The basic message these women received from parents was that education was a worthwhile and even necessary pursuit. These women took that to mean that the more education one had, the more potential advantages one would have, hence the many years dedicated to graduate education.

Of course, the potential benefits and the love of learning were not the only reasons the women gave for pursuing a graduate education. For many it was an opportunity to "prove" something, to themselves and to others. Many of the women describe feeling a need to show that they as Italian Canadian women and as children of immigrants were capable of achieving a high rung in academia. The women's perception was that completing a graduate degree gave them the opportunity to "surprise" themselves and those around them. This finding relates to their position in society as women and as members of an ethnic minority. Due to both their gender and their ethnicity, the women sensed that others were less than confident in their ability to complete a higher education. Often graduate education was an unexpected path altogether. The women were often propelled by a strong sense of how others perceived
them. With interpersonal relationships so important in their lives, it is not surprising that part of their impetus to pursue a graduate education comes from the sense of how others will react to their actions. The women also expressed the sense that graduate school allowed them a somewhat acceptable avenue for independence and a way to avoid falling into traditional roles. For these women, to whom acceptability was very important, education seemed an attractive alternative.

"Surviving" Graduate School

I began this research using Rosaldo’s (1989) notion of borders to view graduate education as a borderland which some are well equipped to traverse and others less so. I indicated some of the barriers I believed to be relevant for the participants of this study and some of the “strategies” used by minority students in crossing the graduate education border successfully. We have seen that, in fact, graduate school did involve some challenges for the women, both in deciding to attend it and in being successful while involved in it. I will review these findings below including some of the “new” strategies uncovered by this research.

Once in graduate school, most of the women enjoyed their studies. They were challenged and stimulated and did not regret their decisions. There are several areas in which this study corroborates other research on the topic of graduate students’ experiences in their programs. For example, Cronbach (1949) found that in order to be successful, graduate students adopt various strategies, not one common one. He explored graduate students’ approaches to their work and their relationships with
faculty and problem solving. Similarly, as was shown in Chapter Seven, the women in
my study adopted several roles or strategies in order to persevere in graduate school.
Even within this particular group of women, who shared many characteristics, there was
no single approach to fulfilling the responsibilities of graduate school. For example, a
few of the women had important relationships with a faculty member both on a
professional level and on a more social one, while other women avoided any type of
contact with faculty beyond the necessary minimum. While some women sought out
support when they were struggling, others were fiercely independent.

Where this study goes beyond Cronbach (1949) and others is that it
conceptualizes the women's "strategies" in a more holistic manner. I considered the
strategies the women took up as a means to survive both in graduate school and life in
general in a manner which made sense for them. For most of the women, the definition
of success indisputably included a satisfying personal life. I found four roles that the
women adopted as they live the graduate school experience (Chapter 7). The roles
demonstrate the most common ways in which the women approach the various aspects
of their lives. It is obvious through their own accounts that interpersonal relationships
are central to their sense of self. In either choosing to exclude or include others into the
various parts of their lives the women make decisions that influence how they conduct
themselves and how others perceive them. Some of the behaviours encompassed in
these roles are in fact forms of resistance. For example, they are resisting the model of
the individual, independent graduate student with few other concerns or as one
participant commented, "the Protestant work ethic," and they are choosing to continue
meaningful relationships with loved ones.

In considering the role of interpersonal relations and individualism in graduate studies, many scholars have found that, indeed, individualism is highly ingrained in the process. Baird (1990) concluded that graduate school "is a difficult place for a student who is oriented to interpersonal relations" (Baird 1990: 373). Noddings (1997) also notes that women in graduate education can "suffer the 'true professional' syndrome" where "many ask whether it is possible to have both a professional and family life, and often highly successful women tell them that it is not" (Noddings 1997: 172). In studying graduate students in Britain, Acker et al. (1994) also found that for both students and supervisors, "individualism is pervasive in the discourse" (Acker et al. 1994: 248) about students' abilities. They contend that, "this individualism does not seem to us to be accidental but is instead an important factor in reproducing the academic profession" (Acker et al. 1994: 248).

Findings from this study of Italian Canadian graduate students corroborate those conclusions. As one participant stated, graduate school is based on a work ethic of the independent scholar, which is in conflict with Italian Canadian values. Not only was it a challenge for the women to adapt to an environment very different from the one they knew in the home, the distinction went further than simply being in a different place. As the women told me, Italian Canadian culture values a collective mentality as opposed to one of individuality. Based perhaps on a past of subsistence work where all members of the family contributed to the survival of the group, Italian Canadian culture
expects interpersonal relations to be central in group members' lives. These relations are not purely emotional but also encompass a supportive aspect that, no longer centred on material survival specifically, has more to do with fulfilling other emotional and social needs.

Some of the needs present in the families of the women were for translation and general assistance in navigating Canadian society. This type of background not only ill prepared the women for graduate school where more emphasis is placed on individual achievement, but also burdens the women with having to negotiate two very different environments concurrently. So while graduate school expects the participation of independent scholars, the personal lives of the women expect an engaged participant in the collective well being of the family. As has been shown, these expectations related to interpersonal relationships exist for the women throughout their lives. However, the age and life stage of the women as they engaged in graduate education may have added to these expectations. At this stage in life, not only were there expectations that the women would continue to be fully engaged in their roles within their family of origin but also that they would marry and create a home and family of their own.

Although not always overtly stated by relatives and others, graduate school appears to be seen as by other family members as incompatible with the expectations held of the women. As one participant stated an undergraduate degree was "fine," as was a teaching one which would lead directly to employment, but an academic pursuit such as graduate school with no obvious vocational outcome was "too much" for her
family to comprehend. All of these factors play into challenges the women faced in graduate school which were not necessarily there in undergraduate study. These findings run throughout the discussions with the women. The straddling of these two very different domains, one which values independence and the other interconnectedness, is a constant challenge.

In their study of Hispanic female students in the United States, Melendez & Petrovich (1989) found that some “culturally determined behaviors” did not match those accepted and valued in mainstream culture and in higher education. There exist several such behaviours for Italian Canadian women. These behaviour patterns are overt manifestations of the values of Italian Canadians. As mentioned above, the sense of collectivity and the behaviors that accompany it can be a source of conflict for the women. Graduate school values independence and individual achievement. Italian Canadian culture, as has been noted several times, is preoccupied with the common good. Even as parents feel a sense of pride in their daughters’ accomplishments there is always consideration of the effects of their goals on the family.

Participants mentioned the resistance from parents who believed that the women should be contributing to the family income instead of pursuing a graduate education. Women were also expected to consider the common good in terms of taking on traditional roles of wife and mother that contribute to the family in several ways. Despite misgivings, the women themselves felt a strong mission to consider the welfare of those they cared about. It is important to note that this caring on the part of the
women was not one-sided; it is partially due to the consideration that their well-being has received and continues to receive from their families. The interpersonal connections they held in their lives were central to their sense of well-being and accomplishment.

How does this dual existence resolve itself? As discussed in Chapter One, Zambrana (1988) studied Hispanic women in the U.S. and refers to "Bicultural Socialization" as a process in which the women must adapt to two cultures. She notes a number of factors which can influence the process. One such factor is "the conceptual style and problem-solving approach of minority individuals and their mesh with prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture" (Zambrana 1988: 71). This same factor played a role in the "Bicultural Socialization" of Italian Canadian female graduate students. Again, these women, reared and continuing to live in a culture that values collectivity and interpersonal relationships are hard pressed to fit smoothly into a graduate school culture which demands an independent approach and less focus on interpersonal relationships. How the women adapt to this dichotomy will be taken up subsequently in the discussion of assimilation.

"Transition Class"

Another particularly meaningful approach to understanding the experiences of Italian Canadian women came from studies of working class graduate students. The findings of these studies are similar to some of the experiences of Italian Canadian women. Like the working class women, Italian Canadian women had parents who had
not benefited from higher education and who for the most part worked as labourers rather than professionals. Both working class parents and immigrant parents tend to feel isolated from the educational world of their children. Quite often, encouragement and emotional support are the only things they had to offer to their children in regard to education. These parents do not have the experience, past or present, to assist their children in the day to day educational tasks. Like many of the working-class academics who contributed to the collection by Fay and Tokarczyk (1993), these Italian Canadian women believe that their experiences differ in some ways from other graduate students. One of the main ways they experience ‘difference’ is through the dissonance they feel between their home and school cultures. Throughout their educational careers these women have had to manage the schism that exists between their personal lives and their educational experiences.

Throughout this research we have seen evidence of how the women’s backgrounds have not prepared them to feel at ease in academic settings and how their personal lives continue to impinge on their educational aspirations. Women raised in the collective mentality of the Italian Canadian culture continue to carry on time and energy consuming roles in their families of origin. At the same time their dealings with education move them further away from the lived experiences of other family members. There are two important issues here, one of which is the manner in which the Italian Canadians’ backgrounds do not readily prepare them for graduate school and the second is how their experiences in graduate school often lead to conflict for them in their private lives. Examining the first point brings us back to thinking about working class
students. One of the ideas from Gardner's (1993) study is that working class graduate students find themselves isolated from both their working class past and their academic present. Not quite fitting into either world is an experience shared by Italian Canadian women. As many participants noted, although they struggled with fitting into the academic sphere they also found themselves alienated from those close to them in their private lives.

I mentioned earlier in this dissertation that many participants who were the oldest in their families became de facto parents to their younger siblings. They used the relatively little exposure they had to the education system and their English language skills to assist parents in guiding the educational lives of their other children. In some cases, as time went on, parents became better acclimated to the system and were able to serve as more effective guides to their children. Yet, parents never developed the ease in dealing with school personnel that other parents might have. Some of this difficulty is based on language skills. Italian Canadian women lacked what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as “cultural capital,” those taken for granted features of middle and upper class homes which allow children to be better prepared not only for school but for making their way in society in general.

As immigrant parents struggled to gain a foothold in Canadian society, they had little to offer in terms of the “capital” that would allow for an easy transition to the world of the Canadian school system. With English as their second language, Italian Canadian parents were able to pass along various levels of language skills to their
children depending on their own experience. For some Italian Canadian women, as I explained earlier, English was first heard in the classroom, making their introduction to the school system even more challenging. For others, language remains a hindrance even as they have advanced to a graduate education. As one participant quoted earlier in the dissertation mentioned, as she completes her Ph.D., the lack of early English language skills still continues to plague her. Another participant who had all her life lived in Canada told me that an undergraduate professor, after reading several of her assignments, asked if English was her first language.

Language is an obvious area where we might expect a deficit, but others are subtler. For example, one participant noted how her career aspirations had always been very restricted, unlike those of her some of her classmates. She credits this limitation to a lack of exposure to persons in a variety of professions. Her parents, relatives and other adults around her other than teachers were all labourers. It would be difficult, she concludes, for a child to know anything other than that to which they are exposed. Immigrant parents were also unable, for the most part, to provide children with assistance with homework and with academically based activities. What immigrant parents did provide to the Italian Canadian women was a strong sense of responsibility and commitment. School was always discussed as something important, to be taken very seriously. Underlying the challenges for the immigrant parent was always the strong desire for their children to succeed in the newly adopted country. In most cases, it was through education that parents envisioned the upward mobility occurring. So despite any insecurities the parents might have regarding the Canadian educational
system, they did view it as a means to an end that would include seeing their children attain a level in society that they themselves were not able to reach.

**Assimilation**

As the discussion above indicates, graduate students’ experience of the education system varies with ethnicity, social class or race. Quite often students from minority backgrounds are confronting an education system which assumes the possession of values and practices very different from their own. Graduate school and education in general challenges them to adapt to this different environment and leads to changes in the manner in which they move through the rest of their lives. This phenomenon was true for the Italian Canadian women I interviewed, and literature shows it is the case for other groups of graduate students. Through the process of going to graduate school, students change their approach to many aspects of their lives. Whether or not this process is expected by the graduate programme or recognized by the student, it will occur at some level for all students.

This study considered the women’s survival strategies for graduate school and how these strategies played out both in graduate school and in their personal lives. Are students compelled to transform their views, practices and values in order to be successful in graduate school, or do all students necessarily experience a transformation based on their graduate experience? By the women’s own accounts, graduate school is more “intense” and requires more time and energy than undergraduate education did. Rather than simply fulfilling the requirements of undergraduate courses such as
assignments and exams, graduate school requires students to take a certain amount of responsibility for their own educational progress and to take on more challenging research endeavors driven by the students' academic interests and goals. In some literature the terms used for this process are assimilation, transformation or socialization. The student, in order to be successful, must or chooses to assimilate to the dominant culture of graduate education, regardless of how it varies from their own. This transformation process is not always straightforward, as it requires students not only to accept a new approach but also to reject many aspects of their former lives.

The assimilation or transformation process has been discussed in the literature and was evident in this research project. Throughout the women's accounts we see numerous examples of transformations that occur as a result of their engagement in graduate studies. For example, the participants try to be independent scholars, although by their primary socialization they are more oriented towards working collectively. Ideas on topics such as politics and feminism take shape and often move away from those held by family members and life long friends. Women become acutely aware, more so than ever, of how different the practices of their home lives are to those of academia. They begin to adopt some of the changes while struggling with others. For the most part, they "hide" this process and these struggles from others. Although not usually invisible to the women experiencing it, it is interesting how hidden the process of assimilation is. Although discussed in academic literature, it is rarely discussed among those who are in the process of experiencing it. The women in this study spoke so freely with me in part because, as they claimed over and over again, they never
discussed the topic with anyone: the topic being the challenges underlying their seemingly smooth transition from daughters of immigrants to academics.

Most of the women were successful graduate students and had been good students throughout their academic lives. Rather than simply continuing to one more stage of schooling, the shift to graduate school brought sharper discontinuities as it signaled more of a commitment to academic life than an undergraduate degree and required the independence noted earlier. The shift often had the women going "underground" with their private lives of family and community. For example, Beatrice would rather say she was stuck in traffic than explain she was caring for an elderly grandmother, and Emma does not wear her engagement ring to school or tell anyone she is about to be married. Other minority and working class writers have commented on feeling this need to hide their personal lives while graduate students. As one writer states, "Nowhere did I feel a greater need for disguise than inside academic institutions" (Sowinska 1993:151). This same sentiment was clear in the women's descriptions of their behaviours.

Loss is another theme that arises in the writings of minority and working class academics. There is a constant fear of the loss that can and does occur as one moves from one arena to another. Adopting one way of thinking often necessitates a rejection of an earlier viewpoint. The women struggled with what becoming educated meant in terms of their personal and cultural lives. Interpersonal relationships, family and certain beliefs tied to culture or religion were central to their identities and yet it seemed that
this process of education attempted to strip them of those. By becoming educated persons they were necessarily moving in a different direction than the one that had previously guided their lives. Their parents and many of the other people who filled their personal lives did not share in their educational experiences.

There was a certain ambivalence on the part of the women about pursuing an advanced education. It may allow the women to gain a position in society that they would otherwise not have the opportunity to achieve, but this position was one in which others close to them had little hope of achieving. The women strove for higher education but were concerned about what it would mean for their identity. They demonstrated this ambivalence in several different ways as seen in the different roles they adopted (Chapter 7). For those who act as teachers, the sharing of their learning with those close to them is an attempt to bring those people into that world so that the women could perhaps alleviate the shift that was occurring. Women who adopted a caregiver role simply remained so central and needed by those around them that there was less opportunity that only their academic lives would be meaningful. Other women joined organizations and groups geared towards their culture. The good daughter maintained her roles and relationships and managed graduate school on “her own time.” Even the rebels spoke extensively of the effects of their decisions on their relationships, indicating that constant interconnectedness.
Survival Strategies

This project, by examining these women’s practices, has in fact uncovered some “survival strategies” for graduate school participation. Having said that, it does not appear that any of women had truly managed to “survive” in a manner that required no sacrifices. These strategies come in the form of the four roles that I discovered and discuss in Chapter Seven. To some extent all of the women have had to put into place certain lifestyle changes in order to manage their lives in a manner which is acceptable to them. In different modes of behaviour, the teacher, caregiver and good daughter continue to have an important role in the lives of loved ones while being successful graduate students. The rebel chooses to sacrifice some of the intimacy of these close relationships in order to turn her attention and behaviours more towards those of the academic world. Yet even this latter role is in relation to others in the sense that they are rebelling “against” others’ expectations.

I would maintain, then, that assimilation is not an absolute process, an all or nothing undertaking. Given the women’s experiences, I do believe that some level of assimilation is necessary in order to be successful as a graduate student. The women’s accounts do not suggest that it is an unconscious or passive process. I would argue that these women and, by extension, most minority graduate students are aware of the forces at play in graduate education, and when they choose to be successful in graduate school by adopting acceptable behaviours, they do so fully aware that they are doing so. They also understand the impact these choices have on other aspects of their lives. Perhaps this awareness is not present throughout the process but it is available through
reflection. However, I do contend that in adopting the four roles the Italian Canadian women have found meaningful ways to be successful graduate students and live a satisfying private life. Inevitably they struggle with the dichotomies in their lives as Italian Canadians and as graduate students, but they manage these through choices - to include loved ones in their learning process or to keep them separate but central in their lives, for example. This argument is not meant to simplify what is, in fact, an often challenging and even painful undertaking, but instead I wish to recognize that the assimilation process can be a conscious one in which the outcome is unique for every student. Looking at myself, I chose to be a graduate student, but I selected a research project that recognizes and I hope honours my immigrant background. I have, as have the subjects of this study, confronted the process of assimilation as a participating member. Not always comfortable with the choices available to us, not always satisfied with the outcomes, we have not become so assimilated that we "forget" the choices. Having been full participants in the process we can "see" it and revisit it and make it our story.

The roles indicate the individual agency of the women in shaping their own lives despite the demands of graduate education. Yet they also had to make certain accommodations in order to participate in graduate school. Dei speaks to these issues by stating that:

Individual agency as such is tied to and constrained by institutional power. At the same time individuals do have the power to make choices within structures of power. For example, all sports have rules (i.e., structured definitions of action, power and control). However, in playing games players constantly (but not always consciously) "break" or "bend" the rules. They do things which are not permissible within
the structure of the rules: they have agency. But that agency has limits, too. One still has to act within the rules (institutional structure) to be recognized as participating in the game. (Dei 1996: 29)

Consciously or not the women have “acted within the rules” of graduate education in order to be “recognized” as students. Yet they have availed themselves of the agency available to them within this structure to construct roles, lives, that make sense to them. These actions are not unproblematic, for as we have seen, they can cause tension for the women in both areas.

I questioned at the start of this study how it was that we have so much rich academic literature on the process of assimilation, most of it written by those who have presumably been assimilated. Through these writings it would seem that individual agency and resistance had little part to play in the process. No one discusses how this can be so, for if they are completely assimilated how can they “see” the issues which surround the process of becoming educated which leads to assimilation. Perhaps the answer was so obvious as to be unspoken, but I believe that this study has elucidated it. Taking into consideration the barriers that surround the border of graduate education for some students, many minority academics can survive the transformation of graduate studies, not unchanged, but with a clear vision of where they have come from and where they have arrived. The women in this study were becoming educated in mainstream graduate studies but kept their personal relationships and culture central to their lives, even if it meant rebelling against them.
Future Directions and Implications for Graduate Education

The process of assimilation, transformation or simply of change that minority graduate students undergo needs close examination as has been carried out in this study. In Chapter Two of this dissertation I concluded my review of literature by suggesting some areas where more research is required. One such area is for studies of minority graduate students' experiences that determine how they may differ from those of others and how they may be impacted by their difference. This research project is one attempt to take up that suggestion by close examination of a never before examined group's experiences in graduate school. Another area that I suggested required further examination was the above discussed topic of assimilation and transformation. I asked why, despite the alienation and ruptures which studies suggest minority students undergo, many such students are successful and choose to remain in academia. It must be noted that there are many more minority students who choose not to pursue a higher education, most for reasons other than fear of assimilation. But of those I spoke to many were doing well in graduate school and several intended to remain in academia. Again, I recognize that in choosing to speak to current or recent graduate students, my selection process was biased towards those who were being successful.

In this process graduate students struggle to be successful students but also to adapt to a new domain. The extent of their struggle and the outcome of it depend on many factors. In discussing thesis supervision issues, Acker suggests that “diversity among students can stem from idiosyncratic characteristics or ways of interpreting their situation” (Acker 1999:82). By better understanding what these characteristics are,
graduate education could become a more hospitable place for all graduate students. We need to look beyond the surface of grades and dissertations to the other challenges graduate students face as they become “educated”.

As I already mentioned, assimilation is a well-researched topic, but little of this research is used in a practical way as a means to smooth the transition many graduate students encounter. This study has shown that the women had little real understanding of the graduate education process and little access to this information prior to enrolling. Although most graduate departments likely have some type of orientation, it does not appear to be focused enough on minority students’ needs. A more effective type of orientation should take nothing for granted and begin by introducing graduate students to all aspects of graduate education. One of the obvious challenges to this type of orientation may be the time constraint of faculty who are stretched by teaching, research and publishing pressures. Perhaps departments need to assign a faculty member to student orientation and development who will be relieved of some other responsibilities. It is can also be a challenge to have students attend these sessions. Already insecure in a new setting they may avoid this type of venue. Perhaps devoting some course time during the first few weeks of a session may be a better solution. Another suggestion for graduate education brought forward by Conrad and Phillips is the creation of “support groups, collaborative groups, or supervisory groups” (Conrad and Phillips 1995: 313). They suggest that these types of group may aid students particularly at the stage of preparing their dissertation to remain engaged and feel less isolated in the process. “No one else will be able to understand so exactly or commiserate so completely as those
who are in the same circumstances at the same time" (Rogers 1986:97). Given the importance of interpersonal relations to the women in my study, this suggestion seems reasonable and could potentially be achieved with varying faculty involvement from initiation to ongoing support.

In this study, by taking the vantage point of the student, I found that personal relationships are not just a means to define the students (for example as children of immigrants), but more importantly, they are central to the stories of these women’s lives. Considering the roles that were discovered in this dissertation helps in understanding the experiences of women, minority, and working class students and possibly all graduate students. These roles give meaning to their lives and in their richness we can begin to understand their experiences. By taking into account the different roles that graduate students take on, graduate faculty could become better able to serve students. Allowing different realities to be expressed instead of repressed can enrich academic discussions and literature. It is inconceivable that some of the events that the women in this study mentioned keeping quiet about (marriage, religion, and family relationships) do not have an impact on their scholarship and in turn on their contribution to academia.

There are some cautions which should be offered in light of the above discussion. There is the danger of essentializing all minority experiences based on certain findings. The expectation that all members of a certain minority group will have the same feelings and react in the same manner to academia should not be the result of
this research. It is important always to understand how the intersections of race, class, culture and gender influence a student's reality. To bring to the fore minority students' experiences should not mean "reducing" our understanding of their lived realities to these experiences. Minority students should not find themselves seen only as representatives of their culture or race, but as individuals whose lives have been shaped by a variety of factors. In discussing a senior faculty member in their study of academics who attempts to bring an interdisciplinary approach to her department, Acker and Wyn suggest that "underpinning this strategy is a relational understanding of difference, in which 'other' is not an oppositional category" (Acker and Wyn with Richards, in press). Allowing for 'other' experiences and realities to be recognized and valued will help reshape graduate education. Finally, "we need", as Bhopal states, "difference without deviance" (Bhopal 1994: 133). Academic research which incorporates difference into its conceptualizations and individuals from minority backgrounds, like the Italian Canadian women in this study, who approach academia in their own manner should not be seen as "deviating" from academic discourse but enhancing and expanding it.
REFERENCES


_____ (in press). In/Out/Side: Positioning the research in feminist qualitative research.


________. 2000. Personal communication


_____. 1991. If one were to write a history of postwar Toronto Italia. In If One Were to Write a History: Selected Writings of Robert F. Harney. Ontario: Multicultural History Society of Ontario.


Maggisano, Carmen Gallucci. 1999. A narrative inquiry into understanding the drama of encounter at the borders of identity: Six second generation Italian Canadian women teachers speak. Ph.D. diss, University of Toronto.


Rendon, Laura I. 1992. From the barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American “scholarship girl”. In New Directions for Community Colleges, no. 80: 55-64.


239


APPENDIX:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Data
Date of birth
Program of study, current school and department, year of study

Family History
What year did your parents immigrate to Canada? How old were they? Did they attend school in Canada? What grade did they complete in Italy/Canada?
What do your parents do now?
Do you have any brothers or sisters? How old are they? What do they do?
Where do you live now? Where did you grow up?

What kind of childhood would you say you had? Are there any experiences you particularly remember from your childhood?

What was your family's relationship with extended family like?
Were your grandparents in Canada? Did you have a close relationship with them?

Did your family speak Italian or English primarily in the home? Did your family's choice of language in the home impact on your English language development?

What is your role in your family today?

Educational Background (Elementary and Secondary)
Where did you go to grade school and high school?

Did you go to a public or separate school? Do you remember how this decision was made? Do you think that it made a difference in your education? How?
Are you currently practicing any religion?

Did you have any positive or negative experiences in school you would like to share?
What kind of student were you?

Did anyone help you with your homework?
Did you discuss school at home with your parents or your siblings or any other family members?
Did you generally enjoy school or not?

Who were your friends in school? Did they come to your house? Did you go to theirs?
Did you belong to any clubs or teams in school? If yes how did you become involved?
Did your parents attend school events or not? (ie. plays, parent-teacher interviews)

How did you decide to go to university? With whom did you discuss your decision to go to university?

How did your parents, if at all, influence your decision to go to university?

How did your parents and any other family members feel about your decision to go to university?

Had any of your siblings or close relatives gone to university before you? Did they influence your decision?

How did you choose which university to attend and which courses to take? Did someone advise you? Who?

**Post-Secondary Studies**

How did you feel once you entered university?

Did you tell your parents about your studies and courses?
Did your relationship with your parents stay the same or change after you began university?
How do you think your parents feel about you attending university? How did they talk about it to others? (ie. family members, friends)

Did you find your courses difficult or manageable? Did you get help from anyone with your studies?

Again, how did you decide to go on to graduate or professional studies? Who influenced you?

How did your parents feel about your decision? How did you explain to them what you were going to do?
What did your parents know about the department or faculty to which you were applying?
Did you give them more information?

**Graduate Studies**

What is your area of research/study? How did you decide on your thesis or focus area?
Did you discuss it with anyone?
In general would you say that your experiences in graduate studies so far have been positive or negative?

At what stage are you in your program? What has been the most difficult stage of your progress? What have you found the least difficult?

Tell me about your department. How do you get information that you need for your program requirements?

What have you found most difficult about graduate work?

Describe your relationship with your supervisor? What would you change in this relationship?

What is your relationship with other faculty like?

Have you attended any professional conferences or meetings? How did you find out about them?

Do you have a mentor within academia?

Who do you discuss your studies with the most?

Are there any Italian Canadian men or women in your courses?

Do you ever feel that you are treated differently than other students because you are female, Italian Canadian, Catholic...?

What do you think you will do when you finish your degree?

Do you talk about your studies with your parents or any other family members? Are they involved in your work or your life in general? How? Would you say your parents have a good grasp of what exactly your are doing in your studies? How has your relationship with them changed over the course of your post-secondary education? Do you feel that your parents are proud of you?

How do you feel about the dual roles you play of daughter and graduate student? Are they compatible?

Do you feel that your studies could be aided by more support by your family? Or do you have enough support?
General Discussion

Do you currently speak Italian? If yes how have you maintained it? If no, why do you think this is so?

Do you feel that the course of your education would have been different if you had been a male?

Do you feel that your position in the family would have been different if you had been a male?

Do you feel that being born into your particular family has aided or hindered your educational career? How could it have been easier or more difficult had your family been different?

Do you feel that because your parents are Italian immigrants your life course and educational career is different from others? How?

Do you feel that your family respects you for your educational pursuits?

What do you think your parents thought your life would look like at this stage when you were growing up? What were their dreams for you?

Will you encourage your children to pursue a higher education? (If you have any now or in the future)

How would you support their education differently than from how your parents supported yours?

What do you see as the general attitude among Italian Canadians toward education?

Do you feel that you have anything in common with other Italian Canadian young adults? Who are most of your friends now?

Were there or are there any role models in your life that significantly impacted on your decisions?

Public and Private Spheres

What do you like the most about being of Italian background?

What do you like the least?

How do you identify yourself, with which culture or both?

Are there aspects of your personality that you do not display within the context of graduate studies? If yes, are they related to your cultural background?

Are there people in your life with whom you do not or rarely discuss your educational pursuits? Why do you think this is so?
Are there aspects of your background that you feel have well prepared or equipped you for graduate studies?

Similarly are there aspects which you feel have impeded or continue to impede your progress?