

Girls and Women Exploring Intergenerational Learning Through Storytelling

By

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A Thesis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore through storytelling intergenerational learning between grandmothers, mothers and daughters from four different families, an Indigenous family, an African Nova Scotian family, a White/Asian family and my own family, which is white. A feminist lens is used to understand the ideological positions that constrain women's and girls' choices and visions for future possibilities (Zaidi, 2013). Through semi-structured face to face interviews with the three women (a grandmother, a mother and a daughter) together from each of the four families, I examined the impact these relationships have on informal learning between generations of women to gain a better understanding of women's advancement. My research question explored, *what is it to be a girl*. Under the larger overarching theme of intergenerational learning among women, the main themes that emerged from the participants' stories are oppression, fear, resistance, social injustice and empowerment. This study highlights the importance of looking closer at intergenerational learning among women to gain a greater insight into lived realities women face now and throughout history. The narratives of the four families from three different generational perspectives using a storytelling approach, provided first-hand accounts of girls' and women's life stories. These stories expose the power of informal learning and help us to better understand the dynamics of women's experiences and gender equality.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Elizabeth, for helping me throughout my life to grow and learn to be the woman I am today. Your infectious laugh and optimistic outlook taught me to always see the brighter side of every situation. Thank you for always being there and for your willingness to share your stories, a song and a dance when just the right song came on. You always knew how to make someone smile and will be forever missed by all who knew you.



Image of Elizabeth Therrien. © Tara Browman; used with permission

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“There shall never be another season of silence until women have the same rights men have on this green earth.”

- Susan B. Anthony (Picture Quote, 2018)

Research shows despite advances over the years, girls in Canada still face pressures today that limit their potential (Stanford, Poole, Mulongoy, Mitchell, Lee, Hemsing, Hampton, Caron, & Ahsan, 2013). Canadian statistics and research findings demonstrate that the challenges girls face have not been addressed, particularly for girls who are marginalized (Statistics Canada, 2016). Girls today face challenges related to self-esteem, body image, mental health, location, racialization, immigration, and colonization (Stanford, et al., 2013). Girls now also face obstacles with the added pressures of social media (Williams, Lund, Liang, Mousseau & Spencer, 2018).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggest the dominant thinking on women’s learning throughout their lives is characterized by the idea that women learn through connection with others, especially caregivers and with those who share similar life experiences by engaging in inclusive and open communication. The word feminine carries with it a relational connotation assuming that to be a woman is to learn by openness, collaboration, and harmony (Leblanc, 1999). According to LeBlanc (1999), women’s life learning experiences implies that for women, knowledge, identity, and self-concept occur as a result of collaboration, through their strong ties to relationships and connection with other women. While Belenky et al., (1986) add that women’s moral decision-making is often influenced by cooperativeness, fairness, nurturance, responsibility, and care and women’s preferred learning style places value on building relationships and becoming part of a community (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), this is not always possible depending on each woman’s life experience. It is

important not to generalize these ideals about women and their learning journeys, as women face a multitude of experiences that vary based on race, social class, sexual orientation, able-ness, and variations of feminism (English, 2006).

English (2006) states that, while other women are significant to the development of learning and growth for women, she is critical of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) misconceptions learning happens through connection with others. She says that assuming women's learning is collaborative, inclusive, and free from conflict paints an unrealistic picture and neglects its complexity. Similarities can exist among women especially for those who may share comparable life experiences, but it is vital not to assume that women, regardless of the connections, operate on one commonality (Campbell, 2016).

Despite the significant efforts that were made by women in the previous waves of feminist movements, gender ideologies and expectations about what it means to be a girl persist (Leblanc, 1999). Women all over the world are concerned with the issue of gender equality through women's empowerment (Ahlawat, 2018). Throughout history and today, within many societies around the globe, there are unequal relationships sustained by patriarchy built on male superiority and female inferiority, sex stereotyped roles, expectations and economic, social and political power of men and dependency of women (Ahlawat, 2018). Women's issues and concerns continue to be debated widely with the major issue being equality (Ahlawat, 2018). Even though women's contributions in social and political activities are well recognized, the journey from survival to dignity and empowerment has not been an easy one (English, 2006). The idea of equality seems to still be a distant dream and a lot yet remains to be achieved (Ahlawat, 2018).

Campbell (2016) states that girls are constantly receiving conflicting messages from family members, teachers, society and the media. Young women are often taught to be both liberated and traditional, a contradiction that produces anxiety in their daily lives (Campbell, 2016). Adolescence brings new pressures to adopt traditional gendered heterosexual roles in ways defined as appropriate by their family, peer groups, and society (Campbell, 2016). Older generations transferring knowledge and experience to younger generations (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016) along with girls observing their parents and absorbing media messages adds to the confliction of gender roles (Campbell, 2016).

Many girls growing up in Canada are being told by parents, caregivers, and social media influences they can be anything they want to be (Stanford et al., 2013). While this notion may be reflected in improved education and career opportunities over the past decades, gender stereotypes continue to persist and young girls in Canada still face significant pressure to conform to traditional female roles (Stanford et al. 2013). Girls grow up modeling what they have learned from the women in their lives (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). These can be more traditional or liberated roles women have played throughout history. Stories handed down from one generation to the next are an integral part of the culture and identity within the family (Broecher, Davis & Painter, 2017). Girls learning typically begins with the adult women in their lives, usually mothers and grandmothers, but influences also come from other caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers with whom they might identify with (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015), as well as the media, faith-based organizations, school curriculum and so on. Today girls are also engaged in social media influenced by the people they see online (Milkie, 1999).

Within my family, I was very much influenced by my mother, grandmothers, and aunts. Some of the stories they told focused on women being inferior and not as capable as men in

society. Many stories I heard growing up in the 1970s and 1980s were about finding a “good” man who could provide for his family. It was assumed the girls in our family would one day wed and have children of their own. Women were to take care of cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing and if they held a job outside of the home, it was minimal income compared to the man who was the real “head of the household”. My maternal grandmother was a significant influence in my life growing up who went beyond the normative female traditional roles. During the second wave of feminism from 1963 to the 1980s, Betty Friedan said “This is the problem that has no name: the systemic sexism that taught women that their place was in the home and that if they were unhappy as housewives, it was only because they were broken and perverse” (Grady, 2018). Support for gender equality gradually increased from the 1970s onward across North America. Nonetheless, significant and varying gender gaps in this support become evident when we analyze public opinion over time and across generations (Jennings, 2006). Research by Gadsen and Hall (1996) on intergenerational learning within families includes a range of studies that focus on the transferral of beliefs and practices and the modeling of behaviors from generation to generation. That is, research seeks to understand better the impact of families on children's individual behaviors and family practices throughout the lifespan (Gadsden & Hall, 1996). My interest in this regard is how intergenerational learning has contributed to the advancement or regression of women.

Across cultures, domestic labour from cleaning to cooking to childcare and reproductive labour are usually expected from women (Landau, 2012). Grandmothers and mothers can pass down an understanding of traditional female roles consciously or subconsciously, which can play a role in the prolonging of these stereotypes (Harris, 1993). Western media also instills the stereotype of the perfect “housewife” throughout history and today (Milkie, 1999). That women

have specific duties and commitments in society remains a powerful ideology despite progress in feminism to speak alternatives (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). This ideology is why gender roles of men and women have been particularly slow in progressing (Gere & Helwig, 2012). Studies have shown that women continue to perform most of the housework and childcare, regardless of their employment status (Fenwick, 2004; Guppy & Luongo, 2015).

The purpose of this research study is to explore intergenerational learning through storytelling with a focus on grandmothers, mothers, and daughters in Nova Scotia. A key goal of this study is to develop a greater understanding of what it is to be a girl, how women interact and the similarities and differences they share. This stems from a lifelong desire to understand what it is to be a girl and what progress we as women have accomplished over the years. Meeting other girls and women throughout my life has made me realize the similarities and differences we have each experienced being a girl. As a girl, I grew up learning to keep quiet about struggles I faced which were common with other girls with whom I shared stories. Not only have girls and women dealt with gendered stereotypes and inequality but many have also faced situations of abuse and violence because of their gender.

Statistics show that across generations of women, sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and harassment declined from 1962 to 2013 but they remain significant issues today (Stanford et al. 2013; Statistics Canada, 2016). Gender stereotypes play a significant role in people's attitudes and are important in influencing how people feel and respond to certain behaviours reinforcing gender inequality including sexual abuse and violence against women (Bates, Klement, Kaye & Pennington, 2019). While many women today use their voice to fight these social injustices, some women are still remaining silent. "Gendered stereotypes impact how people respond socially, how police and services respond and how

victims feel about their own victimization. Specifically, gendered stereotypes and attitudes might influence the likelihood of a victim feeling able, or not, to seek help and report to the police and other services” (Bates, Klement, Kaye & Pennington, 2019, p.35).

The Province of Nova Scotia

The women in this study reside within the Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is Canada’s second-smallest province and is located on the southeastern coast of the country. The name Nova Scotia is Latin for “New Scotland,” reflecting the origins of some of the early settlers. Given its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, Nova Scotia’s economy is largely influenced by the sea, and its harbours have served as military bases during many wars (Beck, 2019). The province has a population of 923,598 with 446,885 being males and 476,715 being females as of 2016. Children aged 0-17 years make up 165,962 of the population with 85,012 being male and 80,950 being female (Statistics Canada, 2016).

The Indigenous population in Nova Scotia is mainly made up of the Mi’kmaq peoples who are the original inhabitants and remain the predominant Aboriginal group within the province (Taylor, 2016). For thousands of years, the Mi’kmaq lived as migratory hunters and gathers in Mi’kmaki, (the land of friendship), which covered Newfoundland, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, the Magdalen Islands, and the Gaspé Peninsula (Lawrence, 2002, p. 32). The population of the Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia is 51,495 with 24,900 males and 26,595 females (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Indigenous peoples of Canada have faced many challenges throughout history and today (Taylor, 2016). Amnesty International Canada (2016, para. 1) state:

For decades, high-level government inquiries, federal audits and international human rights bodies have repeatedly pointed to the unacceptable gap between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous peoples in the enjoyment of basic human rights. Despite living in Canada, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Indigenous families and communities continue to face widespread impoverishments, inadequate housing, food insecurities, ill-health and unsafe drinking water. This along with historic programs and policies such as the residential school program that were meant to destroy their culture has many Indigenous peoples today still living with the harm that was done.

Indigenous women and girls face additional struggles with Indigenous women having a 4.12 % times higher odds of intimate partner violence than non-Indigenous women (Pedersen, Malcoe, & Pulkingham, 2013). Indigenous women and girls are five times more likely to experience violence than any other population in Canada and this violence tends to result in more serious harm (Assembly of First Nations, 2016). Indigenous women also make up 16% of all female homicide victims, and 11 % of missing women, even though Indigenous people make up 4.3% of the population of Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2016). Indigenous feminist scholars have demonstrated convincingly that state-inflicted systematized gendered violence against Indigenous girls and women has been an integral part of Canada's settler colonial regime (Scribe, 2017).

Nova Scotia is home to Canada's largest indigenous Black population, whose roots reach back to 1750 (Sehatzadeh, 2008). African Nova Scotians are a distinct people and their history dates to the early 1600s and includes the Black Loyalists (1780s), the Jamaican Maroons (1796) and the Black Refugees (1813–1816) (Parris & Brigham, 2010). According to Statistics Canada (2016), there are approximately 21,915 African Nova Scotians living in the province with 10,735 males and 11,175 females. They represent 2.4 per cent of the total Nova Scotia population and 37.3 % of the racially visible population in Nova Scotia. From early settlers, life for Black

people was marked by abject poverty, marginalization, and systemic and systematic racism (Sehatzadeh, 2008). Each migration wave has its own distinct story, but all these movements shared the context of being connected to conflict, the reality of disenfranchisement from resources, denial of the right to self-determination juxtaposed to individual and community resiliency, and a Black community faith that exhibited unshakeable hope in humankind (Brigham & Parris, 2016). Some communities remain today, some were destroyed by the forced removal of their residents, and others suffered from the dispersal of their residents' overtime in search of better opportunities (Sehatzadeh, 2008).

Bundy (2019) states, "The Nova Scotia government has discriminated against the African Nova Scotian community for centuries, in terms of limiting access to education and healthcare, employment practices, and housing and this discrimination is reflected in this population's overrepresentation in the criminal justice system" (p. 322). African Nova Scotian women have been absent from historical narratives even though they have played an integral role in community activism within several organizations (Bundy, 2019).

The East and Southeast Asian population in Nova Scotia is approximately 16,715 with 7,850 being male and 8,870 being female (Statistics Canada, 2016). The history of Asian immigration to Canada is one of hardship, perseverance and sacrifice at many levels (Goutor, 2007). Unionists in Canada have long portrayed Asian immigration as a threat to the general welfare of Canadian communities, but they saw the issue as linked to the particular struggles of Canadian workers (Goutor, 2007). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of the top priorities for Canadian labour leaders was demanding the exclusion of Asian immigrants. Goutor (2007) stated:

at the inaugural convention in 1883 at the Trades and Labor Congress, the first resolution adopted read: ‘the future welfare of the working people of this country requires the prohibition of further importation of Chinese labor.’ During the debate of the motion, a series of speakers assailed Chinese immigrants as ‘uncivilized,’ ‘unassimilable’ into Canadian society, ‘immoral,’ ‘unsanitary,’ ‘criminal,’ ‘idolatrous,’ ‘nothing less than slaves,’ and, above all, as ‘forcing the working people out of industries . . . [by the] cheapness of their labor.’

By exploring the lived accounts of what it is to be a girl from three different generational perspectives using a qualitative approach, we can gain first-hand accounts from diverse girls and women about their learning experiences. It is important to look at intergenerational learning among girls and women through storytelling to gain a deeper understanding of gendered roles and the challenges girls and women face such as violence against women, mental health, education and pay equity.

Below, I share my reflections on my learning as a girl and the influences of my mother and grandmother and as I became a mother.

My Story

“When you can tell your story and it does not make you cry, you know you have healed”.

~ Unknown (Picture Quote, 2019)

I grew up in the 1970s in a traditional family during the Women’s Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism that were prevalent to improve the condition of women. For myself, it was a confusing time to be a girl. Even as a young child I was fascinated with the movement

which was against what many women in my family believed. Growing up a girl, I was regularly told I had to dress a certain way, act a certain way, and be certain things when I grew up and that I could only “survive” with the help of a man. I watched my aunts clean, cook, take care of my cousins and work as nurses, schoolteachers, secretaries, homecare workers, and cleaners. I was what many called a “Tomboy” climbing trees, getting dirty and wanting to play with my brother’s toys (cars, trucks, Lego, army men) over the toys I had (dolls, Barbies, stuffed toys). This seemed frowned upon so I would sneak into my brothers’ room when he was out playing and play with his toys being careful not to get caught. I had difficulty understanding why certain toys were considered for boys only or that girls should play with dolls, mainly wear dresses, and have long hair.

From a young age, I had dreamed of being a doctor while being told a nurse or teacher would be more suitable. Reading about the Women’s Liberation Movement in the news assisted me in believing it was something I could potentially achieve regardless of what I was being told. My grandmother who I saw as a “black sheep” like myself also made me feel that I didn’t have to settle on being a teacher, nurse, etcetera but I could be a doctor, lawyer, business owner or politician. Even with this belief and understanding, as a girl I felt constant pressure to do what was expected of me and to please everyone. I helped with cleaning, preparing meals, babysitting my cousins while keeping a smile on my face because that’s what “girls do.”

My aunts believed women stayed home to raise children and take care of the home while the men worked to provide for the family. They didn’t work outside of the home until their children were of school age and some decided to remain homemakers. While my maternal aunts were opposed to violence against women, they were complacent with other inequities being voiced during the Women’s movement. My paternal grandmother and aunts were impassive to

inequities with even violence being seen as something women put up with. I had witnessed at a young age objects being thrown, derogatory comments being made, or an arm being grabbed and bruised. When these events occurred, my grandmother or aunts would say their husband was tired from working all day or another excuse for the action. They continued to smile through it all ensuring supper was on the table at the correct time and the house was clean.

I learned many confusing values and beliefs as a young girl from the women in my family but the values that resonated with me came from my maternal grandmother. My grandmother grew up in the 1920s during the time women were becoming eligible to vote in some provinces and became “persons” under the law in 1929. Throughout the decades I have read about and seen many advances for women but also many setbacks. My grandmother told me that even after women won the right to vote in Canada after WWI, they did not have rights separate from their husbands regardless of the situation. My parents separated during the 1970s when each spouse got the property he or she paid for. In most families, women bought the groceries and men bought the larger items. When they separated, women got the leftovers in the fridge and men got the home, cottage, pension, business and the fridge. This was the case in my family. My father remained in the family home with all the furniture and kept the car. My mother and my brother, sister and I left with a suitcase of our clothes and moved in with my grandparents. Everything remained with my father including the few toys we had and pets we had grown attached to. At a young age I couldn't understand that marriage in the 1970s was not seen as a social and economic partnership and women did not have the right to an equal division of property. Even though we didn't have anything, moving in with my grandparents was valuable in learning about women's rights. My maternal grandmother believed women should have the same rights as men. I had never heard this before, nor seen it within my life up until that point. My grandfather

assisted with childcare, cooking, and cleaning and my grandmother worked at their furniture store and helped with finances. They equally shared in raising and providing for their family.

These were the values my grandmother instilled in me through modeling behaviour and the stories she would tell when we lived there and after we moved out when I visited her. I often questioned how my aunts seemed to progress backward with a forward-thinking mother. My grandmother was seen as “different” from the majority of women within society at that time. My aunts chose the path they believed at the time was perhaps the norm. I, on the other hand, embraced every story my grandmother told me. This encouraged me to work towards creating a difference for women as I grew older through volunteering and education.

During my childhood, I would also notice how many men within my family, friends of the family or other men would slap their wives or other women on their behind or make comments about their bodies. I was only young, so I thought it was a “normal” thing to do. In the 1980s I developed at an early age of 10 – 13 years and started getting comments towards my body development. I began to feel uncomfortable in my skin. Older men would comment how pretty I was or that I was going to be a “looker”. My self-esteem started to suffer the more I felt objectified and when I was touched inappropriately, I froze because I was taught by some of the women in my family to not speak up or to put a smile on my face.

Even as I grew older and was taken advantage of and assaulted, I remained quiet and often felt ugly and alone. When I started junior high school, I met other girls who faced similar circumstances. Many were sexually abused, sexually assaulted, lived in fear or felt insecure because they consistently felt objectified for being a girl. Men would whistle, catcall, make derogatory comments about their bodies or touch them inappropriately. I started to realize that it was more common than I had thought. It was then that I knew what was happening to women

needed to change and that we deserved equality, equity and to feel safe. At 16 years of age, I moved out on my own and tried to be independent. I devoted time studying women's rights and volunteering with different organizations. I faced many struggles along the way because I was a girl, but I continued to overcome adversities and move forward.

I remember sitting and sharing stories with my grandmother and eventually my mother. We had a lot of discussions around the struggles they faced, overcoming inequities and their beliefs about men and women. The maternal side of my family, while still oppressed in ways was more advanced than the paternal side of my family. My father's mother and sisters were ridiculed, emotionally and physically abused and did everything to keep their husbands or boyfriends happy regardless of the cost. Their happiness was not of importance. I had a great deal of difficulty understanding this throughout my life. After my daughter was born my focus on women's rights also included girls. From the time I held her in my arms, I wanted to educate and empower her to grow up to be a strong, independent woman who could choose her own path. I didn't want her to feel inferior or to face the things I had throughout my life or those of other women in our family.

Storytelling became a regular thing as I continued to ask questions over the years to get a better understanding of women's rights. It was learning from my grandmother's stories that led to a greater understanding of gendered roles in society, women's advancements and what it is to be a girl.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of girls and women based on the question *What is it to be a girl?* from three different generational perspectives: grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. Girls in Canada continue to face pressures that limit their potential (Zaidi, 2013). Girls are impacted every day by systemic barriers caused by overlapping factors such as poverty, rural location, racialization, immigration and colonization (Zaidi, 2013). These social and cultural influences form the backdrop to girls' experiences with education and career prospects, violence, and mental and physical health (Zaidi, 2013). Central to this study is to understand informal learning among generations of women, gendered roles and the challenges girls and women face. Looking through a feminist lens is necessary to be aware of the potential of prolonging particular ideological positions that constrain women and girls' choices and visions for future possibilities. In the following chapter, I review the literature on gender equality throughout history and recent times. I also examine the literature on intergenerational learning and how it relates to girl's and women's lives to gain a better understanding of the impact of informal learning and on the advancement of women.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature, I take a feminist perspective and focus on current and relevant literature in the areas of gender inequality, lifelong learning, and intergenerational learning to research how these areas are connected to women's informal learning along the life path.

I begin by first, examining the literature on gender stereotypes and inequality and then I examine the literature with a focus on intergenerational learning and lifelong learning as they relate to girls and women.

Over the last 50 years, the roles of men and women in Western society have changed (Gere & Helwig, 2012). One significant area in which change has been particularly slow is family roles (Gere & Helwig, 2012). Studies have consistently shown that women continue to perform most of the housework and childcare, regardless of their employment status and their earnings are seen as secondary to those of their husband, regardless of how much they earn (Gere & Helwig, 2012).

Research studies have shown that young Canadians carry around gender stereotypes that are more in line with what their parents or grandparents might have thought (Abma, 2011; Dauda, 2010; Agree, 2017). In a report by the development agency Plan International, it was found that 31 percent of Canadian boys aged 12 to 17 believe a woman's most important role is feeding her family and taking care of the home (Abma, 2011). Also, 24 percent of Canadian adults agreed that a woman's primary role should be in the home (Abma, 2011). These statistics remind us that even with advances over the years that there is gender patterning still going on (Abma, 2011). When the Global Gender Gap Report by World Economic Forum was released in 2016, Canada ranked only thirty-fifth in the world (that is a drop in the ranks from thirtieth place in 2015 and nineteenth in 2014 (Forster, 2016). The report showed one of the biggest concerns of women is violence (especially for indigenous women and girls) followed by unequal pay for

equal work and not having an equal voice in politics (Forster, 2016). Regarding annual salaries for men and women, Canadian women as of 2016 earn about \$8,000 a year less than men do for equal work (Forster, 2016).

Gender inequality impacts everyone, from girls and women living in fear for their safety to children living in households that are stressed because of the lack of affordable daycare and mothers not earning fair wages (Forster, 2016). Though the federal government boasts that “Canada is a world leader in the promotion and protection of women’s rights and gender equality,” the reality is that we are moving backwards on many key issues and need bold actions to make real progress (Forster, 2016). Every aspect of our economy and our society suffers when women are not treated equitably, and my focus is on why women’s issues are slow in advancing. There is limited research in Canada exploring ideas of civic participation and citizenship from the perspectives of girls and young women and much of the research related to girls is problematic for both theoretical and methodological reasons (Ingram, 2014). First, over the last 10 years, many of the studies examining gender have focused on a perceived crisis in boys’ literacy, shifting away from a critical examination of gender and the gender role of socialization that continues in families, schools and media (Ingram, 2014). Often girls and young women are merely the objects of the camera’s lens and the subjects of the researcher’s gaze (Ingram, 2014). Traditional research, academic literature, and theories of citizenship and democracy are seldom written from the point of view of girls and rarely do they explore how their citizenship is shaped by their various identities, including race, gender, class and cultural background (Ingram, 2014). Despite this perception, recent evidence reveals that persistent challenges still exist to the full participation of all citizens (Ingram, 2014). I am interested in how collaborative approaches to

research conducted with girls can help us understand what young people are learning about their roles in society.

Fenwick (2004) states approaches to lifelong learning promote equitable knowledge work and work-related learning opportunities for all. Although, gender is hardly ever mentioned in these discourses leaving some to assume gender is 'resolved' especially when emphasizing entrepreneurship, technology, knowledge creation and continuous learning (Fenwick, 2004). However, a closer look reveals that gendered inequity persists both in access to and experience of these learning opportunities (Fenwick, 2004). Current provisions for girls' and women's education in Canada are assessed in light of these issues, focusing on particular learning needs of girls and gendered issues they face in entering the labour market (Fenwick, 2004).

Women's greater responsibility for housework and caregiving of the young, the ill and the elderly is widely documented (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). In Canada, 83% of lone-parent households are headed by women (Statistics Canada, 2016). While media reports that there has been an increase in men's participation in childcare and housework, the most recent Canadian data show that women on average spend 69% more hours per week on domestic labour than men (Statistics Canada, 2016). Thus, little seems to have changed over the years and women's 'second shift' of unpaid domestic work constitutes a gross imbalance of labour in dual-earner families (Guppy & Luongo, 2015).

Statistics show that despite changes in Canada's economy since the early 1980s, Canadian women continue to be economically and culturally disadvantaged by gendered divisions in paid and domestic labour; women earn less, achieve fewer of their educational expectations, have less access to learning and advancement opportunity and suffer greater work-family conflict and associated stress than men (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). Perhaps most

disturbing, Canadian girls appear to accept these conditions as inevitable despite their educational success and aspirations for meaningful, challenging, well-paying work (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). These statistics are indicators that women's rights advancements are stalling (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). Change has remained uneven, with some women and some family types benefiting far less than others from greater gender equity (e.g., single-parent women, Aboriginal and recent immigrant women, and working-class women) (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). The federal government in Canada (2020) says that "Canada is a world leader in the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality," although the reality seems to be that we are moving backward on many issues and need real actions to make progress (Guppy & Luongo, 2015).

In a study by Harris (1993), girls talked about uncertainties, risks, and challenges in their lives and about being a girl in a period of gender upheaval. Harris (1993, p. 54) stated:

To sing 'a cappella' is to carry a tune without instrumental accompaniment. It's a high-risk musical style; it's much easier to lose pitch when the orchestra isn't providing a familiar melody. You can lose your way without a strong rhythm section to keep you on track. Young women in Canada today are living 'a cappella' and for the most part, their song is not being heard.

Colaner and Rittenour (2015) state that research studies on family communication have demonstrated the precedence of the mother-daughter relationship, placing it among the most meaningful relationships a woman experiences and consequential for daughters' self-concept, self-esteem, and relationship worldviews (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Mothers' influence on daughters' beliefs about herself and mother gender socialization can be a predictor of daughter well-being and aspirations for career and motherhood (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). In doing so,

it introduces feminist identity as the means through which mothers' gender-based communication influences daughters' present and projected selves (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Research by Cunningham (2001) shows that mothers' gender role attitudes are more highly associated with daughters' gender roles attitudes.

Researchers have long documented parents' influential role in children's understanding of gender (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015, Barber, 2000, Cunningham, 2001). Research by Cunningham (2001) states that gender identity, formation, gender labeling and sex type behaviour begin at a very age. Gender socialization focuses on the identification process in which parents and children mutually strengthen gender norms (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Children observe others' behaviors to build cognitive structures about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors, which drives them to behave in ways that precede parents' appraisals (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Through a mutually enforcing interaction between children's and parents' enacted gender expectations of gender roles, children accept these gender constructions as natural differences between the sexes (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Barber (2000) states that parents' preferences for their child shape the child's attitudes and preferences. "Parents and children also share similar attitudes, values, and preferences because of their shared social positions, background, and experiences; children may behave in accordance with their parents' preferences simply because their parents' preferences and the own opportunities were shaped by the same social forces" (Barber, 2000, p.321).

Not only do parents and caregivers influence attitudes in children's early ages but also the attitudes and behaviours of young adults towards gender roles (Cunningham, 2001). Although young adults' gendered behaviours and attitudes are also determined by their background and

relationship dynamics (Cunningham, 2001). During childhood and adolescence, youth build concepts about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors (Marks, Chun Bun & McHale, 2009). Young adults continually integrate original ideas about gender which are based upon the unique learning contexts in which youth develop, including family and non-family contexts (Cunningham, 2001). Marks, Chun Bun and McHale (2009) found that parents are significant socializing agents in gender development, although youth act as producers of their own development as well, meaning that youth's gender role attitudes are informed, but not always determined, by parental practices and society (Marks, Chun Bun & McHale, 2009). "Some young adults model their parents' views on gender roles, others do not" (Marks, Chun Bun & McHale, 2009, p.222).

Research by Colaner and Rittenour (2015) shows that children internalize parents' messages about gender, as the incentive for children's conversion of parents' behaviors into value and belief systems. As such, messages from mothers can lead to perceptions associated with daughters' gender beliefs (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Encouragement of specific types of toys and activities deemed masculine for boys is based on the degree to which mothers suggest daughters' involvement with masculine-oriented activities such as playing with toy trucks, tools, and cars (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Encouragement of toys and activities stereotyped for girls is the feminine counterpart of this, with mothers encouraging feminine behavior such as playing with dolls, jewelry, and kitchen toys (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Disapproval of other-gender characteristics, instead pertains to the active discouragement of involvement with activities that are not consistent with the gender behaviors assigned to one's biological sex, such as mothers discouraging their daughters from being "tomboys" or playing with masculine-oriented toys (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Encouragement of helping at home references the amount of

housework mothers tell their daughters to perform, such as cleaning, laundry, and dinner preparations (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Finally, encouragement of education and marriage for family surrounds messages about future roles as prioritizing family and child-rearing over careers (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015).

Through Intergenerational learning one generation transmits knowledge and experience to the other, typically older to younger (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016). This direction can also reverse within families as the older generations can learn from the younger especially in recent times on how to use computers or smart phones (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016).

My research showed, through the stories shared among grandmothers, mothers and daughters, that intergenerational learning has an impact on families which could be positive or negative. Many of the mothers and daughters still carried the grandmother's traditional ideologies that were taught within their families. Grandparents make a particular contribution to 'funds of knowledge' in many families that is carried down through storytelling (Ruby, Kenner, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, 2007). The experience of grandmothers can be transmitted to their daughters and continue to be held within the family, but their granddaughters' beliefs may be re-shaped as they are constructed together with the granddaughters' generation in a new cultural context (Ruby, Kenner, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, 2007). "The homeplace may evoke a spiritual sense of connectedness with whatever is important in a person's life but may also contain a silent weight of fear or repression" (Gouthro, 2006). Gouthro (2006) states that not all homeplaces are supportive or life-affirming and some people are scarred by memories of their homeplace experiences, years after the events have happened. We need to understand the layers that contribute to generalizing women's informal learning to understand its complexity and recognize the barriers that limit our understanding of what it means to learn as women.

The limitations shown throughout my literature review stem from minimal studies on intergenerational learning as it pertains to grandmothers, mothers and daughters. Although the literature draws attention to gender inequality and social justice issues, while also demonstrating the importance to examine the experiences of informal learning among girls and women. Additionally, highlighting these issues may lead to important research and recommendations regarding how to improve gender equality as well as an overall awareness of the struggles girls and women still face today.

In the next chapter, the focus is on my theoretical framework which directed my analysis of the stories shared within the family sets in this study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My research is framed by feminist theory, lifelong learning and intergenerational learning. Feminist theory is the main framework that guides the analysis of the narratives between different generations of women. Intergenerational learning and lifelong learning are of equal importance for framing this study in order to understand participants' similarities and differences along their life path and how their informal learning relates to gendered ideologies. Using feminist theory, it is important not to assume similarities in women's informal learning and to understand that differences exist such as race, class, sexuality, and age. Gender is a constantly changing construction (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) that is culturally and socially embedded, and influenced by interactions at the institutional and private levels. Framing my research study in feminist theory will expose power relations and oppressions "associated with gender, race, class, able-bodied-ness and sexual orientation" (Barrett, 2005, p.89) by understanding the differences that makeup women's informal learning experiences.

When I was eight years of age, I remember questioning family members why boys were treated differently than girls. Boys did not help with chores and certain toys were considered for boys and others for girls. That was my first conscious encounter with sexism and the first time I understood that differences existed between how girls and boys are privileged. As I became a teenager, I felt objectified by men within and outside my family. I had sexist comments made towards me and was touched inappropriately on many occasions, but I learned to ignore and eventually normalize the actions pretending they never happened. Women are "socialized to be 'nice,' to be 'good,' and to attend to other people's needs" (Tisdell, 2000, p. 160). These cultural and social expectations about how girls and women should behave affected my decision to suppress events that happened to me throughout my childhood and into my adult life. Tisdell

(2000) stated that gendered beliefs and expectations for women create barriers that can restrict their ability to openly and freely express themselves and also restrict their ability to challenge relations of power that sustain assumptions and beliefs about how women should behave.

Feminist Theory

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

~ Audre Lorde (Picture Quote, 2015)

Tripp, Ferree and Ewig (2013) state that during the mid-1990s a major success of international feminism was to transform the human rights discourse from gender-neutral to one that acknowledged that “women’s rights are human rights”. The United Nations along with national governments and countries around the world have adopted the concept of “human security” in their policymaking (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). Some activists fear this concept will displace the focus on individual rights and human rights. From a feminist perspective, there are numerous limitations in the way the concept of human security has been used and some feel it does not sufficiently differ from the traditional state-centered ideas of security (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). Exploring the relationship between human security and gender is important. Women’s rights activists have been critical of the concept of human security because women were left out as a special concern, instead claiming the concept encompasses all inequalities (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). The idea fails to articulate what human security means for women and what constitutes gender-based violence by focusing on conflict, famine, and economic crisis and not domestic-related issues (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013).

Women's movements have brought to the fore the issues confronting women and enabling them to participate in different spheres of life (Foster, 2018). At the turn of the twentieth century and in the 1960s and 1970s feminists established a generational and familial framework that categorized feminist activities as 'two moments in the same movement' (Muller, 2016). This generational thinking has since dominated discourses of feminism's history and has become a common means of describing historical shifts in feminist theory, politics and activism (Muller, 2016). Coleman (2008) argues that "the time *and becoming* of feminist theory and feminist theoretical empiricism can be thought of as future-oriented *and* as unavoidably attached to the past". Kate Walbert explores the genealogical conception of feminist history through the fragmented narratives of five generations of women supporting evidence that, in the 1970s and 1980s women *en masse* felt constrained by the fact that they were women. Now and in the past women experienced restrictions on their life choices *as women* (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). What they supported was a political agenda that challenged constraints based on their gender that limited their opportunities (and the aspirations they held for their daughters) to live the life they chose (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011).

There has indeed been a shift between social generations in what it means to be a woman (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). The younger generation of women does not experience the restrictions held in the past on their choices as women (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). Many young women take it for granted that their gender is not, or at least should not, be a limiting factor in their lives (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). Like other feminist researchers writing on generational change, Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson (2011) found in their research that young Australian mothers aged 26-31 years believe in gender equality but are still organizing their working lives around the needs of their children

as their mothers and grandmothers did before them. They return to work much sooner after childbirth and have a greater attachment to paid work (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011).

The extent that young women are disengaged from feminist politics has provoked a great deal of tension between feminist generations (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). In a feminist research study by Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson (2011) they found generational change has largely avoided this tension by focusing on the shifting meanings of feminism and the discrepancy between young women's reluctance to identify as "feminists" and their general acceptance of feminist attitudes toward gender issues.

Peltola, Milkie and Presser (2004) in a study involving two major surveys on over 5000 American women aged 18 years and over found that young women in recent times are unwilling to identify as feminists despite having egalitarian gender attitudes. "Avoidance of the 'feminist' label supposedly comes from the term's stigma" (Peltola, Milkie & Presser, 2004, p.123). Even though the stereotypes younger women attach to the feminist label cause them to reject it does not mean that younger women reject feminist positions (Peltola, Milkie & Presser, 2004). Regardless of their avoidance of a feminist label, their focus is still on many similar issues that were dealt with by second-wave feminists (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011).

Gouthro (2006) states that a critical feminist approach that draws upon feminist theory is needed to develop an analysis of the homeplace as a significant learning site. "Learning that is connected with the homeplace is often devalued or ignored" (Gouthro, 2006, p.5). By delving into the significance of the homeplace as a learning place and looking at its impact on women's lives with regards to three areas—identity, relationships and labour—questions are raised about the underlying value systems in discourses of lifelong education (Gouthro, 2006).

A critical feminist lens gives educators the opportunity to better understand gendered differences in learning experiences. Looking at the homeplace as a “significant site of learning widens the scope of lifelong education to consider more in-depth the learning that occurs outside of formal education.” It also “encourages academic research that focuses upon women’s learning experiences that might otherwise be overlooked or undermined in value” (Gouthro, 2006, p.6).

Another importance of looking at gendered differences within the home and school is girls’ and womens’ potential reluctance to seek higher education based on their beliefs that it is not as valued as boy’s or men’s education. Interviewing the different generations of women for this research study reflects that many did not have a supportive homelife and for some education wasn’t valued whether it was in the home, school or social community.

Lifelong Learning

“Never stop learning, because life never stops teaching.”

~ Unknown (Medium, 2018)

The concept of lifelong learning has been understood differently around the world and in education (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). In policy, the concept was first related to human capital because its motive was to give possibilities for individuals to learn and develop new skills that could be used in the workplace (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). Bosco and Pushkin (2007) define the lifelong learning concept as “an organizing principle of all forms of education based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values. Its role is to be critical in addressing global educational issues and challenges” (p.3). This conceptualization of lifelong learning is rooted in the combination of learning and living, covering lifelong (cradle to grave) and life-wide (formal, non-formal and informal) learning for people of all ages, delivered and

undertaken through a variety of modalities and meeting a wide range of learning needs and demands (Bosco & Pushkin, 2007). This definition remarks that lifelong learning does not limit its range. Lifelong learning extends beyond formal education to non-formal and informal learning for young people and adult citizens (Bosco & Pushkin, 2007).

Many factors play a role in lifelong learning. Careers for example are seen not so much as a choice made in early life, but rather as a series of choices that individuals make over a lifespan (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013). Changes throughout life are strongly influenced by parental background and resources the individual can draw on (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013). Some factors that shape the lives of youth and early adults and the conditions which may bring about individuals to engage in lifelong learning include decisions regarding education and employment growth are shaped by individual capabilities and preferences, which in turn are influenced by experiences in the family (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013). Evans, Schoon and Weale (2013) suggest that even though the data on the influence of parental background on children's educational experience remains stark, that participation in higher education is influenced by the social characteristics within the areas in which young people live (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013). "While there are no simple patterns this evidence of diversification in adult life is argued to be consistent with theoretical perspectives that foreground choices made by individuals over their participation in learning but also confirms that choices that were made were heavily constrained by external circumstances" (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013, p.39). Gender differences regarding social role expectations are also of significance as are the learner identities that are rooted in prior experiences of education, particularly in schooling (Evans, Schoon & Weale, 2013).

The difference between learning and education developed during the 1980s. Changing ideas of lifelong education and lifelong learning and from around 2000, lifelong learning became related to social capital and social cohesion (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). This changed the focus and social relationships were prioritized (Mitchell, 2016). It is within this scope of learning that lifelong learning connects with intergenerational learning. The social and policy interest in social relationships between different generations is growing (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017).

Intergenerational Learning

“Each generation plays an important role. We need the experience and knowledge of older generations, but we also need the fresh ideas and approaches from the newer ones.”

~ Arinya Talerngsri, (Bangkok Post, 2019)

Intergenerational learning is more than just an aspect of intergenerational relationships (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). It enables the intergenerational conveyance of knowledge, attitudes, and habits in both directions from younger generations to older and the other way around (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). Intergenerational learning is more than just a facet of intergenerational relationships. On the one side, it enables the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, and habits in both directions—from the younger generations to the older ones and the other way around. On the other side, intergenerational learning opens up space for generations to learn more about each other, to understand the perspectives of other generations without necessarily adopting them (Mitchell, 2016). Therefore, intergenerational learning is related to intergenerational relationships in different ways as

relationships of generations form these learning environments and the interaction of learners, but also, it can be changed through learning processes (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017).

When older generations engage in meaningful conversations with younger generations, they co-create new stories that help make sense of an ever-increasingly complex society (Mitchell, 2016). Intergenerational learning involves theoretical approaches to the learning process between different generations (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016). First, generations may learn from each other. This approach highlights the fact that one generation can inform and support another generation. Second, generations can learn with each other. The participants are working and learning together on topics that are new to the whole group. Third, generations can learn about each other. Learning about each other means focusing on the historical and biographical living conditions and experiences of another generation (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016). Interestingly, these statements seem to be true for different concepts of generations (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017).

In later years, people experience the need to reflect on their lives and experiences. Older adults have emotional needs, including coming to terms with their stories, resolving issues of dissatisfaction in their life histories, and exploring how they connect with the relationships in their worlds (Broecher, Davis & Painter, 2017). The connection between learning and relationships can be found for different generations within a family and within communities (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). Grandparents have a key part to play in passing on cultural knowledge to younger generations, especially in families that have migrated from their countries or communities of origin (Ruby, Kenner, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, 2007). In looking deeper into the intergenerational learning encounter, we can make use of the process by which knowledge is

culturally re-shaped as it passes from one generation to another (Ruby, Kenner, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, 2007).

Concerning the different understandings of generations, intergenerational learning can occur in diverse contexts and places, while family and educational institutions are only two of them. (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). Intergenerational learning is vital for capacity building; it nurtures sustainable human involvement and paves the way for sustainable community involvement (Gani Dutt, 2017). Research by Gani Dutt (2017) shows that strong intergenerational relations play a dominant role in defining women's status at home. Gani Dutt (2017) questions whether learning across generations can be facilitated and enhanced to mobilize and revitalize women's social movement participation in the next generation.

In a research study by Dun (2007) mothers, grandmothers, and granddaughters managed the contradictions of stability, change, constancy and variation across the lifetime daily. Women balance a desire for both connection and separation (Dun, 2007). Women in "connected" intergenerational relationships emphasize togetherness through personal distance, generational boundaries, and differentiation, which are respected and encouraged (Dun, 2007). On the other hand, women in "divided" intergenerational relationships seek continuous validation from one another and struggle over control of emotional resources as a result of the threat from separation (Dun, 2007). Adult daughters and granddaughters in divided relationships defer to the higher status of woman in the family and ultimately connect to her ideals (Dun, 2007).

Grandmother and granddaughter relationships are usually less connected than the one that is held with the mother (Dun, 2007). The quality of the relationship between mother and daughter both affect and influence the relationship between a grandmother and granddaughter (Dun, 2007). Looking at intergenerational learning, it is important to understand grandmother,

mother, and daughter relationships and the role of communication in those relationships (Dun, 2007). My interest is whether these relationships affect gendered learning experiences.

Mothers' gender role ideology is related to daughters' gender role ideology as adults and social changes over the years have contributed to stronger mother and daughter compatibility in gender role ideology and work role identity (Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997). Thus, mothers play a significant role in daughters' future roles in both career and motherhood domains (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Daughters tend to pull away from desiring a gender-equal society when their mother emphasizes family-oriented future goals (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015).

Because the literature is minimal on intergenerational learning among women, using a feminist lens is beneficial in exploring gendered stereotypes that women still face today. Feminist theory informs my research framework to help me understand the complexities that relate to women's informal learning experiences through storytelling.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

“Passed down from generation to generation, storytelling was an art in my family.”

- David Mixner (Picture Quote, 2017)

The purpose of this study is to explore intergenerational learning through storytelling as it relates to three generations of women. Using a feminist lens, it is important to add to the research on intergenerational learning with new positions of inquiry to expand our understanding of what influences in women’s and girls’ experiences shape and develop who they are. While searching for literature for this study, I could see that although there is significant literature on intergenerational learning, there was limited research on intergenerational learning through storytelling, especially when it relates to women. It was sometimes difficult to find relevant articles on intergenerational learning as it pertains to women. My research question of *what is it to be a girl* adds further insight into the experiences of grandmothers, mothers and daughters and how their informal learning has played a role in their lives and gendered ideologies. Therefore, because I am seeking to gain a thorough understanding of the narrative accounts of women’s informal learning experiences, using storytelling methodology was the best approach to answer my research question. Storytelling allows for exploring relationships as it allows researchers to document the growth and development of the interaction by analyzing the story analogies associated with each relationship stage (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016).

Storytelling Methodology

Storytelling is a compelling means of human expression that helps make sense of the past and to understand possible futures (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). Brigham (2012) states that “storytelling is an interactive process, a form of knowledge construction, which opens our

imagination, provides spaces for questioning, challenges assumptions that shape our judgments, prompt new ideals, opens up reflexivity, and instigates action” (p.3). Stories offer surprising perspectives and reveal hidden knowledge (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). In my study, I am interested in understanding how storytelling in research can create learning opportunities and impact future outcomes.

Storytelling provides a framework through which researchers can investigate experience and gain access to the complexity of human concerns and actions (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). As “people think narratively rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically”, stories are sense-making tools told in the present with a view to the future (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016, p.147). People have a need for stories, to organize and communicate experiences to others, and to help form meaningful connections (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Stories, how they are told and conveyed, are pivotal to understanding society and behavior (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). Storytelling expands our understanding of social determinants by giving insight into the daily contexts in which decision-making takes place (Banks, 2012). Of particular value is the fact that storytelling allows researchers to explore within-group diversity (Banks, 2012).

Banks (2012) offers examples of how storytelling can create safe spaces for voicing inequities and expanded awareness of social injustices while working toward change across various marginalized groups. A storytelling research method can move decision-makers in ways that statistics and reports often cannot (Banks, 2012). Storytelling can express experiences deeply and are central to learning and theorizing about the world compared to standard research methods and report on outcomes (Banks, 2012).

Storytelling can lead to many intergenerational learning opportunities and outcomes (Lee & Kim, 2017). Some of these outcomes include improved well-being, self-esteem, and health for

all involved, greater awareness of the issues facing different generations, development of stronger links to family and the community, breaking down age-based stereotypes and older generations teaching younger generations to be aware of the long-term impact of poor life decisions (Lee & Kim, 2017). Grandmothers, mothers, and daughters can influence each other's beliefs, life choices, and positive development. Intergenerational storytelling can bring meaning to life experiences and lead to greater learning (Lee & Kim, 2017). Through storytelling, people develop their views of the world. When individuals interact with people whose stories are different than theirs, even within their own families, it pushes them to reexamine their values and perceptions (Lawrence, 2017).

Stories allow people to connect to other people's happiness, pain, and varied life experiences which lead to a deeper understanding and encourages change (Lewis, 2011). These life experiences shared through storytelling are important to education research and for understanding different generational experiences. Stories shared from one generation of women to the next is a fundamental form of communication that enables girls and women to interact and connect (Lewis, 2011).

Stories obtained for research are particularly valuable, as they demonstrate how life events affect people and how people give meaning to these events (Gallagher, 2011). This is beneficial for intergenerational learning as stories shared can give insight into how things have progressed or regressed over time (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). This is vital when adding to research on women's learning and experiences especially concerning women's movements, struggles and advancement that happens today and throughout generations because without storytelling or analyzing the lived accounts of women, there wouldn't be insight on how future change can be created. Lawrence and Paige (2016, p.66) stated:

Telling our stories is one way of making sense of our own experiences. Listening to others' stories also helps us to understand ourselves as we identify with their experiences. On the other hand, listening to stories about differences helps to promote empathy and understanding, particularly between people of different cultures. It broadens our knowledge. Storytelling has the power to disrupt stereotypes.

Storytelling can be a form of resistance and a way of challenging the dominant paradigm that privileges some and oppresses others (Lawrence & Paige, 2016).

Storytelling is an important research method that allows a deeper understanding of history and from where beliefs and values emerged (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). In the past, stories were seen as supplementary material to support other forms of research (Thomas, 2015). A storytelling research methodology is a valuable means to give insight into social issues and lessons on how to create change (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). As a research methodology, storytelling is particularly suited to the principles of feminist theory, as it can empower participants and encourage change, inform social policy, and give voice to marginalized groups (De Carteret, 2008). Storytelling and feminist-informed research values the individual and emphasizes collaboration between researchers and participants (De Carteret, 2008). Exploring intergenerational learning through storytelling with a focus on girls and women can lead to societal advancements and favourable changes for women.

The goal of this study is to expand the knowledge and understanding of the topic of intergenerational learning through storytelling from three different generational perspectives of women. Since this research involved family groups of grandmothers, mothers and daughters, the research needed to be carried out in an environment where the participants felt comfortable and within a safe space to share their thoughts when they were being interviewed. My goal was to

develop an understanding of the women and girls I was interviewing through trying to answer my research question and subsequent questions below:

Research question - “What is it to be a girl?” (from three different generational perspectives, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters).

Sub-questions:

1. What was it like when you were a girl? (mothers and grandmothers).
2. What was it like being a girl when you were younger than you are now? (daughters).
3. How do you think it is different being a girl now compared to when you were a girl? (mothers and grandmothers).
4. How do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?

The storytelling process

I met with each of the family sets consisting of grandmothers, mothers and daughters from across Halifax Regional Municipality to hear their stories about what it is to be a girl. I chose this method because storytelling is a collaborative experience and allowed me to build trust between the participants and myself and allowed them to open up about their lives and experiences of being a girl which at moments was both freeing and emotional. Storytelling helped me gather insights into participants’ experiences which could not have been observed or replicated from anyone other than participants themselves (Ali, 2014).

The stories shared reflect the influences that shaped the women’s learning experiences throughout their lives. Grassley and Nelms (2009) describe sharing stories as a means for women to validate themselves and their lived realities. The benefit of storytelling is it does not influence

participants to become resigned to preconceived answers but allows them to be free to share their thoughts in their own words (Haigh & Hardy, 2011). This was important to my study because I am dealing with sensitive issues and personal experiences and feelings, and this allowed the participants to express themselves freely and openly and to share their views on their terms (Barriball & While, 1994). Sharing stories also give participants more room to talk about what is important to them and to control the flow of the dialogue.

The stories from the grandmothers, mothers and daughters unfolded through conversation about past and present events. During the interviews, the participants often took me on a journey through their early memories which added context and depth to understanding their lives. The audio recordings in this study were then listened to carefully to capture the voices and to honour the stories and experiences of the girls and women involved in the study. At the beginning of the interviews with each family, some of the women were quiet until a topic emerged that resonated with them. At each interview, I brought tea/coffee and snacks as a way to create a comfortable atmosphere sharing food and conversation. When I asked the first question, what it is like being a girl, each woman had to ponder the question for a moment before answering. This was the question that many of the women struggled with the most. After a pause, the girls and women started to talk very openly about their feelings. Then conversation through the subsequent questions seemed to flow easily.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. No identifying information about participants is included in the thesis. Women who agreed to participate in the interviews were provided an agenda, information letter, logistics, and a consent form. They were given opportunities to ask questions about the study before signing the consent form.

Research Participants

Participants included three generations of women: a grandmother, mother, and daughter from four different family sets. The family sets of women included a grandmother, mother, and daughter who identify as African Nova Scotian, a grandmother, mother and daughter who identify as Indigenous and a grandmother, mother and daughter who identify as White/Asian Canadian born non-visible minority. The fourth family set in the research was my family who identifies as Canadian born non-visible minority. The age range for grandmothers was 65 years of age and over, mothers 35 to 55 years of age and daughters 12 to 18 years of age. The recruitment poster for this study was shared through social media, universities within the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Halifax Public Libraries and with friends and acquaintances. The process proved to be difficult as in some families, the grandmother was deceased or living in another province in Canada or another country or they were not within the age ranges specified. When family sets fit the research criteria, the conversations were set up within the home of the mother or grandmother of each family. For this research and confidentiality, the families were recorded as family one, two, three and four. Family set number one consisted of a 72-year-old grandmother who attended a residential school, a 44-year-old mother and a 12-year-old daughter of Indigenous descent from a rural area in HRM. Family set number two consisted of a grandmother aged 69 years, a mother 47 years of age and a daughter aged 14 years of African Nova Scotian descent from a rural area in HRM. Family set number three, consisted of a grandmother aged 70 years, a mother aged 48 years and a daughter aged 16 years of White descent from within an urban area of HRM. Family set number four consisted of a grandmother aged 66 years, a mother 38 years of age and a daughter aged 13 years of White/Asian descent from an urban area in HRM.

Analysis

By using a feminist lens, I analyzed the stories collected from each of the families' interviews that were shared. The overarching goal of using a feminist approach is to "create spaces and opportunities to reveal lived realities of power inequalities and difference and provide evidence that can be deployed in working towards addressing these engrained inequalities" (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy & Sweetman, 2019, p. 427). Storytelling is important in creating spaces and opportunities to understand the experiences of the girls and women who took part in this study. The conversations with each family set were audiotaped ensuring I captured the entire narratives from beginning to end. After the interviews were complete, I began by transcribing the participant's stories carefully to ensure I captured all of the data accurately. After transcription, I began the data analysis process with a minimum of two read-throughs of each transcript in its entirety. I then worked through each family's story transcript individually, moving from the identification of major themes through coding to other minor mentioned themes.

Throughout the data analysis process and wanting to make sure I captured the themes that emerged through the stories, I took several days to code the interview transcripts carefully. For themes to emerge, we need to engage deeply with our data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I read and re-read the transcripts again to have better clarity and get familiar with the narratives. First, I coded the transcripts into categories, sub-categories and then themes. The developing themes that were emerging throughout the coding process were read with a feminist lens to help me explore the diversity of the girl's and women's experiences. At certain times during the process, I had to take a break and walk away to reflect on the narratives and after a short time, I would return to further develop the evolving themes. This approach supported an iterative cycle of analysis, coding, reflection, and continuous integration of incoming data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I

also journaled the experience as a way to cope with my emotions after hearing so many stories from participants. At times I felt strong emotions in response to hearing what the women shared, and journaling allowed me to document and reflect on my feelings. Sometimes after I took to the time to reflect and I began the process again, new themes emerged, which caused me to reconsider the themes I had discovered, which were then sometimes adjusted to reflect new understandings of the stories. I wanted to ensure while drawing themes from the participants' narratives that I maintained the integrity of the experiences shared and honoured the voices of the women who took part in this study.

I used thematic analysis which began with multiple readings of each family's story transcript, followed by coding to generate the initial themes that emerged. The goal of thematic analysis is to move the data from a multiplicity of disconnected codes to meaningful patterns or themes that begin to tell a story from the collected data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). As the analysis proceeded, subthemes were further extracted from the themes to facilitate exploration of the developing concepts (Bryman, 2016). Then I applied thematic analysis to explore how the themes helped answer my research question *what is it to be a girl*.

In the following chapter, I focus on the narratives between each family set to gain a better understanding of the relationships between grandmothers, mothers and daughters. These stories came from the conversations shared where I applied thematic analysis to uncover the common themes.

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I explore the stories of each of the twelve girls and women who participated in this study. Their stories are reflections of the influences that shaped their informal learning experiences and gendered ideologies. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) state “the intergenerational transmission of gender ideology—meaning the system of values, beliefs and attitudes a person holds about the meaning of biological sex and gender is a transmission that often occurs within families” (p.527). In exploring the following narratives that emerged between each family set of women, we can see where some of the women’s beliefs and gendered ideologies were carried down from one generation to the next.

Interview with Family Set One

When the main research question *what is it to be a girl?* was asked, family one sat quietly at first until the daughter shared her thoughts and then the conversation began to follow with each family member contributing.

Daughter 1 – *I think being a girl is hard. We have to worry about so many things that boys never have to worry about.*

Mother 1 – *Yes, it definitely seems that way sometimes. What things are you thinking about?*

Daughter 1 – *Well, um like girls have more chores. I have to help with cleaning, cooking and watching my baby sister but my brother gets to play outside more, and um barely helps with anything.*

Grandmother 1 – *That is what we as women do. It is our responsibility to care for our family and provide what is needed within the home. It has been that way for a long time.*

Daughter 1 – *Yeah but why can't boys help too? I um go to school and still have to do my homework and help with supper when I get home or watch my sister, but my brother plays video games all the time. It's not fair.*

Grandmother 1 – *It may not be fair, but it is the way things are. Boys and men have certain responsibilities and girls, and women have their own responsibilities.*

Mother 1 – *Sorry I feel I need to say that I know it seems unfair sometimes that girls do most of the work but maybe it's because we can do it better (laughing). I cannot imagine your brother changing a diaper or cleaning! The diaper would be on backward and things would be swept under furniture to hide it (laughing).*

Daughter 1 – *Um well yeah but why can't you teach him to do it?*

Mother 1 – *Yes, that is a good question. We have always followed how generations before us have done it and no one really questions it or how things are done. Maybe it's time for a change?*

Grandmother 1 – *Because it is not a boy's job. Their job is to get a good education, find a good job and work to provide for their family. Your brother will have a family to provide for one day so his focus should be getting through school and finding employment. Girls need to learn how to run a household, which is what your mother is teaching you and what I taught her. These are important jobs.*

Daughter 1 – *Um, ok, but I still kinda think it's not very fair. I wish I was a boy sometimes! I think they have it easier than we do.*

Grandmother 1 – *I guess that really answers the question of what it's like being a girl doesn't it? It is hard and unfair sometimes but everything we do is necessary to raise the next generation. Women are the ones who go through many physical and mental changes over their*

lifetime. We bear the children, raise them, teach them and hope they will grow into healthy adults and be a positive influence in their community and society. I believe women have the greatest responsibility and it should be an honor to do the work we do.

Daughter 1 – *Yeah, I guess so and I do understand that but besides doing everything we also have to worry about a lot of things too that boys don't. Being a girl is really hard sometimes.*

Mother 1 – *Yes it definitely is but I guess what your grandmother is saying it that we need to honour being a woman even though some of the things we deal with or do seem unfair.*

The grandmother shared her thoughts on what responsibilities women within a family have while the daughter tries to share her feelings although also trying to be respectful of what her mother and grandmother were saying. When she spoke, she started by saying “*yeah, I guess so*”, “*um, yeah ok,*” or “*um well yeah*”. The grandmother answered quite adamantly that it is a woman’s responsibility to care for the family, “*it is what we as women do*” and “*girls need to learn to run a household.*” Moen, Erickson and Dempster-McCain (1997) stated that a mother’s gender role ideology was positively related to their daughter’s gender role ideology as adults. Although certain factors can affect these gender role ideologies over the life span. If a mother changes her beliefs around what she learned from her mother, her daughter will reflect those new beliefs (Moen, Erickson and Dempster-McCain, 1997).

When asking the next question which was for the grandmothers and mothers, *what was it like when you were a girl?* many stated that education was seen as more important for boys when the grandmother and mother were younger, than for girls. These gendered perspectives can not only affect girls’ self-identity but also the expectations placed on them and their opportunities to fully engage in education (Sanford, 2005). If school was seen as less valuable for girls, they

might not identify as being as capable as boys and start to focus on their interests or hobbies on more gendered activities.

Grandmother 1 – *When I was a girl, we had a lot of responsibility at a very young age. I remember starting to do chores at only five years old. It started as simple little things like helping with the dishes or sweeping and funny enough I actually remember enjoying it because I could be like the older girls. I was second to the youngest of six sisters and two brothers. Schooling wasn't seen as important for the girls in the family. We went every day until grade eight and then most of us left school if we were lucky. Most of us had to attend a residential school and it wasn't a very good place to be. Very few of the girls went beyond earlier grades but the boys went until grade eleven or twelve because having a good education seemed more important for them. It was hard on them though. It really wasn't a nice place. Being a girl in my day seemed like the most valuable things to learn was how to take care of a household and find a good husband who could provide for our own family one day. I honestly don't remember ever being told that school was important, but I definitely heard it said to my brothers on many occasions. I feel my parents eventually regretted that with everything that happened. It was just the way things were and we didn't question it. The girls had certain duties and the boys had others even if we felt it was unfair. That's it.*

Mother 1 – *Oh I remember some of the stories of when you were young. We don't talk about it much. I was always thankful I could go to a regular school, even though the school we attended wasn't great either. Many of us girls graduated from school, but it still seemed that education was more important for the boys. I was eager to learn and would constantly have my hand up, waving it around, sometimes wildly (laughing) but the boys were usually called on to answer the question.*

When mother 1 states “we don’t talk about it much” this may be related to staying quiet about the negative things that happen within women’s lives. Feminist activists and scholars have long been interested in the dynamics that keep women from speaking about their experiences (Ahrens, 2006, p. 263). Many girls from a young age are being told that “*things happen*” or “*just ignore it*” which can create the belief that it is better to stay quiet and pretend everything is okay (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). In my own life growing up, I would hear very similar comments from some family members and often heard “good girls stay quiet”. Perhaps these gendered expectations play a role in women staying silent about sexual abuse or assault as adults. Sexual assaults are also often not disclosed or are disclosed only after long periods (Alaggin & Wang, 2020). A lot of factors can play a role in the decision to stay silent including self-blame, fear of not being believed, shame, family-encouraging silence or the fear of losing family or friends (Alaggin & Wang, 2020).

Daughter 1 – *I still find it that way now sometimes! You would think things would be different but in certain classes, the boys are always called on first. Girls in my class don’t even bother putting their hands up anymore. Plus, if we do raise our hand and we get the answer wrong the boys all laugh!*

Throughout the conversation with grandmother and mother one, the women shared examples of feeling inferior to boys and men in school. Both mentioned that education was seen by their parents as more important for boys. This may give the impression to the women that girls are not as smart or as academically capable as boys. The daughter also spoke up to say, “*in certain classes boys are always called on first*” and “*girls in my class don’t even bother putting their hand up anymore. Plus, if we do raise our hand and we get the answer wrong the boys all laugh!*”

A study by Bian, Leslie and Cimpian (2017) of 400 students in the United States shows how girls' thinking in school can change at an early age. Five-year-old girls in the study believed they were "brilliant" but a year later, at age six, they no longer identified themselves as being brilliant or having the capacity for brilliance. Boys on the other hand in the same age group remained believing they were "brilliant". Between early elementary and high school, girls' self-esteem lowers 3.5 times more than boys and girls are also twice as likely as boys to worry that leadership roles will make them seem bossy (Bian, Leslie & Cimpian, 2017). In public schools, girls get less airtime in class and tend to be called on less and interrupted more (Zhang, 2018).

The next question was for the daughters in the family set *what was it like being a girl when you were younger than you are now?* to get their perspectives on their life experiences so far. Most of them thought about the question for a few moments before they answered.

Daughter 1 – *Well I guess when I was really little, it was easier. I didn't have to do any of the chores I do now. My mom did everything and I just played. Even though, um I don't mind helping, it's just that now I help with everything and my brother does nothing.*

When moving on to the next question for the grandmothers and mothers again, *how do you think it is different being a girl now compared to when you were a girl?* they were quick to answer. Both refer to the topic of fear and violence against women.

Grandmother 1 – *I don't know if it was better then or better now or much the same but with different struggles. Schooling I think is different maybe in the sense that our culture is more accepted now and girls today do not have to attend residential schools to forget who they are. I still see a lot of violence though and our girls and women are still suffering.*

Mother 1 – *I agree our women are still suffering today. I worry all the time for my daughter, you. I don't want you to be fearful but to be safe and be aware always. There are too many girls*

going missing or are victims of violence. I don't think that has ever changed. I was afraid when I was young, and I am afraid now for my child. Not so much for myself anymore because over the years I built a pretty tough shell around myself but definitely for my daughter. She always asks why I cannot sleep when she is out with friends and that's exactly why.

Grandmother 1 – *Yes, it is a constant worry. I felt the same when you were a young girl. We have seen and heard so much over the years that you just pray every day that your family will not have to experience it. I have a close friend who lost her daughter to violence at the hands of her boyfriend, and she has never been the same. She is very strict with her granddaughter she had to take over raising but I can understand why after what she went through. I know her granddaughter doesn't get it but hopefully she will see one day that her grandmother was only trying to keep her out of harm's way.*

When the grandmother mentioned “*it is a constant worry*” I thought of my own parenting as a single mother with a daughter. I have at times found myself saying things to her about being safe, walk with a friend at night or explaining things that could happen which are things I didn't say as much to her brothers. I did that because of my own life experiences as a girl, and I did not want my daughter to have face similar circumstances.

Mother 1 – *We can only pray every day we never have to experience that. I do think that education is seen as more important for girls today than when I was younger which is a good thing. So, I guess that's one positive thing. I think when it comes to violence against women, we still have a long way to go. We have to try and raise our daughters to be warriors in order to make a difference for future generations.*

The last question *how do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?* created rich and relative conversation which helped in exploring the way

intergenerational learning among women could have an impact on gender ideologies and women's advancement.

Daughter 1 – *I think, well, I kinda think that the thing that being afraid has never changed. I hear stories from my grandmother, mother, aunts and other women in my community about scary things happening so it's like always living in fear. It always made me scared that I am a girl and have to worry about those kinds of things.*

Mother 1 – *I don't think we ever mean to scare you but to always be aware because unfortunately when it comes to violence against women, we still have a long way to go. I think a big thing that has changed now is that we talk about it more, so women are coming together to try and create change for future generations. We are fighting injustices against women more today it seems. Not that women didn't before but now with social media and people being more aware of what is happening, especially to Indigenous women, we are creating little changes or at least I really hope so. Trust me they are only little changes right now, but we will continue to fight until girls and women can feel safe.*

Daughter 1 – *I hope so! I am afraid all the time. There are men in our community that scare me. They say gross things to me and my friends sometimes!*

Grandmother 1 - *You just need to ignore them and hold your head up. Women have been treated a certain way for so long that some men think they can still get away with that kind of behaviour.*

Daughter 1 – *It is like, we are objects and not even human beings sometimes. Some of my friends think it's funny but I think it's gross!*

Mother 1 – *Yes, we still have a long way to go, and you are right love, it is not funny at all. Not much has seemed to change for girls since I've been alive except maybe around education and*

being able to share stories more freely. Our boys and men need to learn and we as women have to lead the way for change by being strong and teaching our daughters to be strong

Although grandmother one has expressed feelings of fear and insecurity through the interview “*I see a lot of violence though and our girls and women are still suffering*” and “*women have been treated a certain way for so long*” she still dismisses such an important concern brought up by her granddaughter about ignoring men’s comments.

Interview with Family Set Two

In Family two, they also shared similar views when asked *what it is to be a girl?* and introduced an additional topic on areas related to men within the home.

Mother 2 –*Being a girl can be tough! Being a woman can be tough! We go through so many physical changes first like our period and our bodies changing, having to deal with boys and men ogling us, getting pregnant, going through menopause, being skinny and getting fat. I think we struggle with weight our entire lives or God knows I do. Then we take care of our children while taking care of everything in our home and work to bring in extra income just to survive. I am tired every day when I finally get to bed. Being a woman can be exhausting!*

Grandmother 2 – *Yes, we as women definitely do our fair share. My husband, her father, died young in a vehicle accident and I was left alone to care for her and her sister when they were only 1 and 2 ½ years old. I didn’t have an education past grade eight, so I sometimes worked two or more crappy jobs just to take care of my girls. We struggled a lot at times until I met their stepfather who was a good man and worked hard to provide for us.*

Mother 2 – *Yes, he was a good man. We all need one of those heavens knows (laughing).*

Daughter 2 – *Um, we don't need men. You are a single mom, and we are doing ok. All my father ever did was make things worse. Boys are so immature, even when they are older! Being a girl is tough enough as it is without bringing another man into the picture. I love my brother but even him and his friends are so stupid sometimes. The way they talk about girls is disgusting first of all and they laugh at the dumbest things!*

Mother 2 – *Yes but maybe your brother with our help will grow up to be a good man, unlike your father. We are doing ok because I work very hard at my job, but it would be nice to have another income coming in. Then maybe I could find time to exercise and lose a few extra pounds (laughing). All I do is work it seems!*

Grandmother 2 – *That's because you are a good woman and a hard worker. It is unfortunate your dad got into the things he did hurting his family and ruining his life. Your mom tried. I hated seeing her go through those things and worried for you and your brother. I hope and pray one day even if you think you don't need one that you find a good man who can take care of you the way your stepfather took care of us. It definitely made life easier for us.*

Daughter 2 – *I'm going to make my own money and take care of myself. Everyone always says you need to find a man or even some of my friends say I need a boyfriend now, but I don't! I don't need the drama they have with their boyfriends! Last weekend one of my friends didn't even go to a party because her boyfriend didn't like what she wanted to wear and told her she better not go, or they were done. I would have said, "well um we are done then"!*

The grandmother in this family set mentions that a “good woman” is one who self-sacrifices after the mother expressed working hard to provide for her family as a single mother. Then the grandmother talks about finding a “good man” who is someone who provides for his family and would take care of them. Perhaps so the mother didn't have to work so hard. The

daughter disagrees with her grandmother's necessity for women to find a "good man" and states, "I'm going to make my own money and take care of myself" and "um, we don't need men" breaking away from the gendered norms she has experienced within her family. The grandmothers' beliefs follow the gendered expectation that men are the financial providers in the family and if a family unit is without a man, then women have to work harder to be the sole provider. Gender pay inequities often force women to work longer hours or more than one job. To create change for individuals and communities, increase women's labour-market attachment, financial independence, and life choices improved gender pay equity is fundamental to gender equality (Todd & Eveline, 2007).

When the mother and grandmother from the second family set were asked "*what was it like when you were a girl?*", the discussion revolved around the challenges women can face being a single mother.

Mother 2 – *Hmm, well it was tough, like we said before, mostly because my mom was on her own since I was a baby after my father died. She worked all the time, so we were with our grandmother, aunties or friends of the family most of the time when we were young girls. I felt like we were constantly being shuffled from one house to another. I didn't mind too much because I loved all the strong women in our family, but I was terrified of some of the men. My oldest aunt had a husband who yelled all the time. At my aunt, at the kids and I remember as a girl we used to try and play so quietly so we didn't disturb him. No one wanted to disturb him, or it was chaos.* The comment "*she worked all the time*", relates to the women's self-sacrificing and having to work longer hours without equal pay, which referred to when the family was asked what it is to be a girl.

Grandmother 2 – *Yes, he definitely was a miserable man. No wonder he had a heart attack with all that anger! He reminded me a lot of my own father when I was a girl God rest his soul. My father was a nasty man. Girls were meant to be seen but definitely not heard when he was around. My mother kept a very clean house, so we were often made to do chores to make sure the house was in perfect order for when he got home from work. One thing I will always remember is that supper was on the table at the exact same time every day for when my father arrived home. We went to church every Sunday and we had to be in our Sunday best and not make a peep or we would be in a great deal of trouble when we got back.*

The grandmother refers to the role of the man in the family as the disciplinarian and is possibly referring to harsh punishment by her father. Maliken and Katz (2012) state that fathers tend to be less accepting of vulnerable emotions, and less likely to show affection than with girls. Violent men show more anger toward their children, use more physical discipline, and are less likely to use positive parenting practices than nonviolent men (Maliken & Katz, 2012).

Daughter two expressed feeling fear in the home when asked “*what was it like being a girl when you were younger than you are now?*”

Daughter 2 – *It was way worse when I was younger because my dad was around. I was scared all of the time because when he got mad it was really scary. I would stay in my room a lot trying to be quiet, so I didn't bother him. Me and my brother would stay in there for hours sometimes even though he treated my brother better than me. He called him his “little man” and would talk to him sometimes even though I think my brother was still scared of him. I always felt invisible like if I disappeared, he wouldn't even notice. Thank God I had my mum because I would still be a mess. She tried to stick up for me when he was mean, but I always felt bad when he was*

screaming at her. It definitely was so much better after he was gone. It was like we could breathe again.

Next the question for the mothers and grandmothers “*how do you think it is different being a girl now compared to when you were a girl?*” sparked a conversation on the use of social media and how it can impact girls’ and women’s lives.

Mother 2 – *I think it was hard being a girl back then, now, and in between. I don’t think things changed much but nowadays life is online, so girls today face another obstacle added to everything else. I think it was easier when I was a girl in the sense that I was surrounded by a lot of strong women in my family. When they say “it takes a village to raise a child” they are right (laughing) and I had that but besides my mom helping with my children, my daughter never got that experience of having a lot of strong women in her life. She had me and her grandmother mostly.*

Grandmother 2 – *Yes that social media! It drives me crazy! I think that is one of the reasons things might be harder for girls today than when I was younger, or you were younger. Your whole life is online displayed for everyone to see. I don’t like it!*

Mother 2 – *That’s true mom. I hear the young girls talking about it all the time when they come to the house, asking which picture the best is to post. They are always worried about likes or someone commenting. Girls do have it tougher today I think because they are constantly comparing themselves to other girls online. That’s one thing we didn’t really care much about. It seemed like everyone wore the same thing in our neighbourhood anyway (laughing). We definitely didn’t worry about that stuff as much as girls seem to nowadays.*

Mother 2 – *Maybe social media has made it harder for girls because they live their lives online for the world to see but when it comes to things being equal, nothing has changed.*

Social media remained a topic of conversation when answering the last question, “*how do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?*” with the grandmother stressing the importance of not sharing too much personal information.

Grandmother 2 – *They could spend less time on social media hmm? I don’t know why girls today need to share their business with everyone. Maybe they make it tougher on themselves because nothing is private anymore.*

Daughter 2 – *(Laughing) Oh nan, you really don’t like social media, do you? I agree some girls share too much but it’s the way we communicate now. That is something that has changed for sure is the way we communicate. I don’t know how I could have survived back then. Well, I guess I wouldn’t have known any different.*

Mother 2 – *We survived (laughing). We would leave the house and be gone for hours without our parents having any idea where we went. I don’t know how you did it mum because I would be frantic not knowing!*

Grandmother 2 – *Things were different then. The world seemed like a safer place and neighbours always had an eye out for neighbourhood children. Trust me! If you got in trouble, I found out very fast. Things were more private too. Besides, a few things stayed within our family and we dealt with it together. Now a girl is hurt, and the world knows. I don’t know about all of that. Some things are meant to be private.*

Daughter 2 – *I think that is just the way you grew up but even though you had your mum or family, maybe the girl would still feel alone. I know you don’t like social media, but girls could see they aren’t alone if something happened to them and then can share with other girls and share their story to try and change the way things are. I just watched that movie on human trafficking on the weekend and it happens here in Nova Scotia! That’s scary! Maybe social*

media and sharing stuff like that can help girls because a lot of my friends didn't know it happens around here either. You know how a couple of my friends are. They would get into a car with anyone because they would think it's nothing but maybe now, they will think about it.

Interview with Family Set Three

Starting with the first question “*what it is to be a girl*” sparked an interesting conversation with my own family set. I could see where my questioning of gender norms in my family led to raising my daughter differently than I was taught.

Daughter 3 – *I love being a girl! Well maybe not in certain ways but I would much rather be a girl than a boy. Girls can do anything boys can do and sometimes better. I just wish other people could see that too. At school I see a lot of girls saying they want to be nurses or teachers but when I ask them why they usually say because their family thinks it would be a good choice. I never really understood that because you should figure out what you like and work towards that. Not what your family or anyone else tells you that you can and cannot do or what you should do.*

Mother 3 – *Very true! The only way we as women are going to create real change is by thinking outside the societal norms.*

Daughter 3 – *If more girls would break the mold, then maybe we will make real advances towards equality. One thing about being a girl is that we have to fight harder than boys. I think some girls just give in to what their families think is best instead of discovering what they might be truly capable of. I know a lot of my friends struggle with confidence and self-esteem issues which definitely holds them back.*

Grandmother 3 – *I don't see anything wrong with being a nurse or teacher. Those are very good jobs. I think being a girl when I was young is different from today. Things were much*

simpler back then. Now, girls seem way more concerned with their looks. Maybe that is because of social media and selfies. We didn't have any of those things.

Daughter 3 – *Social media definitely can make you feel more insecure as a girl especially when everyone is always paying attention to how many “likes” they get on a post, but it can do a lot of good when it comes to women’s rights and sharing information about what is happening around the world. Some of my friends had no idea about women’s issues in other parts of the world like child brides or genital mutilation. Like honestly had no idea. I told them and they didn’t believe me that things like that were happening until I showed them online.*

The conversation between my mother and daughter about social media was interesting. My mother commented “*now girls seem way more concerned with their looks*” referring to girls posting pictures of themselves online. My daughter agrees that some girls are posting pictures to receive “likes”, which may stem from insecurity and receiving likes might be a way of making them feel valued. Although she can also see the positive side of social media through sharing stories to create societal change.

Mother 3 – *Yes, I guess there are good and bad things when it comes to being a girl and social media. The bad being I see more girls today struggling with confidence and self-esteem than when I was younger. Maybe we did but definitely not like today. I think trying to constantly post the “perfect” picture definitely doesn’t help. Even women my age seem to struggle with this. The good thing about social media is that posts can be shared across the globe. I believe it played a significant role in the Me Too movement. That movement helped a lot of women open up about things that happened to them over the years. Women have faced a lot of struggles that they held in without telling a soul what they went through. Being a girl can be very difficult for so many reasons and sadly we still have a great deal of work to do.*

Grandmother 3 – *We never had a lot of the issues that are mentioned today, or well I guess if someone did, no one ever talked about it. Anything that happened stayed behind closed doors. My niece was attacked and raped by four men, but it was never talked about again after it happened. It was horrible, just horrible what happened to her but somehow, she continued to live her life like nothing happened. She was home for a while, a few months, and then she started coming back around and we never spoke of it again.*

Daughter 3 – *I didn't know that. Um it is the first time I ever heard something like that happened in our family. I have friends who are afraid all the time of stuff like that happening. As a girl, we have to be careful. Definitely more careful than boys. If you drink too much at a party a boy might take advantage of that or I know someone who had the date rape drug put in her drink once. At least her friends took care of her so nothing happened, but it could have, and it happens all the time. It can be exhausting being a girl and having to worry about those things. I wish things were different, but I really don't know if they will ever be.*

Throughout the conversation between myself, my daughter and my mother, my daughter would push back against my mother's ideas. She would have seen me breaking away from the traditionally gendered norms I grew up with. When I was younger, I kept quiet about a lot of negative experiences because I learned that the women in my family never spoke about negative things and always remained quiet.

Here my mother and I share our responses to the question “*what was it like when you were a girl?*”

Grandmother 3 – *I have to think back but I remember my mother always had her best dress on and her hair done as soon as she woke up in the morning. She used to get up before anyone to get herself ready and then woke up the girls to do the same. We were always in dresses every day*

and we had to stay clean. If we got our dresses dirty playing, we were scolded. And the girls helped with all the household chores. There were five girls, so we made it fun most of the time. Even though the girls were treated differently, we didn't think about it much. I don't remember ever talking about it being unfair or complaining. It was just the way things were and we were happy.

I found this statement “*it was just the way things were*” interesting as it seems the grandmothers and mothers learned to live with certain experiences throughout their lives by normalizing them.

Mother 3 – *I know I definitely wouldn't have been happy (laughing). I constantly questioned why boys were treated differently when I was young. I wanted to do everything the boys did and used to sneak my brothers' toys because I liked them better.*

Grandmother 3 – *You used to even try and pee like a boy all the time (laughing).*

Mother 3 – *I was definitely a tomboy. I remember even as a very young girl wondering why I had to have long hair or had to wear a dress. I was ruining all my dresses getting dirty from climbing trees anyway (laughing).*

Grandmother 3 – *You were always getting dirty. Your grandmother was mortified all the time when we lived with them!*

Mother 3 – *Yes, I remember but I also remember her laughing about it a lot too. Maybe I started to change her mind about how little girls should behave. Actually, looking back to when I was a girl and thinking about it today, I think maybe I thought my father would like me more if I was a boy. I remember not being able to understand why he spent time with my brother but not me. My sister didn't seem to care but I wanted to do the things him and my brother would do together. Girls seemed to be treated differently than boys and I had a hard time grasping that concept. We*

did chores, babysat and helped our grandparents. The boys definitely had it easier or at least it seemed that way. All of their meals were waiting for them when it was time to eat because it was the women and girls who prepared it all and cleaned up afterward.

Grandmother 3 – *That is the way it has been for a long time. I remember my grandmother and my mother doing the same things and teaching the girls in the family to be able to take care of their own household one day. We started learning at a very young age to keep our voices down, do as we were told, do our chores and do not disturb my father.*

When I asked my daughter, “*what was it like being a girl when you were younger than you are now?*” she talked about how our family didn’t follow traditionally gendered norms that I had grown up with.

Daughter 3 – *It was just my mom, brother and me since I was five and now just me and mom. I liked it that way when I was younger and still do. My dad brought a lot of negative energy into our house, so I am thankful my mom decided to divorce him. Here my daughter mentions how when her father was within the home that it was a negative experience which was also mentioned by some of the other participants in how they had unfavorable circumstances within their own lives around their fathers. It was better with just the three of us. My mom always let me be who I wanted to be. Even though she was a tomboy growing up, I loved everything girly (laughing). She never tried to tell me a girl had to dress a certain way or play with certain things. My brother and me would play army, superheroes, have nerf gun fights but also paint, play in our play kitchen or activities some people would say is for girls. We both had chores helping with the pets, cleaning or cooking. My nan, sorry nan, would sometimes say that girls should be helping with the dishes and laundry, but my mom would say they can both learn that stuff. I always appreciated that when I was young and probably why I am the way I am today. Here my*

daughter challenges her grandmother's idea again which shows how the intergenerational learning in my own family has changed.

When I asked the final question "*how do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?*", we all took a few minutes sitting quietly and then my mother was the first to answer.

Grandmother 3 – *It was definitely better when we were young. Things were simpler back then. My mother made most of our clothes so that's what we wore. We always had beautiful dresses, so we were happy. We were close with our sisters and cousins, so we always had someone to play with or hang out with and girls usually had the same chores in every home, so we didn't feel different from each other.*

Mother 3 – *Hmm, I think it was different when I was a young girl compared to now but not necessarily easier. I feel some of the issues we dealt with are still the same girls face today while others are not as prevalent. Girls were treated differently than boys when I was young, and I think in a lot of cases they still are. Girls still worry about their safety walking alone especially at night or drinking too much at a party and being taken advantage of. Those things have never changed since I was young. Also, girls still feel like they have to work harder in order to be able to work at certain jobs or advance. They still need to prove themselves just like when I was young too. Women have been fighting for equality for a long time. That is one thing that definitely hasn't changed. The one thing that is different is now they have the added pressures of social media and their lives constantly being judged.*

Grandmother 3 – *That's exactly why I said it was easier when I was a girl. We didn't worry about those things. Girls did what girls had to do and boys did what they had to do. We never really talked about if things should be different or not. You just did what you had to.*

Grandmother 3 – *When I was growing up, we were close with our sisters and cousins and all of our friends of each other hung out with us too. So, there was always a lot of us together. We had a lot of laughs. We never really talked about things that might have happened. Well, sometimes one of the girls might have told a story but it was quickly forgotten. Now it seems like girls share everything and not just with family or friends but everyone.*

Daughter 3 – *I think that is a good thing now though Nan. I think it would have been lonely if something happened when you were young, and you had no one to share your feelings with. I think girls held everything in, well some still do now, but today's girls can share their stories and not feel alone because others share their stories too which might be like theirs. Maybe someday in the future, there will be equality because women all over the world worked together.*

Grandmother 3 – *There were women fighting for women's rights when I was younger, but you didn't hear about it as much as today. I guess some of us didn't think about it as much and were happy with how things were.*

Mother 3 – *Maybe not hearing about the injustices as much helped?*

Grandmother 3 – *Maybe? We just knew what we knew and were taught. My father was a great man though so maybe that helped. He helped around the house and let the girls help when he was fixing cars or something around the house not like a lot of the men. I guess we were happy, so we never thought about wanting it any other way. Some of the girls today seem angry at everything.*

Daughter 3 – *That actually kind of makes sense. You wouldn't have had social media so if you didn't read or see what was happening in the news to women then you would have no idea. I think a lot of us are angry now because we see what is happening all over the world. Child brides, genital mutilation, human trafficking, um violence against women and even being killed*

when you are born just because you were born a girl. It's sad. That's why so many of us are upset because why should anything of those things happen just because you are a girl? This comment shows the value of social media to help educate and inform girls and how it is an important tool that could help make a change around gender equality and social justice issues.

Daughter 3 – *Also, even little things like teachers and guidance counselors thinking girls should take certain classes or things in university. Our child studies class is all girls. Not even one boy and some of the girls told me it was suggested by the guidance counselor. I took business tech and only three other girls were in the class. All of the boys thought they needed to help us with classwork all the time. It was annoying and we are capable ourselves!*

Mother 3 – *Yes, we have lots of reasons to want things to change for girls and women. Little things to very big things. It is a battle we as women have been fighting for a long time. That is why I feel it is important to empower our young girls so they can create change now and in the future. When I was younger in the '70s, I questioned everything as Mom knows (laughing) and even though I was young I could see things were quite different for men and women. A lot of my friends didn't care as much as me what was happening so I often felt alone except when I would sit and share stories with my Nan. I think what has changed a lot for being a girl today compared to the past is that they can voice injustices and their opinions more freely. Hopefully, this is the way women's rights movements continue to grow and spread across the globe to finally create the change so many of us have wanted for years.*

Interview with Family Set Four

When interviewing the last family set, I was excited that I was almost done data collecting, but also a bit saddened as the stories had been interesting and eye-opening. I could see

how future research could benefit by including even more girls and women to get a greater understanding of intergenerational learning. The first question with family set four “*what is it to be a girl?*” resulted in this conversation.

Mother 4 – *I grew up in a very strict household so being a girl meant following specific rules. The girls were meant to be seen, not heard and we took care of all of the household chores. My sister and I had a very regimented schedule every day which meant a lesson before school, the violin for me and the piano for my sister, then school and after school, we would do homework, chores, help make supper and clean up, another lesson and to bed at the same time every night. We weren’t allowed to socialize with other children except for at school or with cousins. It was seen as a waste of time. The rules for my brother on the other hand were very different. He had more freedoms and liberties than my sister and me. So, I guess for me being a girl meant to cross your legs, be polite and quiet, take care of the men in the family and do what you are told. It is probably why I raised my children completely opposite. My daughter never stops talking (laughing).*

Daughter 4 – *Hey! It’s kind of true (laughing).*

Grandmother 4 – *That is just the way things were when we were young. Being a girl came with a lot of responsibilities and if we talked out of line, we got the strap. Bless your father but he followed in his own father’s footsteps and could be a very cruel man at times. It was all he knew.*

Daughter 4 – *I am happy mom decided to raise us differently. I don’t know if I could have handled that. Even though my brother might have liked it (laughing). Do you think it would have been different if you fell in love with someone from China instead of Dad who’s from here?*

I felt a connection to mother four as she also decided to raise her children differently than how she was raised in her own family “*It is probably why I raised my children completely*

opposite.” She broke away from the gender norms she was exposed to as a girl and decided to encourage her daughter to use her voice and not be silenced.

Mother 4 – *Hmm, I don’t think so because I wanted things to be different for my children so if I met someone who did not respect that, I wouldn’t have married him or at least I don’t think I would have. When I was young, I always wanted a different life for myself and my future children. Your dad is the complete opposite of how your grandfather was. So, I guess I chose well!*

Grandmother 4 – *Yes, your father never would have understood him. I tried my best, but I am happy you chose differently.*

Daughter 4 – *Me too! That’s for sure! Even though being a girl is still tough. I feel like we still need to look a certain way, dress a certain way or act a certain way just to be liked. Boys can just show up!*

The grandmother shared the same sentiment as my mother in family set three “*that is just the way things were when we were young.*” The mother mentioned that “*being a girl came with a lot of responsibilities*” and then mentioned raising her children differently as well as saying “*when I was young, I always wanted a different life for myself and future children.*” She was very intentional in her decisions to change the attitudes and perspectives of what girls should be taught and how they should be raised according to gender norms.

The mothers and grandmothers were asked “*what was it like when you were a girl?*” and both had similar experiences of being taught to be quiet as a girl.

Mother 4 – *I grew up in a very regimented household. My father wanted things to be very traditional. Girls were to be quiet, polite and keep the house in perfect order. We were not allowed to cry especially if he was around, so we tried our best to hide any tears in fear of the*

repercussions. That is why I tried to raise my daughter differently. My childhood was hard especially because I was a girl, but my brother didn't really have it easy either. It was just hard in a different way for him.

Grandmother 4 – *It was the same when I was young. It was how things were then. As a young girl, we just did as we were told, and we didn't question it. We were too fearful of what would happen if we did and felt inferior all of the time because we were made to feel that way. I don't remember saying barely two words to my father unless it was yes sir. I used to be mad at my mother, your grandmother for many years but now I think she was probably afraid too and just did what she needed to do without saying a word. Girls were not to be heard then, but I feel it was the same for women when I was young too. Not much changed from my mother's generation to mine. Both the mother and the grandmother grew up in homes where there seemed to be very traditional gender roles. The fathers were the disciplinarians and girls had to act a certain way and take care of the household chores.*

The daughter was asked “*what was it like when you were a girl younger than you are now?*”

Daughter 4 – *Hmm, um, I am not sure if it was much different than it is now except in school maybe and with friends. At home, things are pretty much the same. I didn't have many responsibilities, but things are pretty much the same except I help my mom sometimes. In school, it's different though. In elementary we all played together, girls and boys and all the girls liked each other. Junior high is a completely different story. Girls are mean. One of my friends wasn't invited to a birthday party sleepover because she didn't have name-brand pajamas. They are constantly talking behind each other's backs and commenting on how they look especially on Insta and Snapchat. I didn't go to that sleepover because I felt bad for my friend, so she slept*

over at my house. My mom always says to ignore girls who are mean but it's hard sometimes. Everyone just wants to fit in now. I sometimes wish it was like how I was when I was younger because everyone got along, and we didn't worry about the stupid things we do now.

Then the mother and the grandmother were asked “*how do you think it is different being a girl now compared to when you were a girl?*”

Grandmother 4 – *I'd have to say it's better nowadays for girls. It was horrible for girls when I was young. We had to be seen and never heard but most times we weren't even allowed to be seen. We were seen as housemaids more so than a daughter or sister. We also had to be perfect. There was no other way to be, or you were severely scolded. Perfectly quiet, perfectly dressed, perfect at playing an instrument, perfect at our schooling and perfect with our chores. We weren't really allowed to socialize like the girls do today. Our only social gatherings were with family and even then, we had to be on our best behaviour.*

Mother 4 – *I have to think about that. I understand what my mother is saying but I am not sure if I completely agree it is better now. I just think the struggles are different. I grew up similar to my mother because my father was a very traditional man. The only benefit I had that made a difference is my mother would let me play with friends as long as they were gone, or I was home by the time my father was home from work. I was constantly afraid of being late just like I am now even though my father is no longer alive but at least I had the connection of being friends with other girls. I wish you could have had that mom. I guess some things are better today than when my mother or I were young but being a girl today definitely has its challenges too. So different yes but I wouldn't say better.* Here the mother reminds the grandmother that girls still struggle today with different challenges to which the grandmother agrees.

Grandmother 4 – *I guess so yes. It just seems like girls today have so much more freedom than when I was young.*

Mother 4 – *That’s true. I just think they have different struggles now and still feel inferior to boys. I feel like we have been fighting for rights since the beginning of time and wonder if we will ever be seen as equal in my lifetime?*

The last question brought up the topic of social media “*how do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?*” and the challenges girls face.

Daughter 4 – *Well for me I guess being a girl has changed quite a bit compared to my mom’s and grandmothers’ lives. I can at least talk and sometimes I don’t stop right? (laughing). But it’s really not easier being a girl now either. Other girls can be mean and put each other down. Cyberbullying is definitely a real thing! I hear it all the time from the girls at school. They post mean things about each other or make mean comments on other girl’s posts. I don’t know why. We should be on each other’s sides not putting each other down. It is hard enough being a girl with boys around! I just wish girls could be nicer to each other. I don’t post on social media even though I have an Insta account just because I am afraid of what people will comment. Some girls at school would send snaps of them with a bra on to friends or their boyfriend and the boys screenshot it and send it to their friends. There was a girl in the bathroom yesterday freaking out because that happened.*

This was one of the first times girls being mean to other girls was brought up in any of the family set narratives. The daughter here discusses experiences of girls making negative comments on social media and how it can adversely affect them.

Mother 4 – *Goodness, that’s not good. I hope she talked to her parents. I think it is important for parents to talk with their children about those exact types of things. Girls face completely*

different struggles today than I was young. I guess certain things might have changed at least in my family and how girls are treated but sadly being a girl still comes with lots of challenges.

Grandmother 4 – *That is why I do not like that social media. What's it good for really?*

Nothing is private anymore.

Daughter 4 – *Well there is good too because you can share positive things or talk to your friends. It's kinda the way we socialize now.*

Mother 4 – *That is why I said things might be different today for girls but not easier by any means. I would have loved to see more changes by the time you were born but the fight seems to continue. Being a mother with a daughter is a constant worry. I try not to worry because I do not want you to grow up afraid but when I watch the news or see stories posted I worry for you every day. It makes it hard to sleep at night sometimes.*

Grandmother 4 – *That fear and worry never go away. A mother always worries for her children. Women are made to feel inferior and unsafe. Our voices don't feel like they'll ever be heard really. We just continue doing what we've always done.*

Daughter 4 – *That's sad. Maybe instead of raising us to try to be strong all the time, maybe parents should focus on boys and teaching them about how to treat girls? Some don't have a clue and think we are just objects that aren't as good as them at anything. Maybe then it would change for girls if they knew what they are doing is wrong. Or maybe not but at least we tried. I get tired of not feeling as good as boys. Teachers make us feel not as capable all the time. My gym teacher even said the girls could do less push-ups and sit-ups in an obstacle race because boys are naturally more athletic!! Really?!*

The stories shared between the grandmothers, mothers and daughters gave insight into their circumstances growing up as girls and issues they faced because of gendered norms. Many

of the girls and women lived through similar and different experiences which appeared to depend on their family dynamics. Some of the grandmothers, mothers and daughters in the family sets spoke of being silenced not only by the men in their family but at times by women. This was through fear and violence within the home or being told that girls are meant to be quiet. Some of the daughters questioned gendered ideologies within their family and the need to create change. I was interested throughout listening to the stories about which themes would be common between the participants.

In the next chapter, I focus on the thematic analysis and the individual themes that surfaced through the participant's narratives giving a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 6: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Clarke and Braun (2006) state “through focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. Identifying unique and idiosyncratic meanings and experiences found only within a single data item is not the focus of thematic analysis. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities” (p.57).

Throughout the interviews and thematic analysis, I reflected on my biases. While listening to the girl’s and women’s stories of their experiences, I would experience feelings of emotion. It was sometimes difficult to not express my feelings of sadness and anger when listening to the participant’s narratives during the interviews.

Oppression

From the stories in this study, the theme of oppression emerged. Sunga (2017) states that oppression is the inequitable use of authority, law, or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal. Many of the girls and women in this study said they were taught that women are responsible for housekeeping and rearing of children and that men are the heads of households who provide the finances. Also discussed was the discrimination and oppression they faced in regard to formal education where many of the women were not actively encouraged to focus on school or furthering their studies.

Looking at shared similar experiences among many of the women in relation to learning informally within the home and in the education system most of the grandmothers and mothers

said that they were taught to learn how to run a household and that they followed the way of generations of women in the family before them. Some of the comments included, *“That is the way it has been for a long time. I remember my grandmother and mother doing the same things and teaching the girls in the family to be able to take care of their own household one day”*, *“We just knew what we knew and were taught”*, *“Girls need to learn how to run a household, which is what your mother is teaching you and what I taught her”*, *“We have always followed how generations before us have done it and no one really questions it or how things are done”*, *“Being a girl in my day seemed like the most valuable things to learn was how to take care of a household and find a good husband who could provide for our own family one day”*.

Cunningham (2001) found that mothers’ gender role beliefs have a strong influence on the division of household labor and have a lasting effect that remains with children as adults later in life. Gender role expectations may be enforced from husbands who tend to hold more traditional gender role attitudes than their wives (Marks, Chun Bun & McHale, 2009). “This is not surprising, given that concepts of male privilege and dominance are inherent in traditional views of gender roles” (Marks, Chun Bun & McHale, 2009, p.222).

Children from a young age demonstrate stereotyped beliefs about the gender roles that are dominant within their culture and families (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2015). “Strict adherence to stereotypical gender roles can have negative consequences in childhood and beyond, as these stereotypes can limit children’s educational and occupational aspirations, perceived academic competency, emotional expression and social development” (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2015, p. 540). This is reflected in the narratives of the women in this research study, not only regarding the division of household labor but also their experiences with learning outside of the home. Most of the mothers and grandmothers and also some of the daughters

stated that education is seen as more valuable for boys and men. Many had experiences within school that made them feel their learning was not as important for them as it was for boys within their families and at school. Some of the comments that reflect that include, *“Education was more important for the boys”*, *“Teachers and guidance counselors thinking girls should take certain classes or things at university”*, and *“Teachers make us not feel as capable all the time”*.

Another significant learning is that girls should keep silent. This was mentioned as an experience for many of the women when they were growing up. A few comments included *“I remember as a girl we used to try and play so quietly so we didn’t disturb him”*, *“Girls were meant to be seen but definitely not heard”*, *“We started learning at a very young age to keep our voices down, do as we were told, do our chores and do not disturb my father”*, *“I guess for me being a girl meant to cross your legs, be polite and quiet, take care of the men in the family and do what you are told”* and *“Girls were to be quiet”*. Ahrens (2006) states that when one believes they do not have the ability, the means, and the right to express oneself, they will be silent. This highlights social power structures that privilege some voices while silencing others. To speak and be heard is to have power over one’s life. To be silenced is to have that power denied (Ahrens, 2006). I was told many times throughout my life to be a “good girl” you need to be quiet and polite. In my adult life, I now realize that the issue around girls and women being silenced is about power. Teaching girls to be good listeners isn’t the issue, but when those behaviours are overemphasized to the exclusion of others, it has a silencing effect (Zhang, 2018). Young girls may begin learning the lesson of silence within their homes and then in school. Girls may be often overlooked by their caregivers, teachers, intimidated by their male counterparts, and teased by their classmates for academic achievement (Murnen, Wright & Kaluzny, 2002). Girls being continually silenced can lead to oppression and also fear of speaking up to injustices.

They may remain silent because the consequences of speaking out are not always positive.

Athrens (2006) stated that speaking out may cause negative social reactions from significant others and community systems. These negative social reactions from informal support providers encompass both overtly negative reactions such as blaming or doubting victims (p. 263).

Fear

The theme of fear emerged in most of the family's stories. Many of the girls and women from all of the family sets stated feeling unsafe at times throughout their lives. Some mentioned feeling unsafe at parties or gatherings, their workplace, walking alone, especially in the dark, and some even within their own homes. Comments reflected how fear plays a role in many of the participants lives, *"I have friends who are afraid all the time of stuff like that happening. As a girl we have to be careful. Definitely more careful than boys"*, *"I still see a lot of violence though and our girls and women are still suffering"*, *"I was afraid when I was young, and I am afraid now for my child"*, *"I think when it comes to violence against women, we still have a long way to go"*, *"I hear stories from my grandmother, mother, aunts and other women in my community about scary things happening so it's like always living in fear"*, *"Girls still worry about their safety walking alone especially at night"* and *"That fear and worry never goes away"*. I found that fear among women was commonly referred to throughout the interviews with each family set. It is something that still affects many women, but I often wonder if some are still keeping quiet about some fearful experiences they face. Mother one mentioned that we *"Still have a long way to go"* when it relates to violence against women, then mentions this could be because when negative things happened, they were not discussed but rather they *"Stayed behind closed doors"*. In a study by Bhandari (2019), involving Indian women between the ages

of 20 and 61 the strategies they reported using to deal with abuse in their lives were staying quiet or crying. Numbers of sexual and physical violence today are still likely to be underestimated given the reluctance of women to report such sensitive information (Yodanis, 2004). Violence against women results from gender inequality on the societal level and across countries, women's movement and freedom are more restricted than men because of fear (Yodanis, 2004).

Warshaw and Parrot (1991) state that girls learn that they are "supposed to be friendly and to yield to others' needs and wants even if it means sacrificing their own. They learn to defer to men, to rely on men to provide them with social status, protection, and ultimately, a secure future" (p. 360). This connects with the findings of Murnen, Wright and Kaluzny (2002) based on their research of multiple studies in the United States because these attitudes encourage men to be dominant and aggressive, and it teaches that women are inferior to men and are sometimes worthy of victimization.

During the interviews with the family sets experiences of fear and violence within the home also emerged. I wondered if those experiences played a role in girls and women being silent around the circumstances they faced. Many of the comments regarding fear and violence within the home included, *"I hated seeing her go through those things and worried for you and your brother"*, *"I was terrified of some of the men. My oldest aunt had a husband who yelled all the time"*, *"My father was a nasty man"*, *"My dad brought a lot of negative energy into our house"*, *"If we talked out of line, we got the strap"*, *"There was no other way to be, or you were severely scolded"* and *"I was constantly afraid of being late"*.

One of the most significant forms of violence against women is intimate partner violence, which includes physical, sexual, emotional/ psychological, and financial forms of abuse and is a global phenomenon (Barrett & St.Pierre, 2011). Despite policy changes that promote the ending

of violence against women in North America, intimate partner violence continues to be a major risk factor threatening women's psychological and physical well-being (Barrett & St.Pierre, 2011). Hunnicutt (2009) stated intimate partner violence happens more frequently in households where traditional gender roles are strongest, suggesting that patriarchal ideology can be connected to domestic violence. Crimes against women are more likely to be committed by somebody within their social network or even their own home (Broll, 2014). Depending on different social positions, women will have access to different resources for protection and resistance. "For women of privilege, class confers power on subordinated women. For more disadvantaged women, subordinated status creates opportunities for resistance" (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 565).

Resistance

The theme of resistance arose mostly with the question about how being a girl has changed or not changed over the years. Many of the girls and women spoke about fighting injustices and creating change throughout history, today and the future. Some of the comments included, "*Yeah, but why can't boys help too?*", "*Maybe it's time for a change?*", "*I think a big thing that has changed now is that we talk about it more, so women are coming together to try and create change for future generations*", "*We are fighting injustices against women*", "*We will continue to fight until girls and women can feel safe*", "*The good thing about social media is that posts can be shared across the globe*", "*If more girls would break the mold then maybe we will make real advances towards equality*", "*Maybe someday in the future there will be equality because women all over the world worked together*", "*There were women fighting for women's rights when I was younger, but you didn't hear about it as much as today*", "*I feel it is important*

to empower our young girls so they can create change now and in the future” and “Fighting for rights since the beginning of time”.

Thomas and Davies (2005) specify that “resistance involves reforming society to achieve gender equality and remove gender distinctions, such as addressing the barriers that prevent women from competing equally with men. The goal of resistance is the redistribution of rights to achieve gender equality” (p. 716). Foucault (1978) suggests that where there is power, there is resistance; power affirms that there exist resistance and vice versa. During the interviews in this study, I could see where power dynamics existed in some of the women’s lives.

They talked about girls being treated differently than boys, gender roles, fear, violence within the home and girls’ voices not being valued by teachers. For example, grandmother and mother four learned that girls’ roles in the family were to take care of household chores, do as they were told and not disturb the man of the house by staying quiet. Girls were also meant to be polite, well dressed and kept clean. Some of the grandmothers and mothers in this research described not only external social pressure to conform to gender role expectations but also their internalization of normative ideas about appropriate female behavior. Rajah and Osborn (2020) state how “women are specifically charged with preserving the harmony of the family sphere through silent acceptance and endurance, while their male partners are viewed as the uncontested heads of the household” (p.5). However, the daughters in the family sets including my own family did not buy into those ideas and sought answers about why things were the way they were. Many of the girls had a questioning attitude. I wondered if resistance leading to change seemed to progress slowly because some women simply are comfortable with their present ways of doing things or find it easier to do things the way they always have within their family rather than to do things

differently. When I was growing up, I constantly questioned the status quo similar to my daughter and other daughters in the family sets.

A study by Moen, Erickson and Dempster-McCain (1997) involving 245 mother/daughter pairs in the United States showed how over time mothers' beliefs changed considerably because of the women's revolution in the 1970s and 80s. By 1986 many mothers had less traditional gender role beliefs and identified more with paid employment (Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McCain, 1997). This reflects a shift in gender role beliefs between generations and why daughters' attitudes may be both less traditional and more work-role oriented than their mothers and especially more so than their grandmothers (Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McCain, 1997). My study showed that the younger generation is questioning the status quo and want to create change around the gendered ideologies they grew up with.

Social Injustice

The theme of social injustice emerged and was described by some of the girls and women in prior themes mentioned in regard to education, unequal division of household chores, oppression and violence against women. Social injustice includes unjust actions done in society to perpetuate inequality (Miller, 2015). Discrimination is an example of social injustice which is found in education, housing, employment, voting, lending and credit, land use, health care services, transportation, public accommodations, and government benefits and services (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2021). Discrimination is described as unequal treatment of persons, for a reason which has nothing to do with legal rights or ability (Miller, 2015). Some of the comments referred to the injustices women have dealt with in the past and today include, *"I have to help with cleaning, cooking and watching my baby sister but my brother gets to play*

outside more, and um barely helps with anything”, “Because it is not a boy’s job. Their job is to get a good education, find a good job and work to provide for their family”, “Girls need to learn how to run a household”, “I honestly don’t remember ever being told that school was important, but I definitely heard it said to my brothers on many occasions”, “The boys definitely had it easier or at least it seemed that way. All of their meals were waiting for them when it was time to eat because it was the women and girls who prepared it all and cleaned up afterwards” and “I have a close friend who lost her daughter to violence at the hands of her boyfriend, and she has never been the same. She is very strict with her granddaughter she had to take over raising but I can understand why after what she went through.”

Another key area mentioned in regard to the theme of social injustice by some of the girls and women was social media and how it can impact women’s lives. Social media refers to producing, collaborating, and sharing content online (Boursier, Gioia & Griffiths, 2020). Some of the participants viewed social media as negative. For example, some of the mothers and grandmothers viewed social media as creating issues for girls especially around comparing themselves to others and this leading to insecurities. Some of the participants’ comments about social media include, *“Now with social media and people being more aware of what is happening”, “Nowadays life is online, so girls today face another obstacle added to everything else”, “Girls do have it tougher today I think because they are constantly comparing themselves to other girls online,” “Social media has made it harder for girls because they live their lives online”, “I know you don’t like social media, but girls could see they aren’t alone if something happened to them and then can share with other girls and share their story to try and change the way things are”, “Social media definitely can make you feel more insecure as a girl” and “I think trying to constantly post the “perfect” picture definitely doesn’t help.”*

Boursier, Gioia and Griffiths (2020) shared underlying motives for taking and sharing selfies that included the pivotal role of social pressure, habitual passing of time, self-approval, self-confidence, mood modification, attention-seeking, belonging, documenting, archiving, social competition (trying to attain more 'likes' than others), retaining special moments, and being creative (Boursier, Gioia & Griffiths, 2020). The daughters, while agreeing with some points made by their mothers and grandmothers, also pointed out that social media can be a platform to share social injustices in hopes of creating change for girls and women.

Daughter three also commented about older generations being unaware of the true complexities of what is happening around the world concerning gender inequalities, because they are not being informed about world news through social media: *“You wouldn't have had social media so if you didn't read or see what was happening in the news to women then you would have no idea. I think a lot of us are angry now because we see what is happening all over the world. Child brides, genital mutilation, human trafficking, um violence against women and even being killed when you are born just because you were born a girl. It's sad. That's why so many of us are upset because why should anything of those things happen just because you are a girl?”* and *“Girls can share their stories”* and *“We are fighting injustices against women more today it seems. Not that women didn't before but now, with social media and people being more aware of what is happening, especially to Indigenous women, we are creating little changes or at least I really hope so.”*

The exposure of feminism through social media gives young women important tools to work against the discrimination they find in their own lives and others. It also assists in recognizing sexism in everyday experiences and inspires activism to question the current

patriarchal system (Flores, Gómez, Roa & Whitson, 2020). Flores, Gómez, Roa and Whitson (2020) state that

social media is especially appropriate for communicating new feelings and promoting the discussion on feminist ideals has identified the Internet as one of the strategies that can make feminism more accessible to a new audience formed by a diversity of women immersed in technology. The objective is to use the Internet as an entrance door, so that new generations of women make a link between their experiences of gender discrimination and feminist theories, providing them a space where they question the discriminatory practices that have been normalized in their own contexts. (p. 752)

I can see how social media can enhance our ability to see how gender differences, discrimination and stereotypes are visualized and portrayed online. This could have positive or negative effects depending on how individual girls view things. I am interested in whether informal learning within their homes plays a role in the way they use social media. I see some of my daughter's friends using platforms to share images of themselves and their daily lives while my daughter tends to use it to share issues of social injustices happening in the world as well.

Empowerment

The theme of empowerment unfolded in different ways through the interviews. Personal empowerment can be closely linked to self-esteem and self-confidence which some of the participants referred to. It is also about taking control of one's own life and making the best decisions for oneself. Cheung, Mok and Cheung (2005) suggest that "personal empowerment can refer to the occurrence of changes of the individual in personal qualities, which include an

outlook on life, personal ability, emotional control, and knowledge about society, all of which are conducive to more effective decision making and handling of problems” (p. 371).

Many of the women talked about having low self-esteem and self-confidence at certain times in their lives. These feelings surfaced in early adolescence and lasted into adulthood with some of the older women saying it is still an issue for them today. *“I built a pretty tough shell around myself”, “We have to try and raise our daughters to be warriors”, “I’m going to make my own money and take care of myself”, “Surrounded by a lot of strong women in my family”, “I love being a girl!”*, *“Girls can do anything boys can do and sometimes better”* and *“I know a lot of my friends struggle with confidence and self-esteem issues”*. This is related to power or lack of power, which created low self-confidence.

Personal empowerment comes from creating a change around life experiences and feeling confident in your choices (Cheung, Mok & Cheung, 2005). As mentioned above some of the women were being silenced throughout their lives and being told that “good girls” are quiet; this can lead to a lack of confidence. There is nothing wrong with being a good listener, but when being quiet is overemphasized to the exclusion of others, it has a silencing effect (Ahrens, 2006). Throughout the interviews, mothers and grandmothers stated that girls’ voices have been undervalued within the home, especially for the older women and at school but mothers have validated their daughters’ concerns, such as in family one *“Yes, we still have a long way to go, and you are right love, it is not funny at all”*. Knowing that they are being heard is vital for girls in a society where they often feel their voices and perspectives are less important than boys. Allowing girls to express themselves and their feelings freely can lead to positive self-confidence and give them a sense of empowerment (Zhang, 2018).

These findings, along with their experiences, gave the girls and women in this study the opportunity to share their stories and offer insight into what is it like growing up as a girl throughout the past and today from three generational perspectives. The themes that surfaced throughout the narratives offered a look into the gendered stereotypes and ideologies women face during their lives. In the next chapter, I explore a more in-depth look at these experiences in the discussion section of this study.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question from three different generational perspectives “*what is it to be a girl*” to understand women’s informal learning experiences throughout their lives. My methodology included storytelling and semi-structured interviews. Thorough thematic analysis of the four family sets of interview narratives using a feminist lens I identified the resonant themes that emerged from each of the twelve narrative accounts. In many storytelling or narrative research studies, some researchers choose to analyze participants’ accounts that they shared. Analyzing the stories shared within this research study around “*what is it to be a girl*” is important when producing a list of the common themes (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). The themes that emerged highlighted learning, fear, social media, resistance and personal empowerment across the lives of grandmothers, mothers and daughters in the study. The themes served to illustrate the common experiences shared across the women’s stories. In a research study on narrative accounts emerging themes serve to illustrate the common experiences shared across participants’ stories (Banks, 2012).

Through many of the stories, it was evident that many traditions and beliefs passed from one generation to the next. Although despite that grandmothers shared what they learned from their mothers with their daughters and some of the mothers carried down the same stories, traditions and values with their daughters, most of the mothers started to raise their daughters differently breaking the gendered ideologies they grew up with. Looking closer at personal empowerment in the narratives of each family set of women showed how their home lives and family beliefs around gender roles impacted their self-esteem growing up. Comments included “*Being a girl is hard*”, “*I wish I was a boy sometimes*”, “*Being a girl can be tough*” and “*Being a woman can be tough.*” The more traditional roles were enforced in the families, the more

some of the women thought being a girl was unfair as boys weren't treated differently or better. Grandmother four mentioned a few times the struggles of being a girl within her home growing up which have effect on her today. She spoke of being silenced when she was young because girls were to "*be seen but not heard*". She said girls took care of all of the household chores, while the boys in her family had to focus mainly on their education and had more freedoms and liberties than the girls. Family set one also talked about following traditional gender roles with the daughter mentioning "*I have to help with cleaning, cooking and watching my baby sister, but my brother gets to play outside more and barely helps with anything.*" To that, the grandmother replies, "*That is what we as women do.*"

Throughout history, gender inequality has shown the complete omission of rights or recognition of women (Uneke, 2014). Women were ignored in public and political life as voting rights excluded women, and women's citizenship was tied to their husbands or fathers until 1946. Even when women could vote in public elections, there were very few female representatives in the legislatures or the courts. Married women were (or were expected to be) dependent on their husbands' income and should also not seek paid employment outside the home or if they did, it was minimal compared to the husband's contribution (Uneke, 2014). The general perception was that women achieved a higher moral status through marriage and motherhood. Consequently, women were not only relegated to the maternal role but were also denied any significant role in other aspects of society. Even marriage did not offer equality for women (Uneke, 2014). Today, a significant number of women now work outside of the home, but primary caregiving for children coupled with the double burden of labor market participation and domestic work still falls largely on women (Uneke, 2014).

Daughter three is the only participant who believed being a girl is a positive thing and that girls are as capable or more so than boys stating, *“I love being a girl”* and *“Girls can do anything boys can do and sometimes better.”* It left me wondering if her beliefs are different because, like that of the mother in family set number four, many of the traditional family roles were not taught to our daughters. For myself, this was mainly because I questioned gendered roles when I was younger, so I did not share those beliefs with my daughter, and I was also a single mother when my daughter was growing up since she was a young age. I worked and owned my own business, went back to university, took care of our home and had both her and her brother helping with chores rather than singling out what some would have considered a “girls’ job” or a “boys’ job”. Not to say being a single mother didn’t come with challenges, but it taught my daughter resilience as she has adapted quickly to change that has happened in our lives and demonstrates a lot of confidence as reflected in her statement: *“Girls can do anything boys can do and sometimes better.”* Taylor and Conger (2017) state that “being a mother can be a challenging role for even the most successful, educated, or invested woman, including those who parent with a partner. However, mothering can be particularly demanding for single women who are both the primary caregivers and primary wage earners for their children” (p. 350). Self-efficacy, optimism and self-esteem have been shown to be associated with higher levels of positive adjustment in single-mother families which creates a positive environment for children (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

School was a place many of the participants mentioned as a source of their feeling inferior because the focus for many of them seemed to be on boy’s education being of more importance *“Girls in my class don’t even both putting up their hands anymore”*, *“Education is seen more important for boys”* and *“Boys were usually called on to answer the question.”* In

classrooms when the focus is more on boys' academic achievement it often masks other problems and inequalities, such as girls' continuing low self-esteem, boys' domination of classroom space and teachers' attention, continued inequitable power dynamics, and beliefs that it is still better to be a boy (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). In a study by Younger and Cobbett (2014) twelve teachers from four different schools in the Eastern Caribbean were interviewed not only showing gendered assumptions within the classrooms but that girls were expected to behave and be respectful in a way that boys were not.

Intergenerational learning within a family involves intentional and unintentional learning and the exchange of experiences amongst generations (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). The interviews revealed that gendered beliefs were carried from one generation to the next through intergenerational learning within the home and also within formal education. Mothers held similar beliefs and values to those of the grandmothers but most of the daughters questioned how and why things are the way they are and declared it was unfair how females in the family were treated compared to males and how they were treated differently at school. Research shows that the most significant influence on gender role development occurs within the family setting, with parents modeling and passing on to their children their own beliefs about gender (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Moen: Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Uneke, 2014). Gender inequality gives men and boys more rights, privileges and opportunities to become decision-makers and influencers within the home, society and politically. Girls and women are denied opportunities to develop themselves and improve their social conditions because they are female (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). A survey by Girlguiding (2017) in the United Kingdom on girls' attitudes of 2,000 girls aged 7 to 21 years, researchers found that 55% of girls believe

the pressure gendered stereotypes affects their ability to say what they think and 60% said the pressures affect what they wear.

As shown through the narratives of the participants, fear plays a significant role in women's lives. Many times, the women throughout the interviews mentioned not feeling safe or being fearful, "*I was terrified of some of the men*", "*When my dad was around, I was scared all the time*", "*I was afraid when I was young and now, I'm afraid for my child*" and "*Being afraid has never changed*". Listening to family one and family four around the topic of fear depicts how society has failed women over the years with daughters one and four mentioning how girls still have to live in fear today. Research by Yodanis (2004) states that emotional and physical violence creates a fearful home, and sexual violence forms the culture of fear for women (Yodanis, 2004). Fear among women and violence are not solely explained by men's individual characteristics, attitudes, and experiences. Rather, violence against women is linked to structures of male dominance (Yodanis, 2004). A study by Cohen and McClain (2004) showed women born in Canada reported higher rates of all types of violence than those not born in Canada with rates of violence being higher among Indigenous women than non-Indigenous women. According to Status of Women Canada (2018), Indigenous women reported having experienced a violent crime at a rate 2.7 times higher than that reported by non-Indigenous women and police-reported data showed that the homicide rate for Indigenous women and girls was nearly seven times higher than amongst non-Indigenous women and girls.

It is through fear that men can control women's behavior, keep women out of decision-making or confine their participation, and thereby maintain control of social institutions (Scribe, 2017). Not every man must be violent toward every woman for violence to control women's behavior. Rather, knowing that some women are victims of horrific violence is enough to control

the behavior and limit the movement of all women in society. The creation of a culture of fear secures men's status over women (Scribe, 2017).

It was challenging throughout this study to choose which parts of the narratives of the women to include. Each participant had great insight into what it is to be a girl. I was conflicted on what pieces to include in this study when listening to the women's stories. During thematic analysis, gender roles and ideologies continually emerged throughout the interviews as an overarching theme with oppression, fear, resistance, social injustice and empowerment being the main themes that seemed to be common within each family set.

Listening to some of the narratives showed how gender roles are still prevalent in many families today with girls being expected to assist with household chores, marry, have children and even if they work, they are still expected to take care of their duties at home and nurture the children. Men seem to still be chiefly expected to get a good education, work, earn and provide for their families. Patriarchy is closely related to the concept of gender roles and provides the construct of gender inequality which is connected with unequal power, social values, entitlements, and roles (Ahlawat, 2018). Patriarchal beliefs, male dominance and the devaluation of girls and women also lie at the root of gender-based violence although patriarchy is a structural force that influences power relations, whether they are abusive or not (Evans, 2009).

Research has continually been devoted to understanding why women are typically thought to inhabit a domestic role while men are expected to seek professional satisfaction outside of the home (Evans, 2009; Ahlawat, 2018; Forster, 2016; Guppy & Luongo, 2015). This division of labor is frequently mapped onto a social hierarchy in which males' freedom to venture outside of the home and presumed control over women is perceived as superior and dominant (Guppy & Luongo, 2015). As such, rather than working to destabilize the

historical notion of patriarchy, much literature assesses the origins of patriarchy or a social system in which the male gender role acts as the primary authority figure central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege and entails female subordination (Evans, 2009).

Choosing to study intergenerational learning through storytelling and the experiences of women honours participants' stories and adds to the area of informal learning for researchers to build new knowledge and further the field of adult education, social activism and feminist research. A feminist lens helped me understand how fear, learning, social media, resistance and personal empowerment affect women's lives in subtle and unexpected ways. Although the participants each faced certain individual experiences, there were some consistencies in personal accounts and beliefs among the participants and across cultures. Regardless of their culture or family dynamics, there were similarities in their experiences growing up as a girl, such as the unequal division of household labour, being fearful at times in their lives, or formal education being seen as less valuable for them compared to boys in the family. Gendered ideologies were passed down from one generation to the next in each family unless one of the women changed the traditional gender norms and expectations that they had been accustomed to in their own family.

In the next chapter, I provide a conclusion for my study and offer recommendations for future research possibilities.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

In this research study, I interpreted the findings through emerging themes that arose through storytelling to present a picture by bringing together the voices of the grandmothers, mothers and daughters. It is important to engage girls and women in dialogue to understand their perspectives on the challenges they face daily. Canada is falling behind the developed world in women's equality, as poverty rates climb for elderly single women and single-parent families headed by women (Status of Women Canada, 2016). Over the decades some progress has been made in women's struggle for equality although many concerns and problems have not disappeared: equal pay, workplace discrimination, domestic violence, sexual violence, health care, and many other concerns still affect women's lives (Uneke, 2014). While there were many commonalities between the family sets in this study, one family in particular talked about violence against women. They had known someone who was murdered by an intimate partner and talked about being fearful for their own daughter and granddaughter. Looking at violence against women in Canada, the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019, p. 54) stated,

In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) confirmed 582 cases over 20 years of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) report also stated that Indigenous women made up roughly 16% of all female homicides between 1980 and 2012, despite making up only 4% of the female population. Statistics, however, can be misleading: this number represents an average over a long-time span, which obscures the increasing severity of the problem – namely, that Indigenous women and girls now make up 24% of female homicide victims.

Women today also continue to be underrepresented in politics, are responsible for the majority of caregiving, earn less than men in the workforce and continue to experience high rates of gender-based violence (Status of Women Canada, 2016).

Society must ensure that the rights and freedoms women have fought for in Canada are protected (Landau, 2012). Generations of women need to work together and motivate future generations to advance women's issues (Landau, 2012). Intergenerational learning in families is important to creating this change. Girls learn gender roles, whether traditional or liberated, from mothers and grandmothers who are the first influencers in their lives (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015). Knowledge of the past and what has worked and what hasn't is crucial to protecting and shaping our future (Landau, 2012). Unquestioned intergenerational learning, in this regard, is significant to women's advancement. If generations follow traditional gender norms without question, it leads to a reproduction of inequality. In this study, some of the women talked about following the gendered norms and expectations they were taught in their families without question. When some of the mothers did challenge the inequities and changed their beliefs and behaviours, their daughters took on those new ways of thinking about gender roles.

While many studies on intergenerational learning focus on the benefits and positive aspects (Bostrom & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Seponski & Lewis, 2009; Ruby, Kenner, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, 2007), we must not assume that all stories passed down from an older generation is necessarily wise or beneficial. There is a need to examine stories for oppressive ideology. It is also important to recognize how family values and beliefs and certain emotions, such as guilt and shame, play a role in reinforcing ideology.

Looking deeper at women's experiences throughout the life course can give insight into why and how some women learned to be complacent, while others learned to resist and develop

new paths. The generations of women who participated in this study told stories that contradict dominant thinking about women's roles in society. While many traditional gender role norms were evident in many of the narratives, there were additional experiences shared that highlighted the complexity in these women's intergenerational learning experiences, and that knowledge, power, and resistance can play a part in shaping those experiences.

Storytelling is important for adult education research as it is a way of making space for women to reflect on and share their experiences. The participants in this study benefitted from storytelling as evidenced by some of the women saying they had not heard certain stories shared before until this opportunity. Having a space for storytelling may act as a form of healing when, for example, family members hear another family member's experiences which can help develop a better understanding of that family member. Furthermore, some participants felt silenced for many years, so having someone ask about their experiences gave them an opportunity to be heard. Storytelling helps make the ordinary extraordinary as women's stories are often unheard or ignored even when shared. Educators can benefit from remembering that informal learning in families is important learning and teachers and adult educators, in general, can ask their students to do intergenerational storytelling as an assignment as a way of appreciating and challenging ideology.

It is vital to develop a space for women and girls to reflect critically on their lives (present and future) and to offer their ideas for solutions (Landau, 2012). "Storytelling methodology allows for a better understanding of the participants of the research, resulting in empathy and consequently ensuing the will and the energy on the part of the researchers to help in changing the status quo, especially when it comes to gender issues" (Ali, 2014, p.103). Storytelling offered the means to discuss *what is it to be a girl*, what has played a significant role

in how their beliefs and understandings of gender developed and how women can continue to create change for a more equitable future. This study also showed the importance of having three generations of women together in a room sharing stories because many people don't often make time for this especially when a child becomes a teenager, and everyone seems to be too busy make time to talk and listen together.

Future research on diverse generational families of grandmothers, mothers and daughters from different communities over time would help shed light on possible patterns of similarities and differences across different generations of women. Studies using storytelling with generations of women can lead to a greater understanding of advancements and setbacks to women's rights.

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APPENDIX A



What is it like to be a Girl?

Girls and Women Exploring Intergenerational Learning Through Storytelling

Generations of women needed for a research study!

I, Cassandra McDonald, am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am conducting research on what it is like to be a girl from three different generational perspectives to better understand what progress we as women have accomplished over the years.

I would like to interview three family sets. Each set will consist of a grandmother, mother and daughter to explore what it is like to be a girl.

Who can participate?

- You must be or self-identify as being female and be a part of a family set (e.g. daughter, mother and grandmother), be of African Nova Scotian descent, Indigenous descent or be from an immigrant family.
- The age for grandmothers is 65 years and older, the age for mothers is between 35-55 years and the age for daughters between 12-18 years;
- Currently living within Halifax Regional Municipality.

What would your participation involve?

- Your family set (i.e. grandmother, mother and daughter) will be interviewed together in one semi-structured interview that will be approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours long.
- The interview will take place at a location convenient for you in Halifax.
- All of the women in the family set will be asked questions about their past and present experiences of what it is like being a girl.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by August 10, 2018.

Cassandra McDonald ~ 902-XXX-XXXX ~ cassandra.mcdonald@msvu.ca



APPENDIX B

**List of Mental Health Resources****1. Family Service Association**

Organization offers individual, couple and family counseling services. 6080 Young Street, Halifax, NS, B3K 5L2

1-902-420-1980

www.fshalifax.com

2. Self-Help Connection

Resource center providing emotional and social support as well as practical help in dealing with common problems in our lives.

63 King Street, Dartmouth, NS, B2Y 2R7 902-466-2011

www.selfhelpconnection.ca

3. IWK Mental Health and Addictions (IWK MHA)

Mental health and addictions service for children and youth up to 19th birthday. Please call 902.464.4110 or toll free 1.855.635.4110.

902-464-4110

www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health

4. Mental Health Mobile Crisis Telephone Line

The Nova Scotia Mental Health Crisis Telephone Line is delivered by the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT). This provincial service provides crisis intervention for children, youth and adults experiencing a mental health crisis or mental distress.

902-429-8167 or 1-888-429-8167

APPENDIX C

Combined Information Letter & Consent Form**Research for a Master in Arts in Education Thesis****Girls and Women Exploring Intergenerational Learning Through Storytelling**

Cassandra McDonald

Graduate Student, Education in Lifelong Learning Mount Saint Vincent University

166 Bedford Highway Halifax NS, B3M 2J6

Telephone: 902-XXX-XXXX; Email: cassandra.mcdonald@msvu.ca

Thesis research supervisor:

Dr. Susan Brigham; Telephone: (902) 457-6733; Email: susan.brigham@msvu.ca

Date: August 1, 2018

Greetings,

I invite you to participate in research I am conducting for my master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Susan Brigham, Professor in the Faculty of Education.

What is the Study? *Girls and Women Exploring Intergenerational Learning Through*

Storytelling focuses on what it is like to be a girl from three different generational perspectives.

The objective of the research is to explore intergenerational learning through storytelling with a focus on grandmothers, mothers, and daughters and to understand what it is like to be a girl and

what progress we as women and girls have accomplished over the years. Sharing stories can lead to a greater understanding of women in society and what it is like to be a girl.

What will you be asked to do? Four family sets consisting of a grandmother, mother and daughter will be asked to participate in a semi structured small group interview lasting 1 ½ to 2 hours. Each family set will be interviewed separately. The purpose of this interview is to hear your stories and views about what it is like to be a girl today and in the past. To participate you must be or must self-identify as being a woman, be a part of a family set (daughter, mother and grandmother), be of African Nova Scotian descent, or Indigenous descent or be from an immigrant family.

The semi-structured interview will be held in a space (to be determined) convenient to you within the Halifax Regional Municipality and will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The questions and interview will be in English. I will lead the semi-structured interviews, asking questions and making sure everyone has a chance to share their stories and thoughts.

How will I protect your confidentiality? Because you will be sharing your stories with two women within your family set in a group setting, I will ask everyone who attends to agree to not share details of the discussion with anyone if it is requested by others within your family. This is important in order to help everyone feel comfortable sharing their stories. In addition, I will ensure that your name and other identifying information will not be used in my thesis made publicly available based on this research.

I take seriously the responsibility of protecting the privacy of all participants in my research,

which is why you will be required to sign a consent form. The audio recordings and written documents from this study will be kept strictly confidential. Hard copies will be kept in a locked file in the research supervisor's office at Mount Saint Vincent University, and all electronic information will be coded to remove any potential identifiers and secured using a password protected file on the researcher's computer.

What if you would like to withdraw from the study? Participation in this research is voluntary. Your participation in this study will consist of a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours. You will be asked a series of questions about your life and experiences of being a girl. You are not required to answer the questions. You may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and take a break, reschedule or you may choose to stop participating in the study. If you choose to withdraw completely from the study you can email, phone or verbally state that you withdraw. Your data that had been collected will not be used and all parts of your individual transcript will be deleted. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. You can withdraw from this study up until October 1, 2018, when I expect to be submitting my thesis.

What are the risks of participating? The risks involved in this research are minimal. You might feel uncomfortable or become upset sharing stories about your life, but you will decide what information or stories you provide in the interview.

What are the benefits of participating? There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, however, participating in the semi-structured interview will provide an opportunity for you to express and discuss your thoughts and experiences with other women in your family.

How will this research be used? The research findings may be used in community presentations, academic papers and conferences. The results of my research, of which the semi-structured discussion is one part, will be published in a thesis and available through the Mount Saint Vincent University library.

What if you would like to review your transcript? If you would like to review your transcript, you will be required to sign the consent form and provide your email address. The transcript will be sent to you electronically and you will have one week to review it. If no response regarding the transcript is received within a week, one reminder will be sent via email after 3 days. If I do not hear from you, I will assume that you are fine with the transcript as is.

Where can you get more information? If you have any questions or would like further information with respect to this study, you may contact me, Cassandra McDonald, at 902-XXX-XXXX or by email at cassandra.mcdonald@msvu.ca. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Brigham who can be reached at 902-457-6733 or by email at susan.brigham@msvu.ca or the Mount Saint Vincent University's Research Office at 902-457- 6350 or by email at ethics@msvu.ca.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. Please find the consent form to be signed on the next page.

Consent form for Participants in the Study: Girls and Women Exploring Intergenerational Learning Through Storytelling

I have read the information letter provided and understand what this study is about, as well as the risks and benefits to participating. I understand that by signing below I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research- related harm. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my involvement during the study up until October 1, 2018 without penalty. I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

*Parent/legal guardian signature if participant under 19 years of age.

Date: _____

My signature below indicates that I agree to be audio recorded.

Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

*Parent/legal guardian signature if participant under 19 years of age.

Date:

My signature below indicates that I would like to review my transcript.

Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

*Participant email: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

1. Research question - “What is it like being a girl?” from three different generational perspectives, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters.

Subsequent questions will include:

- What was it like when you were a girl? (mothers and grandmothers).
- What was it like being a girl when you were younger than you are now? (daughters).
- How do you think it is different being a girl now compared to when you were a girl? (mothers and grandmothers).
- How do you think being a girl has changed or not changed over the years?