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Abstract

In this research study, the experience of having a heroic figure and associations with identity status are explored. Seven young women in Grade 12 were interviewed using a semi-structured, open-ended interview regarding their experience of having a heroic figure. This was followed by each participant being interviewed using the Clinical Identity Interview as developed by Marcia (1966) and adapted by Josselson (1987). Each heroic figure interview was analyzed using hermeneutic analysis, involving the isolation of meaning units (Giorgi, 1975) with the discovery of inherent themes. Five super ordinate themes and five subordinate themes which revolved around the roles played by the heroic figures in the lives of the participants were reported and discussed. The identity interviews were analyzed by an experienced independent researcher. Participants were assigned primary and secondary identity statuses and associations between identity status of participants and the functions of the heroic figure as experienced by participants were made. The results of this study provide support for the research which shows that women form their identity in connection with others, and often within the context of relationships. They also suggest that there is some association between the role the heroic figure plays in the life of the participant and the identity status of the participant. Heroic figures in this study helped young women work through crisis and
explore alternatives and options, while also providing a safe place and a sense of belonging and connection to those young women who were only beginning their exploration.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Identity formation is the major developmental task of adolescence and becomes critical at a time when many young people are making career and life decisions (Erikson, 1968). Once choices have been made and synthesized, the resulting identity becomes a filter for adult decisions. Erikson (1968) identified the stage of identity resolution as crucial to adolescent development because it links the newly autonomous individual to the larger society. He postulated that the individual moves from lack of identity (diffusion) toward this crystallized sense of self. While this is a lifelong process of redefinition and refinement, identity struggles reach their ascendancy during adolescence. Without a clearly defined sense of identity, an individual may drift along through adulthood unable to assimilate choices they have made into a newly evolved sense of self.

While there exists a growing body of research studying identity status among adolescents, most of this research has focused on late adolescence and college aged students (Abraham, 1983). In addition, much of the research on identity formation has largely overlooked the dominant issues in female development: issues of interpersonal relatedness and the role of affiliation in the quest for meaning in life, and
very little research has been done in the area of adolescent female identity formation. Josselson (1987) found that women who are in a state of identity diffusion at the end of adolescence often remain so well into adulthood, finding it difficult to make commitments to life choices. While some research has indicated that there are no age or sex differences in identity development of high school students, there have been few reported studies with high school students examining more complex identity related constructs (Abraham, 1983).

Adolescent females are struggling to establish a sense of self while remaining in relation and connection to other significant people in their lives. When asked to describe themselves, young women typically include much information about other people, usually in the context of relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Stern, 1990). Given that research shows that relationships become the context of identity exploration for adolescent females, exploring the role significant others play becomes critical. In discussing her research with adolescent females, Gilligan (1982) concluded that the concept of identity is relational for women, hence the probable importance of a role model or heroic figure in an adolescent female’s life.

**Definition of Terms**

The construct which is most pertinent to this study is the concept of
ego identity, as developed by Erik Erikson (1966). From a research perspective, Marcia (1980) has defined identity as "a self-structure - an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history" (p. 159). Erikson (1968), in his original discussion of adolescence, defined the identity construct more specifically:

Individually speaking, identity includes but is more than, the sum of all the successive identifications of the early years when the child wanted to be, and often was forced to become, like the people he depended on. Identity is a unique product, which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside the family.

Josselson (1987) sees identity as the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world, integrating self meaning with meaning to others. With a clear sense of identity in place, there is a match between how one is viewed by oneself and by significant others in one's life. Identity is a dynamic piecing together of the personality with the individual's experience of the social world so that the person has a sense of both internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the real world; with our identities defined, we can take for granted who we are to ourselves and to others.

To understand the operationalization of identity as it is being measured for the purposes of this study, an examination of Marcia's
(1966) four identity statuses is in order. According to Marcia, identity formation can be measured along two dimensions: exploration (crisis) and commitment. Exploration through crisis refers to demonstrated stability in goals and values as evidenced by an articulated belief system that shows some degree of self reflection. The least developmentally sophisticated status is identity diffusion, which basically reflects that the individuals in this status have made no commitments to who they are or what they stand for in life. Adolescents in this status may reflect their lack of commitment by responding to questions about vocational plans with no clear idea of what they want to do. Other things are more important to them, such as body image or perceived social desirability (Archer & Waterman, 1983).

Foreclosed adolescents show commitments they will strongly defend but will offer no evidence of thoughtful questioning underlying their assumptions. Commitments are typically extensions of the values and expectations of significant others, often from within the family, and are assumed without question. Conversely, adolescents in the moratorium status show evidence of actively seeking information in order to decide between alternatives they perceive as available in the world. The moratorium status initiates activity to resolve questions, perhaps by reading, talking to friends, teachers or other significant figures to reflect on what is personally meaningful; in other words, to find
out what 'fits' for that individual. *Identity achievers* have already experienced moratorium and have made a commitment that they are living out in their lives or will put into place in the near future (Archer & Waterman, 1983). Identity achievement involves finding the delicate balance between the constructed self of childhood and the created self of adulthood.

The other construct being addressed by this research is that of *heroic figure*. Heroic figures are generally found in the context of literature and mythology and are defined as being “larger than life”. Traditionally, the hero moves from a place of innocence in youth to a place of wisdom in adulthood by means of a quest. This journey pits the hero against many obstacles and challenges; usually tasks that require the heroic figure to overcome fear and darkness. While this darkness is sometimes embodied in mythical beasts and other creatures, it is more often representative of some internal conflict in the heroic figure themselves. The pattern of the hero's journey in myths and fairy tales provides a metaphoric map by which the challenges of forming an identity can be placed in context (Catford & Ray, 1991). By using the term hero in this study, participants are being asked to identify someone meaningful to them in their lives who embodies many of the values and life choices they see as salient to their own experience of what they believe they stand for. In this way, the heroic figure as used in this study,
is seen to act as a bridge between the participant's self-view and the significant others in their life.

Research in mentoring has shown that a key factor in youths of both sexes who overcame problems and successfully negotiated the transition to adulthood is a nonparental adult who gives guidance and encouragement; someone who "makes a difference" in their lives (Hamilton, 1991). Often these people possess useful life negotiation skills which may be modelled for adolescents. These may include the four skills of the heroic figure: faith in self, absence of judgment or open-mindedness, precise observation and curiosity, and the willingness to take considered risks (Catford & Ray, 1991). Heroic figures have purpose, have negotiated challenges successfully and have a passion for their chosen path. While young men have traditionally had heroes, mentors and models, they may act as an especially important ally to young women on the edge of adulthood who historically have not had those guides.

**Statement of the Problem**

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1) What is the experience of Grade 12 girls who have a heroic figure in their lives and are able to share that experience?

2) How does the experience of the heroic figure relate to their current identity status as measured by Marcia's (1966) four categories of identity
3) How does the experience of having a heroic figure relate to their commitment to specific beliefs and values they hold?

These questions arise from research based in Erikson's (1968) theory which shows that identity formation as the central psychosocial task of adolescence is followed by the establishment of a capacity for intimate commitment and that for all adolescents, identity concerns will predominate over intimacy and generativity concerns throughout adolescence (Espin et. al., 1990). While identity activity takes place throughout adolescence, identity issues are age related. In a survey of seven studies, Archer and Waterman (1983) identified that the greatest movement in identity formation during early and mid adolescence takes place between the 10th and 12th Grades. They found that there were increases in instances of moratorium and achievement behaviour and decreases in diffusion toward the end of this time span, making Grade 12 a useful point to examine identity issues since a wider range of identity status among participants may be available for study.

Given that Grade 12 is also toward the end of high school, it becomes a watershed time for many adolescents in terms of decisions regarding career and relationships. Often, these decisions are based on identifications with role models both within the family and outside of it. Stern's (1990) three year study of adolescent girls found that the number
of statements relating to relational style and skill increased each year as the girls approached graduation. While Stern did not differentiate what types of relationships were important to the participants, the role of significant others within a family setting in the identity formation of adolescents has been clearly documented (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986).

Forming strong identifications within the family to the exclusion of nonparental models is not without problems. One consequence of forming a commitment based on early identification is that opportunities for exposure to experiences which may generate alternatives will be missed. Additionally, a result of making premature commitments for all adolescents may be an increased sense of security which may not be based in reality. "Adult roles would be designated, models to emulate identified and life goals clarified on a simplistic and often unrealistic level" (Archer & Waterman, 1983). Exploration of the hero experience with females who perceive this to be an important aspect of themselves may shed light on how much influence a role model exerts on the level of exploration (Moratorium) and commitment (Identity Achievement) to life choices in adolescence.

**Significance of the Study**

Although research has been done with male and female high school students that suggests the significance of secondary attachments to adolescent self-concept, the role of a heroic figure in adolescent
female identity development has not been actively researched to date. (Adams-Price & Greene, 1990). Past research concerned with adolescents’ interpersonal relationships has focussed primarily on peers and parents with little attention given to relationships with nonparental adults (Hamilton, 1991). There are suggestions that research is necessary which focusses on how adolescents identify and decide between identity alternatives (Waterman, 1984). Additionally, Enns (1991) notes that women’s identity concerns must be taken seriously in late adolescence and that counsellors should encourage young women to consider exploring roles during the window of time provided by the high school years when they face fewer pressures to take on culturally prescribed roles. Gilligan (1989) points out that in order for girls to develop a clearer sense of self in relationship with others they must examine what ‘relationship’ means to themselves, to others and to the world. Grotevant and Cooper (1986) stress the importance of multiple perspective taking in adolescence and suggest that exploration through role-taking is critical as a component of identity formation. Adolescents must be able to possess a viewpoint, be aware of the views of others and be able to integrate, yet differentiate their views from the views of others. The way that most adolescents do this is to begin to form an ego ideal: an idealized self drawn from the qualities, values and lifestyles admired in others (Josselson, 1987). Exploration of the experience of having a
heroic figure seems a natural extension of the work done in identity formation in adolescence, with Enn’s (1991) caveat in mind:

“Tendencies to generalize about women must be tempered with research that identifies the effects of circumstance and individual difference.”(215)
CHAPTER 2
Review of the Literature

Introduction

Much of the research regarding identity formation in adolescence has been focussed on the salience of the identity status paradigm as developed by Marcia (1964). This chapter examines the relevant research and is divided into three main sections: Identity development, operationalizing identity, and the role of the heroic figure in identity formation in adolescence.

The first section discusses the underlying theoretical work done by Erikson (1968) to help develop the construct of identity and relates this to the identity status paradigm developed by Marcia (1966) to measure identity. This is followed by a section which explores the operationalization of the identity construct so that the reader may understand the complexity of the four identity statuses. In addition, this section discusses the need to begin looking at women's experience of forming identity as different than that of men, a research direction supported by the literature.

In the final section of the chapter, the importance of the heroic figure is explored and arguments are expressed supporting a link between the existence of primary and secondary role models in adolescence and specific stages of the identity formation process.
Identity development

Erikson (1968) saw identity resolution as a stage-specific normative crisis that takes place during adolescence. His discussion of the life cycle indicates that while identity issues may begin prior to adolescence and may continue to be refined well into adulthood, at adolescence issues of identity take precedence. All adolescents begin the task of identity formation from a diffused state (Archer & Waterman, 1983). Most adolescents remain diffused or move to foreclosure between the ages of 12 and 16, initially committed to the goals of significant others beginning in the family and then moving out into the world (Adams & Montemayer, 1983; Archer, 1989; Archer & Waterman, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Waterman, 1984).

At about age 16, many adolescents enter a period of moratorium where they begin to “try on” new aspects of identity and explore lifestyle and career choices. Berzonsky (1986) calls this “adaptation of social role” and sees it as the basis for identity. Precursors of mature identity formation in late adolescence, according to Erikson’s theory, include confidence in parental support, a sense of industry and the ability to be self-reflective (Marcia, 1983). Recognizing the need for exploration, post-industrial societies have formalized the end of adolescence as a time of moratorium; a period of delay in which it is generally accepted that the person will not yet be taken quite seriously (Waterman, 1984).
the end of this period, choices often become crystallized into work and relationship commitments which, while they may be greatly modified across the lifespan, cannot be undone. Choices made become part of an individual's history with new aspects of identity being integrated with previous experience. Adolescence becomes the "hatching period" of the adult (Josselson, 1987).

Identity issues are salient in adolescent development because they impact on so many areas of an adolescent's life. In her longitudinal study which followed up a group of female participants fourteen years after an initial college identity status interview, Josselson (1987) found that to remain diffused beyond adolescence led to significant difficulties in adulthood. Even in adolescence, some movement toward crisis and commitment has been shown to be preferable to none. Marcia's (1980) review of the literature in identity research, done with both males and females, revealed that sophisticated identity status (identity achievement, and to a lesser degree, moratorium) resulted in more positive correlations with psychological variables such as autonomy, self-esteem, moral reasoning, mature capacity for intimacy, cultural sophistication and an internal locus of control. Jones and Hartmann (1988) found that male and female students from 19 high schools categorized as identity diffusions were reported as being involved with substance abuse significantly more often than were foreclosures, perhaps due in part to
the strong influence of peers. Conversely, Abraham (1983) found that identity achievers of both genders were significantly less external in locus of control than individuals in all other identity statuses. These findings are important in terms of the current study being undertaken of heroic figures and identity, because evidence suggests that significant others may have a varying degree of impact on adolescents, depending on identity status.

Research has also supported that identity achievement is positively correlated with positive relational intimacy (Bourne, 1978). Grotevant & Cooper (1986) found that both male and female adolescents who were most able to explore identity issues were more likely to observe parents relating to each other in individuated ways and were also more likely to participate in individuated relationships with their parents themselves. In contrast to this ability to experience intimacy, Orlofsky et al. (1973) found that when examining a mixed sex group of college students and their ability to be intimate, none of those in the identity diffusion status were in an intimate or pre-intimate status in their relationships; instead, nearly a third were classified as isolated. Orlofsky et al. concluded that those individuals who were categorized as being in the identity achieved and moratorium statuses appear to attain more satisfactory interpersonal relationships, both with same sex-peers and in heterosexual romantic relationships. In examining the health status of
the identity statuses, Archer (1989) concluded that identity achievement appears to be the decision making mode that individuals should strive toward, given that the skills of flexibility, role exploration and generating alternatives fit well with the requirements of an ever changing world.

There is a tendency when examining the identity formation literature to interpret findings as being hierarchical; to believe that identity achievement is a more developed state of being than moratorium or diffusion. However, recent studies in the area of identity formation have indicated that individuals do not always fall neatly into one status across all categories. Grotevant et al. (1982) suggested that it is important to consider that the development of identity is an ongoing lifetime process with its roots in adolescence. While the issue of crisis and commitment is especially salient during the decision making window of adolescence, adolescents do not resolve or work on all issues simultaneously and may carry many struggles of identity with them well into adulthood. Marcia (1980) contended that identity achievement may be a longer process for young women than for young men. Part of the struggle unique to young women is their need not only to experience connectedness, but also to develop an ideology about interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1989). Josselson et al. (1977) found that high maturity females used interpersonal relationships for identity resolution and were less focussed than the high maturity males who used career
goals as a source for self-esteem. By exploring their idealized interpersonal relationships with heroic figures, this study will attempt to explore the effectiveness of the interpersonal links young women make in resolving identity related issues, regardless of their current status.

Criticisms of the existing research in identity formation during adolescence have revolved primarily around methodology. Adams and Montemayer (1983) pointed out that while most research does support Erikson's contention that identity is formed as an evolving configuration, in most cases there is limited generalizability of the results since random sampling of known populations has not been done. Archer (1989) suggested that studies using personality and social behaviour correlates need to be viewed with caution since in many cases, the correlations are statistically weak and imply a large variance in the sample studied. In addition, it is important to examine identity domains as well as global identity to understand how different areas of identity formation are affected by outside factors. Matteson (1977) conceptualizes the identity status categories as stages on a developmental continuum, with the axis of crisis and commitment revolving around exploration of alternatives and the degree to which these are undertaken at any one given time. Matteson suggests that it is not possible to pinpoint identity formation so exactly. In conclusion, the literature indicates that more longitudinal studies which draw on qualitative research methods would expand the
body of knowledge in this area, especially studies using adolescent samples that focus more specifically on the factors that might promote identity development.

**Operationalizing Identity**

Measuring identity is difficult because as a construct it is not quantifiable. While an individual can be without a clear sense of identity, one cannot have a little bit of identity or too much identity. Because identity is a configuration of aspects of the personality and experience, a qualitative approach to examining differences among identities and how they are arrived at is necessary to preserve the holistic nature of the construct (Josselson, 1987). For women, Hodgson and Fischer (1979) have strongly suggested that because “issues of intimacy are intertwined in female identity development in ways not adequately recognized by Erikson” (p. 49), the area of interpersonal relationships must be included in any measurement of identity formation. Josselson et. al (1979) have shown vividly in their research that developing friendships is an important factor in achieving a sense of identity for young women. Grotevant et al. (1982) go on to say that sex differences in identity formation combined with the need to include a psychosocial context in the measurement of identity indicate the importance of extending identity research into the interpersonal domain, often best achieved using an interview method such as Marcia’s (1964) Identity Status Interview,
based on Erikson's theory.

Some concern about the relevance of Erikson's original work on identity as it is related to women centers on the argument that Erikson believed that the crisis of intimacy versus isolation came after identity formation in both males and females and involved the establishment of a mutually trusting love relationship in which partners must know themselves first (identity) before moving on to intimacy. Given the theory and evidence that relationships may be more important to women than to men, it has begun to make sense that a significant part of their identity formation involves developing a commitment to others and a belief in relationships as well as understanding the roles these play in their lives (Gilligan, 1982; Grotevant et al., 1982; Hogdson & Fischer, 1979; Miller, 1976).

While there remain some concerns about measuring identity using discrete categories, the four identity statuses are the most widely used measure of identity today (Bourne, 1978; Marcia, 1980). As Bourne (1978) has pointed out in his review of identity research, prior to Marcia's (1964, 1966) development of the Identity Status Paradigm, much of the research in identity was done using self-report questionnaires, Q-sorts and self-rating measures of identity and role consistency. Marcia noted that while these procedures examined the outcomes of identity achievement such as social role, they did little to get at the psychosocial
criteria for determining the degree of ego identity achieved by the individual at some point during the process. The psychosocial criteria Marcia identified as salient include the preliminary crisis experienced by an adolescent as the precursor to moratorium, and the resulting commitments which serve to complete self-definition and define identity. Using a semi-structured interview approach, Marcia created an interview protocol lasting 15-30 minutes which explores commitment and crisis in areas of vocation, political ideology and religious attitudes and beliefs. The interviews are usually coded by two or three judges, using a scoring manual that provides criteria for evidence of crisis, commitment, identity achievement, moratorium, diffusion and foreclosure with respect to all three content areas previously mentioned. Inter judge reliabilities typically run from 72% -90% (Marcia, 1976). Between 1964 and 1977, Bourne (1978) reports that approximately 30 studies have used Marcia's approach with respect to a wide variety of personality, cognitive and developmental variables. This research paradigm, known as identity status research has become the dominant one for research in identity formation.

While Marcia’s identity status interview has shown fruitful research results with men, the consistency and predictability of findings broke down when applied to women using only the categories established (Schenkel & Marcia, 1972). Not until a fourth category was added to the
interview, that of sexual values and standards, could women be meaningfully divided into the same four groups established by Marcia with the same reliability and validity. Schenkel’s (1975) research showed that identity decisions for women were much more bound up with religious and sexual values than with career decisions or political ideology. Once this new category had been added for women, new information came to light about the relational aspect of identity formation in women in comparison to men and a link was indicated between psychological health and identity status. Among females, those in identity achieved and foreclosed groups (commitment group) scored higher on psychologically valued dimensions of self-esteem, low anxiety and field independence. Those who were in moratorium seemed to be the most anxious and confused, reporting the most negative psychological symptoms of distress (Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Schenkel & Marcia, 1972). In other words, whereas moratorium was a ‘healthy’ psychological state for men to be in, it was reported as ‘low’ and associated with unfavourable variables among women. Josselson (1987) suggests that differences such as these raise the question of whether our society is discouraging exploration of identity possibilities in women. “Perhaps women are being rewarded for making identity commitments, however premature.” (p. 33)

Another possible explanation of these findings by Schenkel and
Marcia, (1972) and Josselson (1977) may rest in the early gender socialization females receive in our culture which suggests that secondary attachments, especially romantic ones, are desirable for women and imply social maturity. In a recent study of adolescent secondary attachments and self-concept, Adams-Price and Greene (1990) found that adolescent females “uniformly preferred romantic to identificatory attachments while males chose agentic objects.” (p. 196) Interestingly, both chose figures they perceived as more powerful than them. Those young women who are not as aware of secondary attachments, or are having difficulty forming key interpersonal relationships, may surface in identity testing as being diffused or in moratorium. Perhaps because both identity achieved and foreclosed women are so firmly based in a clear context with a set of values attached (e.g., the family or other identified group), they could conceivably identify role models from their family or life experiences more easily than the other two groups, who are still searching. By examining the experience of having a heroic figure, this study will attempt to determine if there is support for these theories.

In one of the longest longitudinal studies of women’s identity formation, Josselson (1987) studied 60 women randomly chosen from senior classes in colleges across the United States, interviewing each with an adapted version of Schenkel & Marcia’s (1972) clinical identity
status interview protocol. Each interview was coded and each respondent grouped into an identity status according to the criteria outlined by Marcia (1966). Follow-up interviews were done using a semi-structured, open ended format and content analyzed for identity themes. Fourteen years later, a second set was done with 34 of the original group of 60 women and individual longitudinal case studies were developed to illuminate the process of identity formation in women across the life span.

Josselson (1987) found that a separation-individuation phase of adolescence which underlies all four identity statuses, was especially crucial to identity formation in adulthood. The foreclosures, who had not differentiated from their family of origin in the time they had been away from home, tended to stay foreclosed unless unforeseen circumstances forced them into crisis and a process of individuation. Most of the time these crises were the result of value conflicts that had not been questioned or resolved before. For example, young women forced by circumstance (e.g., an unplanned pregnancy) to question strongly held family values and make an independent decision often found the need to finally confront who they were and what they believed to be right. These crisis turning points and their role in identity formation in women are echoed in Peterson's (1981) narrative study of women who never married, but found struggles of value orientation assisted them in
At the other end of the scale, Josselson (1987) found that the diffusions, who had separated too much and too early, did not internalize enough identity forming structure from their parents so that they were unable to form an individuated identity themselves. Moratoriums who held a strongly internalized sense of self, often tried to break away too completely which led to painful life experiences of loss and isolation. Josselson reports that some women in the study were able to bear the pain and move on to identity achievement, but many became overwhelmed and returned to a foreclosed position or retreated into diffusion or loss of self. The identity achievers seemed to grow in a manner Josselson calls “ongoing rapprochement”: moving forward, touching base, moving forward again in a rhythm that carried them into adulthood.

While Josselson’s (1987) research cannot be generalized to all women since it is limited to a small sample within only one cultural stratum of society, her conclusion that the aspects most salient to identity formation in women are different than those found in men cannot be overlooked. “Communication, connection, relational embeddedness, spirituality, affiliation—these women construct an identity.” (p. 191) Josselson readily acknowledges that much of the turmoil reflected in the stories of her participants reflects the zeitgeist of the changing role of
women in the 1980’s; the decade in which she did her primary research. However, this turmoil is seen more in the content of the stories than in the underlying identity struggle itself. Obviously, identity does not form in a vacuum; Berzonsky (1986) points out that “one’s identity is constructed by decisions made from an array of environmentally influenced decisions.” (p. 115) Throughout history women have been defined by societal role expectations; even when these expectations were more implicit than explicit (Miller, 1976). Josselson (1987) suggests that women are susceptible to cultural definitions of how they ought to be and sensitive to social agendas. Living within social parameters, young women must make choices about who and what they wish to be, what their priorities are and how they will achieve them, often without recognition of their relational abilities as strengths. The process of making those decisions is at the crux of identity formation.

The role of the heroic figure in identity formation

A heroic figure is someone who meets life’s challenges in a special way. Heroic figures are those who are passionately committed to some course of action and are committed to the journey of life in the highest sense (Catford & Ray, 1991). Since the idea of the heroic figure embodies the two key aspects of identity development: challenge and commitment, the metaphor of heroes and their journeys becomes an ideal vehicle to explore how adolescents see these aspects of change in
others and in themselves. For women especially, having a mentor has real value because the concept of a heroic figure embodies both connectedness through sensitivity and nurturance, and action through assertiveness and strength (Catford & Ray, 1991). Young women need both to attain a clearer sense of identity (Stern, 1990).

At the heart of the current research on women's identity development is the concept that women are relational (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Stern, 1990). In discussing Erikson's theory of development, Gilligan (1982) points out that while Erikson acknowledges the gender differences in identity formation by his theory that women hold identity in abeyance as they prepare to attract a male partner, he stops there, implying that the female identity crisis will be resolved by taking on the name of a man, "by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling 'the inner space'" (p. 12). Current research with female adolescents shows that while young women acknowledge and value their shared experiences with meaningful others, they do so within a context of differentiating themselves from family members and friends (Stern, 1990). Hence, the role of a non-parental model in the lives of young women could be one of a 'safe place' to experiment with different ways of being, while maintaining an essential component of connectedness.

Research has shown that women do make life choices on the
basis of what will bring them emotional gratification in relational terms (Hancock, 1989; Stern, 1990) and that ideology in women is interpersonal (Josselson, 1987). However, Erikson's (1968) relational quality of “inner space” suggests that women are predisposed to activities centered around promoting inner and outer harmony as a function of forming their identity, and many researchers today wonder how much of their need for inner and outer harmony is culturally defined as ‘feminine’ and how much is truly part of the identity formation process (Gilligan, 1982; Grotevant et al., 1982; Hancock, 1989; Miller, 1976).

Enns (1991), in her discussion of various theories of ‘healthy’ identity, points out that as personality theory evolved, healthy identity was associated with the dominant western cultural norms of achievement, individualism, self-determination and mastery. The mature adult self was seen as someone who was self-sufficient, self-supporting and distinct from others. Most of this research was carried out with males, and seems to have missed the relational aspect of identity development thought to be so crucial to women.

Gilligan (1982), based on her study of adolescent and adult women’s moral reasoning, was the first to reveal that women typically define themselves in relational terms that imply growth in the context of intimate connections, whereas more men define themselves in terms of non-relationships and use terms that focus on separation and
achievement. As an outcome of her work, Gilligan redefined the “ethic of care” as a strength and suggested that women are empowered by connectedness with others they perceive as significant. In Hancock’s (1989) narrative study of women and identity formation, the researcher concluded that through egalitarian relationships with others, women often reported reclaiming a “sense of self” lost in experiences of subordination. Josselson’s (1987) finding that significant relationships, rather than paid work act as an anchor for women’s identity formation supports Gilligan’s theory of the importance of relationships in female identity development. Josselson’s impression that female high achievers in the world had made use of a mentoring relationship to help them find their way further consolidates the importance of significant and supportive relationships for young women.

Mentoring as a method of fostering adolescent development has received more attention in the literature recently; especially as a method of intervention with troubled youth (Hamilton, 1991). In a study of 47 pairs of “at risk” youth of both sexes and their nonparental mentors, Freedman (1988) characterized mentorship relationships as either “primary”, “secondary” or “non-significant”. His findings indicate that primary relationships, where participants viewed the relationship as central to the lives of both parties and unlimited by fixed role boundaries, had more impact than secondary or non-significant relationships.
Freedman suggested that these relationships were seen as very meaningful because of the reduction of young people's access to significant adult role models.

While little research has been done to explore mentoring relationships exclusive to young women, Hamilton (1991) suggests that mentors are more critical and harder to find for girls. They are more critical because young women require the example of those who have been able to take advantage of opportunities that are easier for the dominant group to acquire. In a discussion of assertiveness and success, Greenglass in Buxton (1994) points out that significant adults in a female adolescent's life should ask her about women she considers to be good role models and highlight high profile examples of assertiveness and success. Cultivating and appreciating heroic figures found in literature, sports and the performing arts may help young women create touchstones of identity; an opportunity to check out various lifestyles and life choices made by others in comparison to what they value and strive for themselves.

In a discussion of whether identity is discovered or created, Waterman (1984) suggests that an individual's true identity is closely linked with the concept of the daimon or true self. The daimon refers to the potential of an individual and is an ideal in the sense of what a person may strive for; the realization of which is self-fulfillment.
Waterman sees the task of the adolescent as discovering or recognizing the character of the *daimon*, which is really the inner self. He sees this as crucial to finding the path that is truly reflective of an individual's uniqueness. Waterman adds that the information obtained through the experience of having a model figure is invaluable "because possible identity elements may arise in connection with the model figures to whom one is exposed." (p. 335) However, he cautions that the experience of having model figures in one's life is useful only to the extent that they are incorporated through reflective self-appraisal, thereby integrating important feedback and experiences into the larger self, thereby allowing the adolescent to "construct" their unique identity by choosing the attributes in others they would like to incorporate into themselves.

Waterman (1984) and Grotevant & Cooper (1986) both conclude that parents are often the most important models for the adolescent because of the time spent in their company, and the sheer volume of knowledge known about parental successes and failures. However, given the fact that some adolescents are not living with their parents; teachers, coaches, siblings and peers should not be discounted as models, nor should the impact of media figures be ignored for the sheer array of modelling possibilities they provide. In their discussion of the importance of secondary attachments in adolescence, Adams-Price and Greene (1990) suggest that the type of role models chosen by
adolescents at a given time in history may provide important cultural and contextual clues to changing norms and mores in society. Also, secondary attachments "provide a safe context in which both male and female adolescents can experiment with alternate identities in the search for a consolidated sense of self". (p. 189) By examining heroic figures in the lives of adolescent females, this study hopes to determine how meaningful and pervasive the presence of secondary attachments is to them and whether common themes exist among chosen role models.

A review of the current literature dealing with identity formation in young women and the importance of role models and mentors, has shown that issues of separation and connection are primary concerns for adolescent females, but rather than being experienced as a conflict, this apparent paradox coexists and creates a connected way of being in young women. Independence allows for the capacity to meet one's own needs and relationships provide the supportive context to allow risk and challenge which leads to growth (Stern, 1990). The role of a heroic figure may assist in the identity process by giving female adolescents an opportunity to explore new options in a safe, vicarious way. Those young women who are diffused or have become foreclosed in their style of dealing with the choices they face may find a strong role model acts as a bridge to the world by being in an independent, yet connected relationship with someone they admire who has negotiated their way to
Finally, Pearson's (1986) framework of the heroic journey as a path to identity formation provides an interesting synthesis of the two concepts. Pearson sees the heroic journey as something which must be taken by all of us to achieve individuation, beginning with the trust of the Innocent stage and moving to the longing for safety of the Orphan, the self-sacrifice of the Martyr, the exploration of the Wanderer, the competitive spirit of the Warrior, and finally through to the Magician stage; a place of wholeness. Rather than following the traditional beliefs associated with identity formation, Pearson does not see the achievement of individuation and identity as a linear process. Instead, she suggests that identity forms in a spiral fashion, and a person can be at different stages of development according to the different tasks being undertaken.

Pearson notes that the classic notion of identity formation rests in the Warrior stage, where success equals conquest; most likely due to our culturally defined notions of successful individuation which are tied to competitive processes. Much of our society is built on the Warrior premise, reflected in our competitive sports, in war, in politics and even in religion:

Our culture so consistently reinforces this basic archetype, at least for those in power, that the slaying-the-dragon pattern appears to them to be the only reality (p.79).
Additionally, the classic hero is saddled with a solitary journey fraught with peril without the benefit of family or relationship support. This experience of crisis and commitment does not have to be such an isolating process. Another way to look at this, says Pearson, is to see the heroic journey as making an absolute choice for ourselves and our integrity within the context of relationships to others.

Gender is another issue closely tied with the concept of the hero’s journey. Pearson says:

In our culture, the heroic ideal of the Warrior has been reserved for men—usually only white men at that. Women in this plot are cast as damsels-in-distress to be rescued, as witches to be slain, or as princesses who, with half the kingdom, serve as the hero’s reward (p. 2).

This seems to imply that traditionally, women have been cast as those who serve and sacrifice rather than those taking the heroic journey. But Pearson points out, “as long as we are not all taking our journeys, finding our voices, our talents and making our unique contributions to the world, we start feeling less and less alive” (p.3). In reality, the Warrior’s journey is only the first step of many to forming an achieved identity. Without a true sense of identity, the warrior finds that their fight is merely an empty show of superiority to mask the sense of not knowing who they are.

Ultimately, the link between heroism and identity lies in defining a new kind of heroic journey which moves from the classic hero/villain
scenario to hero/hero. Rather than focussing on the conflicts and the struggles inherent in prevailing as the winner, Pearson suggests that we need to see the heroic journey as a process of growth and discovery. In this way, she says “heroism is redefined as not only moving mountains, but knowing mountains: becoming fully oneself and seeing, without denial, what is, and being open to the lessons life offers us” (p. 10).

This study will attempt to determine if having a heroic figure can assist young women to begin their own heroic journeys, focussing less on the traditional heroic quest of conquering others, and more on the process of understanding themselves and their relationships. In this way, their identities can perhaps be more fully defined.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the parameters of the research undertaken, describe the subject sample demographically, and outline the method used to gather and analyze data. The questions this study attempted to answer are as follows:

1) What is the experience of Grade 12 girls who have a heroic figure in their lives and are able to share that experience?
2) How does the experience of the heroic figure relate to their current identity status as measured by Marcia's (1966) four categories of identity formation?
3) How does the experience of having a heroic figure relate to their commitment to specific beliefs and values they hold?

Data Collection Procedure

Volunteer female participants who were interested in talking about their heroic figures were recruited from Lord Byng Secondary School in Vancouver. Posters advertising for participants were placed in Grade 12 English classes, in the counselling center and in the girls washrooms by the researcher (Appendix 1). The first eight female applicants who met the study criteria as listed on the poster were contacted by the researcher personally to discuss participation in the study. One applicant subsequently withdrew from the study citing time conflicts. The remaining
seven participants were invited to a screening interview with the researcher to confirm their appropriateness for the study (Appendix 2).

The screening interview (Appendix 2) involved a brief 15-minute meeting with each potential participant, where they were told that they were being asked to participate in a research project for a Master's thesis in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia that involves talking about the experience of having a heroic figure. The construct of heroic figure, as it is understood for the purposes of this study, was explained to them. Additionally, the Identity Status interview was described to them and they were asked if they had any questions about the study or data collection procedures. At this time, they were informed that the time commitment was approximately two hours for the two interviews, plus a half hour follow up interview. The young women were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and their participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were assured that all interview material was strictly confidential and would be coded to ensure anonymity.

Following participant agreement to become involved in the study, a letter was sent to parents of participants outlining the study's purpose and procedure (Appendix 6), and a permission form was included for parental signature. In addition, all participants signed a participant consent form themselves and kept a copy for their records (Appendix 3).
The reason for choosing seven participants is twofold. First, in order to clearly see patterns in the different stages of identity development and their corresponding choice of heroic figure, it was necessary to have a large enough sample to include more than one identity status. Second, a survey of current identity research with adolescents across grades has shown that in six studies of adolescents they tended to be spread across the four statuses, but with the majority of participants in the twelfth grade being identified as diffuse (Archer & Waterman, 1983). To obtain a range of possibilities, given the constraints of time and money on this research, seven participants seemed reasonable.

**Instrumentation**

An open-ended one-hour qualitative research interview was conducted regarding the experience of having a heroic figure in each participant's life and how that was meaningful for her (Appendix 6). This interview was developed by the researcher based on material gathered from informal discussions held with young women regarding who their heroes were, which took place during a practicum placement at Lord Byng Secondary School in Vancouver. None of the women who participated in this study was involved in prior discussions which generated the interview questions.

In his discussion of the qualitative research interview, Kvale
(1983) outlines some of the unique features of using this approach which support its use in this study. The qualitative research interview “seeks to cover a factual as well as a meaning level” (p.174) and because of this, techniques such as clarifying, paraphrasing and summarizing are used to ‘read between the lines’ and understand the implicit message.

Further, Kvale points out that the qualitative research interview is theme oriented and not person oriented. The assumption is that the interview begins with two people who are choosing to meet and discuss a topic of mutual interest and importance, and the resulting data will be analyzed in the context of the “lifeworld that is described by the person” (p.174).

Finally, the qualitative research interview is descriptive, attempting to tap the experience of the participant as fully as possible. These descriptions are expected to be specific to the topic being investigated and should be focussed on certain themes of the lifeworld of the participant. The interviewer’s task is to “focus upon, or guide towards, certain themes, but not to guide the interviewee toward certain opinions about these themes” (p.176).

An important tenet underlying the qualitative research interview method is the idea that the interviewer should remain critical of their own held values and presuppositions and keep these in mind when conducting the interview. This complements the belief that the interview is an interaction between two people and as such, involves reciprocal
In exploring the themes of the heroic figure and identity, it was necessary to keep in mind that both the concept of the hero and the construct of identity are culturally constructed. It would be impossible to separate the presuppositions held by both parties in the interview regarding these concepts. What transpired in the interview process was really a culturally constructed metaphor created together by both parties.

**Validity and Reliability of the Heroic Interview**

Kvale (1983) postulates that the qualitative research interview can be carefully constructed so as to meet the requirements for validity and reliability. The problem of interviewer bias is somewhat reduced in this study since there was only one researcher. However, since varying sensitivity across interviews is inevitable and cannot be avoided, this is a factor affecting the reliability of the heroic figure interview. Leading questions are another problem which are common to open ended interviews. Again, in principle, these are impossible to avoid and so must be acknowledged as being present. The solution, says Kvale, is not to try eliminating them as a problem, but to analyze the different types of leading questions present and their influence on the answers given. He goes on to say that there is probably less danger of leading questions becoming a problem in a qualitative interview than there is in a questionnaire,” where there are few ways of examining how the
respondent has understood the question” (p.190).

Content validity of the research interview examines the extent to which the interview measured the experience of having a heroic figure. The most important aspect of the interview is the necessity of clarifying the meaning of the phenomenon being investigated. In the case of the heroic figure, the screening interview served to orient the participants to the understood meaning of this construct for the purposes of this study. Additionally, the data were analyzed both to “the letter of the text”, using actual quotes and “its spirit” through the use of themes. By doing this, content validity is increased (Kvale, 1983).

The final area of examining validity involves naming the context within which a theme is located. Hermeneutical text interpretations have often overlooked the social and material context a person lives in, choosing instead to focus on the individual (Kvale, 1983). The interview used in this study attempted to include the aspect of the greater context these young women were living in, by clarifying and reflecting answers which seemed to hint at this area. Additionally, the young women were asked directly what their views were regarding gender issues in relation to their experience of finding a role model.

The Identity Interview

Using an adaptation of Marcia’s (1964) and Schenkel and Marcia’s (1972) clinical identity interview as presented by Josselson (1987),
participants were interviewed by the researcher in a second one-hour session to determine their identity status: foreclosed, moratorium, identity achieved, or diffused. Identity status determination was made by analysis of interview transcripts using the criteria originally set out by Marcia (1966) and explained in detail with concrete examples (Marcia et al., 1993). This was done by an independent rater who had experience scoring Marcia’s Identity Status instrument.

Reviews of Marcia’s Identity Status Interview (Marcia, 1966) indicate that this method of determining identity is well grounded in identity theory and the construct validity of the statuses has been amply demonstrated (Bourne, 1978; Grotevant et. al., 1982; Waterman, 1988). Inter-judge reliability of the interview generally runs from 72%-90% (Marcia, 1976). The identity statuses have also been found as appropriate measures of identity formation across a broad range of life domains (Waterman, 1988). The Identity Status Interview is widely accepted as a valid measure of ego development (Waterman, 1982).

**Hermeneutic Analysis**

Both the identity status interview and heroic figure interviews were transcribed from audiotapes by the researcher and themes were extracted which described both the experience for the participants of having a heroic figure in their lives, and echoing themes found to reflect their current identity status. Data generated from this study were
analyzed by the researcher, with a focus on isolating shared themes common to both interviews. The first part of the identity interview provided a context for understanding the developmental perspective of the participants; the second part provided data which reflect the issues of crisis and commitment salient to that status as seen in the light of their relational perspective of having a heroic figure.

Initially, "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1975) were extracted from the heroic figure interview transcripts. After reading the entire transcript as a whole, chunks of meaningful data were isolated and grouped according to content theme in addition to highlighting and recording any new thoughts which occurred during the chunking process. In keeping with the holistic framework of qualitative research, the analysis was done in almost constant interaction with the data using a method known as hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). As described by Tesch (1990),

data analysis refers to a process which entails an effort to formally identify themes and to construct hypotheses as they are suggested by the data and an attempt to demonstrate support for those themes and hypotheses. (p. 113)

Text segments were taken out of taped transcripts which provide meaning, even when examined out of their context. This analysis involved several aspects: idiomatic phrases were isolated and patterns of words and features which occurred in the data were identified and
labelled. Van Manen (1990) states that phenomenological themes may be understood as the "structure of experience" (p. 79). Theme analysis refers to the process of uncovering the themes embodied in the texture, meanings and imagery of the participant's language and story.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science anchored in the lifeworld of the participant. It is the "philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the other, the whole, the communal, or the social" (Van Manen, 1990). The hermeneutical perspective involves analyzing the data to provide a social context for the findings (Kvale, 1983), recognizing the unique voice and developmental stages of identity in women as identified by Gilligan (1982), Hodgson and Fischer (1979) and Josselson (1987). The experiences of participants were framed in light of the social context and meaning making systems unique to their personal situations, while also providing a larger social context which is anchored in the broader Canadian culture of today as framed by the current perceived role of women.

The issue of social context in data analysis becomes critical in this type of research because identity cannot be formed in a vacuum; much of the research reinforces the importance of understanding the social, political and historical forces at work in this process, especially for women (Josselson, 1987). Women historically come from a position
where their nature and role has been defined for them by others, leaving their sense of self to be determined by whatever the dominant culture believed was needed from women at any given time (Miller, 1976). This use of social power is also a main issue in examining narrative data because it is such a crucial factor in understanding the roles played by both parties in any type of relationship. Women especially have been the members of society most affected by the domination-subordination dialectic, and often frame their experiences, values and expectations from this perspective (Miller, 1976).

**Follow up Interviews**

Following thematic analysis, a summary of the heroic interview was prepared for each participant reflecting the meaning of her experiences as interpreted by the researcher. These were prepared by condensing the content of the interview using an organizing framework which responded to the content areas covered in the interview. Following this, a validation interview was done with participants in order to allow them an opportunity to respond to the researcher’s interpretation of their experience. Participants were asked if they wished to make any corrections or additions to the summaries as presented. The purpose of the validation interview was twofold: one, to ensure that the participants felt understood by the researcher regarding this topic; and two, to provide a balance against any suppositions the researcher may have allowed to
colour the interpretation of the interview. This is an important feature of the hermeneutical process (Kvale, 1983). The questions asked in the validation interview were:

1. Do you feel that this summary accurately reflects your experience of having a heroic figure in your life, particularly their influence on your life?

2. Are there any thoughts or feelings that you would like to add to your story?

3. Is there anything written in this summary you feel is inaccurate, that you would like to have taken out or changed?

4. Was the interview method used conducive to sharing your experiences effectively? Do you feel the questions were appropriate or did you feel they restricted you in any way with regard to your telling your story?

No information regarding their identity status was given to participants until analysis had been completed by the independent researcher who interpreted the identity interviews. The information regarding their identity status, as well as the results of the study will be personally communicated with all participants.

Limitations of this Study

The current investigation has limitations which relate to the generalizability of the results. The first area of limitation was the scope of
this study, which was limited to seven high school girls in Grade 12 attending a high school located in Vancouver, British Columbia. The experience of having a heroic figure was assumed to exist among this population, and only female students who were able to articulate their understanding of their experience of having a hero were considered for participation in the study. Generalization of findings to larger high school populations in other Vancouver schools or to other large urban centers in Canada would not be viable given the specificity of the population and the unique nature of the setting, except in cases where the socioeconomic and educational conditions match those of this study.

The second area of limitation regarding generalizability of the results involved the small sample size and its unique cultural diversity. Due to time and financial constraints involved in collecting and analyzing the data, the number of participants involved in the study was limited to seven. A larger number of participants may have produced clearer results. Additionally, while the sample was small in size, the group was characterized by a significant array of multicultural perspectives, with participants representing Canadian, Taiwanese, Filipino and Japanese heritages. Given the broad cultural context, generalizability in this case must be based on a 'goodness of fit' principle rather than on the size or homogeneity of the sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This means that it is the readers who make the decision as to the meaningfulness of the
findings, comparing the results of the study with their own experiential framework.

As mentioned previously, Kvale (1983) points out that hermeneutic research is not presuppositionless. This study is based on the personal experience of the researcher that having a heroic figure can have a significant impact on decision making with regard to identity forming choices in such areas as career and lifestyle. The underlying assumption of this study was that adolescent girls in their senior year of high school have had similar experiences and would be able to articulate them, given a structured opportunity to do so. Given the assumptions of the researcher, that having a heroic figure is a valuable experience, there was also a possibility that the interviews may have been biased by leading questions and probes which implied to the participants that it was more desirable to talk positively about the experience of having a heroic figure.

The other area of limitation in this study lies in the appropriateness of the instrument chosen. The adapted version of Marcia's (1966) Identity Status interview used by Josselson (1987) is well researched and appropriate for female college populations, but little identity status work has been done with females in high school using an open-ended, semi-structured interview such as the adapted Josselson instrument. (See Appendix 5) Most studies done with this population have used
objective measures of identity status (Abraham, 1983) and while an extended version of Marcia's test has been developed for use with families (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), no other adaptation of the identity status interview has been adapted to meet women's identity issues. Another interview instrument has been developed recently using Marcia's work specifically to measure identity status in teen populations from an interpersonal perspective. However, this measure was not chosen for the study because to ensure reliability, a team of trained observers and coders is required to analyze data (Grotevant et. al., 1982). While the researcher in this study was working alone, analysis of the identity status interview was done using a trained scorer. However, a team of four scorers as required by the Grotevant et al. instrument was not a viable option. Therefore, the analysis of the identity interviews was dependent on the skill and interpretation of the trained scorer thus possibly introducing additional bias.

Finally, limitations of the study also revolved around the researcher and the participants. While every effort was made to invite as many young women as possible, it is quite likely that not every suitable participant was reached. Given the time commitment involved in participation, young women who had an interest in this topic may have been reluctant to come forward and the necessity of talking quite intimately with a stranger may have added to their reluctance. For those
participants who did become involved, the process of the interviews was uniquely limited to the time and space in which they happened and as such, can not be replicated. The nature of the interviews involved a creatively constructed metaphor of the experience having a heroic figure, and this means that whatever findings are set forth as a result of this study, they are limited to the context in which they were created, but may be useful in illuminating general trends of thought and experience within the specific limited population of Grade 12 young women.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter includes the findings of this current investigation regarding the experience of having a heroic figure and the results of the identity status interview for each of the participants. The material regarding the heroic figure experience is presented in two parts: a summary of the interview content is followed by thematic analysis. Each theme is described and the hermeneutic analysis used to arrive at the theme is discussed in detail. Participants are grouped according to their identity status and each status is discussed in the context of the experience of having a heroic figure. Quotes from the transcripts of the interviews with participants are used to support and further illuminate each theme presented.

Heroic Figure Interview

Results are based on the data obtained from interviews held with seven young women in Grade 12 at a high school in Vancouver, British Columbia. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. What follows are summaries of the interviews with “Allyson”, “Lyn”, “Francine”, “Isobel”, “Lianne”, “Misha” and “Anna”. Participants read and commented on the summaries during the validation interview.
Allyson’s heroic figure was her maternal aunt who lives in another part of Canada. The heroic qualities she found in her aunt included independence of mind and spirit, fulfillment in life, passion for her work, self-determination and inner strength. Allyson talked about her aunt’s ability to live life on her own terms and create her own environment within which she lives rather than following a set of externally imposed standards. Having her aunt in her life has allowed Allyson to see that there are many possible ways of being in the world and broader alternatives to what she sees as a traditional lifestyle choice which most women make. Allyson mentioned several times how much she respects her aunt and how important that quality has become in her other relationships. Her aunt has helped her recognize the power of choice in her own life.

Allyson’s aunt has influenced her in some significant ways. In the area of education, Allyson talked about how her aunt has shown her that university can be a means to an end but it’s not the only choice. Her aunt’s travels have encouraged Allyson to go out and explore the world herself before beginning her own formal education by reminding her that Allyson must be the one to make things happen in her own life; she must be responsible for her own happiness. Allyson also recognized that her aunt has influenced her feelings about the power of material
possessions. Allyson sees her aunt being happy and content without having a lot of material wealth, and believes that happiness in life is more important than the pursuit of money and prestige.

Allyson recognized that having someone in her life to look up to has contributed to her sense of who she is and what she believes in. She named her father and mother as other figures in her life whom she respects and whose honesty she values. All three people, her mother, father and aunt have given Allyson the message that making a difference in the world is important to one's sense of self-respect. Allyson has a problem with the school system because she believes that teachers do not always respect her as an individual and that teacher-student relationships are bound by role restrictions, which means that in her mind, they cannot be truly genuine, honest and equal relationships. She agreed that her relationship with a significant role model must have honesty and equality; her mentor must not try to protect her or spare her from the realities of life. She says she needs to have the freedom to make her own mistakes, knowing there is a safe place to come back to.

On the topic of women and their role models in society, Allyson believes that both men and women can profit equally from significant role models, but that it is probably a lot more difficult for women to find a role model. Allyson believes that men and women need to find some balance in the gender roles they play in their relationships and in the work place.
Because her aunt has chosen to remain single, Allyson sees being single as a positive lifestyle choice for herself. Even when she does marry, Allyson would continue to see herself as independent and responsible for her own choices in life.

Using the metaphor of an anchor, Allyson sees her aunt as someone who has been there for her during a difficult time in a way that was unique and special. This experience has left her with the feeling that her aunt will always be there for her when she needs her. Her experience of having her aunt in her life, has been in her words, soulful. “Sort of good to know there’s someone out there who’s on my side who can understand me more than the rest of the world”.

Lyn

Lyn’s heroic figure was identified as her mother. Heroic qualities Lyn recognized in her mother included: emotional strength, determination, intelligence, open mindedness and fairness. Lyn perceived her mother to be happy and content with her life. Lyn stated that observing her mother overcome some personal setbacks and seeing her continue to thrive despite being a single parent and putting herself through graduate school had made a great impact on her. Lyn particularly admires her mother’s positive attitude, her spiritual principles and her emphasis on treating Lyn as an adult, capable of making her own decisions. She sees her mother as a woman who is independent
and fulfils her own destiny, and sees the choice her mother has made one of being able to follow your heart in life. This has served as a powerful example for Lyn.

Lyn’s mother has influenced her in some significant ways. Discussing her philosophy of child rearing, Lyn referred to her mother’s style of parenting and indicated that she would like to model her own parenting after her mother’s. One main theme in Lyn’s discussion of her mother as heroic figure seems to be the idea of fairness toward others through empathy. Lyn’s mom has encouraged her to look at both sides of every situation before making a judgment. Perhaps it is no surprise that Lyn’s experience of having her mother as a heroic figure in her life is one of support. She feels her mother is open to discussion about issues that Lyn is still struggling with, and is able to be supportive without being controlling.

The open-minded, accepting approach to people that Lyn’s mother has modelled for her has helped Lyn to interact with others who do not share her values. Discussing her relationship with her stepmother, Lyn indicated that she has learned to let go of arguments because she sees that the two women, her mother and stepmother, are very different and she is able to accept each as they are. Another theme regarding generating alternatives arose from her mother modelling choices made between a traditional path and choosing a more singular
journey. For example, Lyn relates an incident where she had to deal with disappointing her mother as a result of a choice she made. Lyn expected her mother to be angry but found that her mother understood and after some discussion, told her she still trusted her. Comparing her mother's reaction to what she would expect of her more traditional stepmother, Lyn reflects that she really respects her mother for wanting to know the truth and then dealing with it, rather than avoiding a painful topic.

When discussing the topic of women and their role models in society, Lyn was adamant about the pressure experienced by many of her friends to conform to a certain image of femininity as offered in the media. She credits feeling secure in her body image to having her mom as a positive alternative role model. Having the power to stay true to her own ideals in the face of peer pressure and family pressure from her stepmother and grandmother is another result of this. She sees her mother as trying to break the mold of her own upbringing and give Lyn some options based on internal rather than external strengths and rewards.

Using the metaphor of a safety net, Lyn decided that having her mother as a role model she could look up to made her feel safe. Home was seen as a safe place to come back to after exploring in the world, knowing that she could return and be accepted by her mother, no matter what. Lyn also acknowledges that her mothers modelling of taking risks
in her career, such as returning to school in her thirties, has given her the message that security comes from within. She says "If I did something and found I didn't like it after a few years, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable leaving it and doing something else, because well, my mom did it and so can I".

Francine

Francine initially named her mother as her heroic figure, and then later in the interview decided that her music teacher had also been another very significant figure in her life. Heroic qualities seen in her mother and identified by Francine included: inner strength, a balanced perspective on life, the ability to be empathic with others, and a strong, consistent belief system that Francine believed shapes her mother's life and provides her with strong convictions. Francine admires her mother's quiet determination. In her music teacher, she saw heroic qualities which were somewhat opposite. He was a man she described as passionate, dedicated to his music, inspiring and inspired, idealistic to the point of being impractical at times, and highly creative.

Francine experienced these two heroes in her life as representations of her inner struggle between passion and reason. Using the metaphor of a harbour, Francine saw her relationship with her mother as the 'safe place' that was calm and predictable; a place she could return to when she needed perspective. In contrast, the world of
her music teacher was seen as a whirlwind, a passionate storm of creativity, a place where he inspired and encouraged her to go inside herself to get in touch with her music, then take it out into the world and share it with others. Both of these places were important to Francine. She admired and respected her music teacher for his passion and her mother for her inner strength and voice of reason. The role of these two heroes in Francine’s life seems to be one of providing balance for her without forcing her to choose either world; described in her words: “having them there hasn’t been divisive because they balance each other”.

Francine reported realizing how important her role models were to her at the end of Grade 10. When faced with a decision whether to continue in a relationship that was getting in the way of school, Francine first attempted to deal with the breakup all alone, and then found her mother had noticed her distress and was really concerned about her. By opening up with her mother, Francine was able move their relationship to a more egalitarian level and find the support that had been there all the time, but had not been accessed. In the same way, by taking a risk to be vulnerable and perform for her music teacher, Francine also found his support in an unexpected place. After hearing how nervous she had been at the audition and realizing this was the reason for her poor performance, her music teacher went after her and invited her to try
Having a role model like her music teacher, who chose to follow his heart in his choice of career has encouraged Francine to keep her options open. She is committed to her choice of a career in medicine for the present, but acknowledges that changes in people’s lives do happen and making changes if things don’t work out is always an option.

Reflecting that she is still evolving as an individual, Francine says she will develop her style over time, as she is exposed to other significant people. Francine sees the importance of her role models particularly in the feedback she gets from them about who she is. In her words: “I think it’s like a constant character analysis”. They seem to act as a mirror or an echo, not only of who she is right now, but of the many possibilities for who she can be in the future. Acknowledging that, Francine reflected that having more than one role model is important because each person can only know a tiny part of her since they know her only in a limited context.

Francine believes that both men and women can benefit equally from having a role model. She recognizes that woman’s roles are changing and she says “finding a person whose qualities you admire is always important, regardless of gender.” She feels men are already part of a heroic culture where their role models are more readily accessible. Women on the other hand, have many complex issues that are only now beginning to be addressed. Women who are leaders, she says, are more
apt to get to know their role models than just sit back and worship them from a distance. Having two role models in her life has encouraged Francine find a balance point between choosing a life devoted to passion or reason, knowing that she can have both in her life by accessing different parts of herself.

Isobel

Isobel's heroic figure was identified as being a teacher whom she found significant in her early years of high school in the Phillipines. She referred to her as Mrs. V. The heroic qualities seen in this teacher by Isobel included: her sense of fairness and the ability to treat others in a respectful and accepting way; her simplicity as evidenced by her approach to life; wisdom; open mindedness about views which were different from her own; her objectivity; a sense of fulfilment with her work that she shared with her students; and her belief in her students. Isobel talked about Mrs. V.'s ability to maintain her own beliefs and yet provide an atmosphere where others could be individuals. Having Mrs. V. as a teacher was especially important to Isobel since that time in her life was somewhat tumultuous with a lot of time spent questioning the system in which she was expected to be a part.

Isobel mentioned several times that Mrs. V. made a significant impact on her life in numerous ways. Initially, she found that Mrs. V.
provided an alternative to the other teachers she had experienced. As she grew to know her better, Isobel found that Mrs. V. acted as a mentor for her, providing a safe place to go and test out her ideas and beliefs against someone whom she perceived as wise and calm. Despite having different value systems, Isobel really respected what Mrs. V. had to say, and for her part, Mrs. V. seemed to understand Isobel's need to be an individual and test the limits of the system. For example, Isobel related a story where she chose to go against what was expected of her in a value related situation. She found Mrs. V. was open to listening to her side of the argument when many others in authority were not. Recalling the incident, Isobel said: "But Mrs. V. didn't get angry at me. She just said she was disappointed but she respected what we thought". This made a great impact on her, and she says, has contributed to her own growing awareness of the need to be fair with others and to be open to both sides of the story at all times before making judgments.

Mrs. V. has also influenced Isobel in the area of career. Isobel has very committed plans to become a teacher, in large part she says, because of Mrs. V. and the example she set. Mrs. V.'s altruistic approach to her teaching career seems to have struck a chord with Isobel's own idealism and has reaffirmed for her why she wants to go into teaching, a career which culturally does not hold the same worth for her at home in the Philippines as it does here in North America.
Mrs. V. has also been there for Isobel when she worked through some significant issues about her own sexuality and her identity. From Isobel's perspective, her relationship with Mrs. V. provided the context for a dialogue she found useful in gaining the feedback she needed to make decisions. While she recognized that Mrs. V. was confined to the parameters of the role she was in, Isobel still found that the relationship was deep enough for her to get support in a way that was not available to her at home.

Discussing the importance of a female role model, Isobel believes that having alternatives to the traditional ways of doing things is really necessary to young women in society today. “Not to be different, but to explore other ways of dealing with things.” Isobel talked briefly about the influence of a female singer whose lyrics she saw as important statements about being a woman today. She did some reading about this singer and found that many of her songs actually captured some of Isobel’s own experiences. What intrigued her most was that this woman was seen as different, much as Isobel was perceived as a rebel in the system she was a part of because she questioned the status quo. Isobel seemed to identify with and respect her struggle to maintain her identity in the face of pressure to conform.

This idea of being true to yourself is a theme throughout the interview. Using the archetype of the wise woman, Isobel described her
relationship with Mrs. V. almost like a wellspring of support: a place she could return to whenever she wanted for information, comfort and affirmation in her struggle to establish her place in the world. Isobel believes that Mrs. V. supplied her with a set of tools to navigate the world successfully. In her words “What she did was she showed me how to be fair. I think I’m sort of wiser. I’m not wise, but I’m wiser. Because this woman is so wise and I only got a billionth of the wiseness she has. I weigh everything now before I judge”.

Lianne

Lianne identified her heroic figures as both her grandmother and a friend in Taiwan. She described her grandmother as a woman who was very brave, having escaped from enemy soldiers during the Second World War. Other heroic qualities possessed by her grandmother and perceived by Lianne included: emotional strength evidenced by a lack of complaining about her situation in life; helpfulness toward others, wisdom about life and people, and supportive of those around her.

Although Lianne does not see her grandmother much since she lives in Taiwan, Lianne still experiences her support as if she were right here. Lianne described the experience of having her grandmother in her life as being “a safe place” where there was someone who listened to her, held her, and gave her confidence to face life’s challenges. Using the symbol of a tree, Lianne felt that her grandmother was strong and
rooted, protecting her with her 'branches'. She was also perceived as old and wise and a source of wisdom about life. Because her grandmother came into her life when she was at a vulnerable stage in her development, Lianne believes that she has a special connection with her. “I found out that when you are young, if you make a connection with a certain person, I think that you will always feel that she is the closest person to you. Even more than your mother.”

Lianne's friend in Taiwan, whom she designated as her second heroic figure, was described by Lianne as also having the qualities of emotional strength, courage, independence and empathy for other people's problems. Lianne also identified a dark side to her friend, that of anger which she says her friend keeps stored up inside. Lianne values the special relationship she has with her friend and appreciates her friend's trust in her that has been demonstrated by the depth of their discussions and sharing. Lianne's friend plays the role of advisor with her, giving her advice about relationships and life. Lianne sees her as a mountain in her life, “stable, strong, never changing”.

Misha

Misha described her heroic figure, her Grade 5 and 6 teacher, as a man whom she saw as a substitute for her grandfather. Misha was struck by this man's sense of fairness and justice, which she experienced as extremely different from her other teachers she had in the past. Mr. X., as
we will call him, was the first teacher Misha had whom she found to be approachable, fair, kind and gentle. He showed her an alternative to using violence to deal with anger in her life and provided constructive alternatives for her.

Mr. X. seemed to act as a model in Misha's life where she watched what he did each day quite intently and through the modelling he provided, helped her to come to some conclusions about her own behaviour. He seemed to have come into her life at a critical time when Misha was questioning issues of right and wrong. Misha says: "I think he was the turning point that let me realize those things. Afterward, life proved him out and I could be sure of what he taught me." Although Misha says that she never developed a personal relationship with Mr. X. because the circumstances did not permit it, she feels she did develop a closeness with him because in her mind, she saw him as a surrogate grandfather. "I thought everything he said was true and that he could do no wrong." Because of this, Misha did not question what she learned from Mr. X. Also, she found that the things she was learning from him reflected what she believed.

Overall, Misha reported that having Mr. X. in her life helped her to learn how to control her feelings and emotions in a safe and healthy way. "I still get angry but the thing is I find it easier to control myself and I can stay in control, so far I can cope." She acknowledges that she really
needed Mr. X at that time in her life, but says that now she needs a role model less. There are peers she looks up to today but says that she feels it is important to learn from others after you have examined the qualities you admire closely. “Don’t blindly worship somebody; try to find the things you admire and learn from them. I think that’s what a role model is in the best sense of the word. Because if you just blindly take on whatever the quality is and put it on yourself, you’re not being true to yourself.” This seems to sum up her experience of having Mr. X in her life: someone who taught her that it is really up to her. With the model of a wise and compassionate man held in her mind as a way to be now and in the future, Misha feels more confident about herself and her ability to cope.

Anna

Anna’s heroic figure was identified as both her mother and father equally; both were seen as having equal weight and influence in her life. Heroic qualities seen by Anna in both her parents included: their strength of purpose at pursuing a new life in Canada; their openness with her about their experiences and their willingness to share that experience; and their respect for her as an individual capable of making her own decisions in life. Separately, Anna admired her father’s moral strength and his willingness to stick to his principles, so much so that he changed careers because of a moral dilemma in his job. This made a deep
impression on Anna and she feels it has contributed to her own sense of right and wrong. Anna admires her mother for her willingness to give; her sacrifices made in the name of her family; and her support of choices made by Anna, such as the university she chooses to attend.

Anna talked about the importance of having a personal and meaningful relationship with the heroic figures in her life. She feels she could not just look up to someone she did not know outside of their role. Anna sees her mother as a kind of internalized support in her life that can help her to overcome obstacles placed in her path. Anna said “If my mother weren’t there I wouldn’t be able to cope with so many problems...I’d probably be very unhappy because there would be no one there to help me.” Her father on the other hand, seems to act as a motivator for Anna. She feels he has set an example for her and she is striving to reach the same level of success that he has attained, not because he expects it, but because she wants to do it for herself. “I figure if he can do it, then I can also do it. I’m not less, I’m not inferior, so if he can do it, then I can do the same.”

Anna experiences having her parents in her life as a feeling of being secure and safe. She sees her parents as being the real teachers in her life because they have shared so many of their experiences with her. Her opinion is that school based knowledge, while important, does not hold the same value in the real world as the life lessons her parents
have taught her which she finds very meaningful. Perhaps because of her experience with a male and female whom she considers to be a meaningful role model, Anna also feels that she would be happy with either gender as a future mentor in her career, remarking that having both genders gives her a balanced perspective on life's issues.

**Thematic Analysis**

Interview transcriptions were analyzed thematically using hermeneutic analysis. As described previously, “meaning units” (Giorgi, 1975), were isolated and then arranged by participant according to an organizing framework representing three different areas:

1) Who is the heroic figure within this sample?
2) How is the heroic figure experienced by the participants?
3) What role does the heroic figure play in the lives of the participants?

The first question regarding the identity of the heroic figure was more concrete than the other two and as such, was not included in thematic analysis. The second and third organizing questions generated data that were so intimately intertwined that the two categories became superordinate and subordinate thematic strands (See Table 1).

This method of organization corresponds with Tesch's (1990) description of interpretational qualitative analysis. Two commonalities of this type of analysis are that the “data are segmented and the data segments are organized according to an organizing system” (113). The
Heroic figure

responses to questions about the value of a role model in general and a female role model in particular will be dealt with separately in a section which follows.

The question of the identity of the heroic figure within this sample was consistently reported as either a family member or someone who took on a role perceived by the young women as parental. The primary heroic figures, as indicated in the participant’s summaries included three mothers, one father, one aunt, one grandmother, and two teachers. Secondary heroic figures included one teacher, a recording artist and one peer. Consistent across all interviews was the view that to be meaningful, a heroic figure must be someone the participants knew personally.

In total, ten themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. The superordinate themes seemed to revolve around the role of the heroic figure in the lives of the participants and acted to “fold in” their experience of having this person or person(s) in their life. With this in mind, what follows are the five main superordinate themes corresponding to the role of the heroic figure, with the five coexisting subordinate themes woven in (See Table 1). To supplement each theme, in keeping with the spirit of hermeneutic analysis, the participant’s actual words from the original transcripts are offered as supportive evidence (Kvale, 1983). Tesch (1990) calls this process “decontextualizing and
recontextualizing in descriptive/interpretive analysis” (p.115).

The five superordinate themes, with corresponding subordinate themes, associated with the experience of having a heroic figure have been identified as:

1. The heroic figure acts as a *benefactor*: the keeper of possibilities, alternatives and choices in life; someone who stands at the gates which mark the many future paths available to the participant and helps them to find the key which opens those doors. The subordinate theme is the heroic figure experienced as someone who has followed their own path in life.

2. The heroic figure acts as an *advocate*: one who gives support and encouragement and helps the participant translate this into action. The subordinate theme is that the heroic figure is most salient during times of decision by encouraging the participant to take action in their own life.

3. The heroic figure acts as a *refuge*: providing a safe place to return to, consistency, and a sense of belonging. The subordinate theme of connection to something larger experienced by the participant was also observed.

4. The heroic figure acts as the *sage*: one who tells stories about life; shares insight and wisdom gleaned through life experience. The subordinate theme is the idea that the heroic figure is a source of wisdom about life that the participants felt free to draw upon when necessary.
5. The heroic figure acts as an echo: one who gives feedback; provides a balanced perspective; encourages dialogue about life.
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The subordinate theme of the heroic figure being accepting and non-judgmental was also evident. These five superordinate themes were present in all seven interview transcripts in varying degrees of clarity and emphasis. While the subordinate themes were not as universally accessible, they nonetheless provided strong corroboration for the themes listed above. There is a strong possibility that the lack of consistency among subordinate themes may be related to variation among identity status in the sample. This will be addressed in the discussion of the identity interview analyses.

Themes in detail

Theme 1: The heroic figure acts as a benefactor.

The task of providing alternatives was a universally attributed function of the heroic figure in the lives of the participants, making it a superordinate theme in this study. This was often expressed directly with the participant’s use of the word option; as in the case of Francine who holds her mother up as an example of another choice for her life: “If she wasn’t my mom, then I wouldn’t have known that being a mom could be an option to a high stress career.” Isobel also refers to her heroic figure, her religion teacher, as providing alternatives when she says “...because of her motherhood is on my good side now. It’s another alternative.” Another participant uses the word possibility to describe how she has
experienced her aunt as someone who showed her a different way of living. Says Allyson:

I would never have known that that is a possibility; that that is something I can do when I get older. Because you know, I wouldn’t have realized: “Hey, I don’t have to live in the same place my whole entire life.” I think it’s opened up those doors for me; sort of saying “Look, you can do what you want, it’s your choice.” So, I think she’s sort of broadened it for me, the whole aspect of choices in adulthood.

Some participants gave more concrete examples of how their heroic figures provided alternatives. Misha, who remembers her Grade 5 teacher’s example of humanitarian discipline, said that “Physical punishment is considered O.K. in most schools in Taiwan. By reacting differently, he sort of got me thinking about how people deal with things and made me see there was more than one way.” Later in the interview she sums up her experience of her heroic figure as a benefactor when she says “I really appreciate what I learned from him. He showed me an alternative way to deal with things in my life.”

In several of the participants’ lives, the experience of the heroic figure as benefactor was more subtle. In Lianne’s case, her grandmother has provided a model against which she can compare her choices and options in life. For her, alternatives are seen as something different.
When talking about her choices for the future, Lianne reflects “I don’t really want to live her life. I live in Canada now and there are different ways to live. Some of the things she did, like marry and settle down, I won’t do right away.” Anna talks about choice in terms of decision, seeing her parents act directly to help her examine the options while leaving the final decision up to her. “They might analyze things” she says, “and tell me what the different careers involve so that I can better understand the careers and make a better choice.”

The subordinate theme which appeared to complement the idea of the heroic figure as a benefactor, was the commonly expressed view that the heroic figure was someone who had taken risks in their own life, or at the very least, someone who had chosen alternatives for themselves which set them apart in some way. For example, Allyson spoke about her aunt’s determination to live life on her terms.

Well, she has always done exactly what she wanted to do and she doesn’t really let other factors stop her...she’s travelled, she’s lived in every province of Canada, gone across Canada back and forth a couple of times...I mean my grandmother didn’t want her going across Canada but she did it anyway of course.

Allyson perceives her aunt as “breaking the mold” and going beyond societal role prescriptions. Her aunt’s choice to remain single, delay commitment to a career in favour of exploration and travel, and her
choice of a non-traditional lifestyle as an entrepreneur and artisan are noted by Allyson and seen as significant alternatives for her own life.

Well, by looking at my aunt, I realize that unlike the rest of my family, by looking at her I realize that money isn’t everything. And the fact that she travelled around against the wishes of her family and hitchhiked when she probably shouldn’t have hitchhiked...but she did and she made it and she liked it, so that tells me that I can do it too. And she went to university and she said that university was an amazing growth experience for her, so I’ll try it.

Allyson’s aunt has given her the alternative that learning and experience are an end in themselves, rather than the traditional view that they are a means to an end.

Lyn’s mother also chose to break away from a traditional path in her previous life as a wife and stay at home mother by returning to school after a divorce. Says Lyn: “She went back to school when she was thirty something and she didn’t care that everyone else was younger than her when she did it.” Lyn also talks about her experience of her mother as a parent in light of how she perceives her mother’s approach as different:

She’s trying to break the mold of her family where the father is the disciplinarian, and she has to cook and clean and look good: she spent her high school years dressed to the nines when no one else in high school was and she didn’t like it all. My grandmother
raised my mom in that mold, my mother tried to raise us a different way.

Lyn sees her mother's commitment to this goal as so powerful, that when her mom chose not to marry because the man in question wanted "a traditional wife", Lyn applauded her decision and supported her fully.

Other participants recognized this theme of rebellion and risk taking in their heroic figures as a need to follow their own inner voice. Francine describes how her music teacher changed careers during midlife because he had to do what he really loved with "absolute passionate intensity"; he had reached a point in life she says, where he said "No more." This has caused her to reflect on the reasons behind her own career choices. Isobel and Misha, whose heroic figures were teachers as well, commented on how struck they were with the way these people went out on a limb for what they believed in. Isobel's teacher took on the 'wild class' and through her belief in them, made a significant impact on the views Isobel held at that time. Isobel says the experience of having a teacher who would take the risk to believe in the 'slacker class' was very powerful.

And I just stopped and realized, my gosh, she really believes in us! If she can do that, why can't I? I mean, it sounds really simple but it's made such a big difference to the way I feel about things.

Misha's teacher held out the example of humanitarian discipline in a
system where such things were considered the norm. “The first thing this teacher did was to break the cane and tell us that he wasn’t going to hit or punish us in any way. So he really made an impact on me...” This caused Misha to reconsider her position on violence and began what she saw as a turning point in her life. Anna’s father left his job as an engineer after an ethical struggle with the policies of the company he worked for. He went on and became a doctor, which Anna says has greatly influenced her.

That had a great impact on me because I have the same value as him now. When people cheat, I don’t do the same because I feel it's immoral and I have my own principles to go by."

Theme 2: The heroic figure acts as an advocate.

The term 'advocate' was chosen for this theme because the support perceived by the participants from their heroic figures is of an active nature. It is a support that, in their words, makes a difference in their lives, particularly when it comes to making important decisions. For some participants, the support was experienced directly, as in the case of Lianne, who lived with her grandmother when her father was away on business.

Well, when I had arguments with my parents, my grandmother was always there for me. She wouldn’t say much, she just held me. I remember once when I was very young, I was scared and she
came in and tucked me in so I could sleep better. She is like a
tree. Strong and rooted, protecting me with her branches.

The support felt by participants from their heroic figure seems to facilitate change, reflecting the subordinate theme of the heroic figure as someone who encourages the participant to take action in their life. Several young women in the sample described being encouraged to go after what they believed in. Anna describes how her father supports her in her work toward her career goals:

If my father weren't there, I wouldn't be working as hard as I am now. He used to tell me a lot of stories, right? And I figure if he can do it, then I can also do it.

Isobel experienced her teacher's support as permission to be true to her own values and to act on them. Following a decision to actively boycott a school mandated presentation which she disagreed with, Isobel faced being disciplined by the administration for non-compliance. Instead, her heroic figure interceded on her behalf after taking the time to talk to her about the reason for her actions. Isobel found that this incident greatly increased her respect for her teacher and modelled another way of being in the face of a rigid, traditional system. In her words:

...that was so refreshing to find a reaction like that, especially in a school with that kind of system. That was the first time I had actually met anyone older than I was who was open minded about
Isobel noted that the supportive relationship she built with her heroic figure lasted through her high school years, and provided her with someone to talk to when she was faced with decisions about dating, drinking and drug use, as well as career and school issues.

Like Isobel’s teacher, Lyn’s mother also believed in her in a way that Lyn found really supportive. After doing something to be accepted by her peer group and subsequently being caught in a lie to her mother, Lyn says:

She wasn’t really mad, she just said “I still trust you, I just want to know...” so I felt a lot better. She didn’t think about never trusting me again after that, she just sort of understood.

By providing support for Lyn’s decision to be honest about what she had done wrong, Lyn found the bond with her mother had been strengthened. Even when Lyn makes unpopular decisions in her mother’s eyes, such as choosing not to attend church, Lyn says “I know she’s there for me.”

Francine reported that the support she receives from her mother is emotional. Her mother’s empathy has helped Francine to sort out her feelings:

She’s the one in the family that I talk to the most. If I talk to her about friends or my problems or anything like that, she seems to know exactly what you’re talking about and feel that exactly. And it
seems like she’s gone through all that stuff before as well. Francine also relates a story where she says she went to her mother for support after her mother recognized that she was really struggling with a personal issue. This was a turning point in their relationship, where Francine says:

And I started to tell her more things and then I saw that she could see things really clearly and that she was right. She didn’t get mad, or yell or anything, she was very respectful and so I began to trust her.

Francine uses the words support and encourage to describe how she experienced her other heroic figure, her music teacher. When she was faced with difficult auditions and pieces, “He encouraged me”, she says. “He’s really supportive because it’s so hard sometimes; there are so many technicalities in music, it almost seems like a science.”

This sense of acceptance is a prominent feeling for Allyson as well. When she was younger, Allyson recalls how her aunt supported her through a difficult time, taking the actions that made the difference in how she perceived her situation at a critical point in her life.

She was just so supportive. I hated it when we first moved here and I couldn’t discuss it with my mother because she was the one who made me move here. But my aunt, she was there for me, she made me see. She took me around and showed me the city and
Heroic figure

showed me it wasn't so bad. And she just...she was one of those people who was there when I needed her.

For Allyson, support and respect were closely aligned. She spoke numerous times of the respect she had for her aunt and how any meaningful relationships in her life had to be based on honesty and mutual respect. In summing up her experience of the support and acceptance she receives from her aunt, Allyson says:

There are different people I respect for different things but there's no one else who stands out as a whole figure. Sort of good to know there's someone out there who's on my side who can understand me more than the rest of the world.

Theme 3: The heroic figure acts as a refuge.

The complementary function of the advocate, one who provides the support necessary for meaningful action, is that of the refuge, one who provides a safe place, a place to retreat from the world. All participants commented on the feeling of safety inherent in their relationships with their heroic figures providing the superordinate theme of refuge. A subordinate theme was one of connection. Many participants believed that the heroic figure helped them to feel connected to the world around them and provided a sense of belonging. Some participants used the word safety directly; others used metaphors or
examples to describe the feeling of being held, protected and cherished for who they were. All valued the feeling that there was someone who sheltered them when life was difficult. Lyn described the feeling specifically:

Well, I never really thought about her not being there. She's there. She feels safe. I don't want to lose her. If I don't feel safe out there then I can come home...my mom says "Come home when you don't feel comfortable..."

When asked if her mother provides a safety net for her when she's out exploring the world, Lyn answered "Exactly!". Anna was also very specific in describing her experience of having her parents there for her. When asked what it feels like to have them in her life, Anna said "I feel secure, very secure. Safe."

The sense of implicit trust and belief in the relationship between the heroic figure and the participant was evident in several accounts. Allyson mentioned the idea that her heroic figure was something constant in her life and this was a great comfort to her.

She was one of the people in your life that when you know you need them, they'll be there and when I know I need her, she'll be there. You always need that, because it's always so comforting to know.

Francine also uses the word safe to describe how she feels about
her relationship with her mother and her music teacher, her two heroic figures. She ties in the complementary theme of support to her observations:

Safe. And lucky. Really lucky. I do have people I can look up to. I'm lucky to have people I can care about that care about me. I have someone to talk to when I have a problem. Not having them would mean giving up a lot and that would be very difficult. I need that external support.

Later in the interview, Francine talks about how deeply intertwined the concept of support and safety are for her:

I want to go to a local school because I'm afraid I would feel really lost being so far away from my home and my family. I was really aware that leaving them behind meant cutting myself off in a way. I really need to stay in touch. I would really miss that. I would lose a part of myself.

For Lianne, Isobel and Misha, the experience of having their heroic figure in their life was safety through connection. Lianne felt very close to her grandmother and said “if she’s there, I feel safe. I believe in myself more.” But her sense of connection to her grandmother was the overriding theme.

I still fell closer to my grandmother than to my parents. I found out that when you are young, if you make a connection with a certain
person, I think you will always feel that she is the closest person to you.

Through her connection to her grandmother she was able to feel safe and carry that with her, even though she doesn't see her grandmother often anymore. Misha saw her heroic figure, her Grade 5 teacher, as a surrogate grandfather, since her own grandfather had passed away. She felt very close to her teacher in a way that different than her experience with her other teachers. "I think I really did have a closeness with him" she says, "a lot more than I did with other teachers in the school". Isobel recognized that her teacher, her heroic figure, was able to give her a safe place to explore some really important issues. By doing this, Isobel believes she developed the ability to see both sides of an issue. In her words, she says "I'm more trusting and I'm more optimistic. She really helped me talk things out and she gave me an older, wiser perspective..." Through her connection with Mrs.V., Isobel was able to venture into the world and try out her new found convictions, knowing she could come back and discuss any problems she was having. Isobel says that she continues to write to her heroic figure, even though she lives so far away now.

Theme 4: The heroic figure acts as a sage.

The theme of the heroic figure as a wise person who teaches life lessons is echoed in many of the participants' accounts of their
experience. The subordinate theme was one of experiencing the heroic figure as wise and a source of wisdom; someone who had been on a life journey. The words *wisdom*, *wise*, and *insight* are repeated in almost every description of their heroic figures. Isobel sees this quality as something Mrs. V. passed on to her in some small way.

"I think I'm wiser. I'm not wise, but I'm wiser. Because this woman is so wise and I only got a billionth of that wiseness that she has. I don't really have the same beliefs as she does, but it's the way I would go about things, I probably got that from her."

Wisdom also takes the form of lessons learned about life from their heroic figures as well. There seems to be a belief that the heroic figure is 'marking the way' for participants by telling them about what to expect in the world. Misha doesn't remember too many specifics about Mr. X, her Grade 5 teacher, except that:

"He was one teacher who taught me about life. I remember the stuff he said, a lot of it was about life lessons. When I think about what he said in certain situations, it comforts me."

Lianne also remembers the stories her grandmother used to tell her. "She gave me examples. Also, she told me about her past in China and how she and her family escaped during the Second World War." From these stories, Lianne began to develop a philosophy about what to expect in the world. "I lived with her for a short time and she told me..."
about life and the problems she had", says Lianne. "I learned from her that if you are weak in life, people will take advantage of you and cheat you." These lessons from her grandmother also included the admonition that Lianne should make time to listen to others; that "everyone has something to teach me."

Anna recounts her experience of learning first hand about life from her parents, an experience she values as more important in some ways, than her academic education:

Actually, I got more from my parents than I've gotten from school. Because the education I've had in school only talks about subjects and different facts, but from my mother and father I've learned about the real society, the real world. They've told me stories about people getting tricked by others, people who have had a really bad life. That has helped me to understand what life is really like.

For Allyson, the stories about life told by her aunt are extremely important because Allyson values truth as the foundation of a relationship above all else. In her words, "if you don't have truth, you don't have anything because the foundation of everything is truth". Given that context, Allyson values her aunt's perspective on life, based on her experiences:

We met in Toronto this summer and we went out for dinner and
we’d chat, chat, chat, chat... and she tells me all these little stories, about men she knows and she tells me I shouldn’t worry so much. She’s very helpful. She realizes that I don’t really like school because I kind of find it boring and she says “Well, you don’t really have to learn in a classroom…”

Allyson contrasts her experience of her aunt’s truthfulness to what she sees as patronizing behaviour by some of her teachers. “Some of my teachers patronize me; they’re not telling me the truth. They just sort of pussyfoot around the whole topic.” In contrast, Allyson says her aunt is straight with her:

Oh, she basically tells you what’s what, and how it is, not how it should be. Like here at school, they tell you how it should be; well of course everyone should be equal, of course men and women should be equal, but my aunt will tell me once you get into the real world there will be some people out there who treat you poorly because there are!

Allyson also values the honest relationship she has with her parents, whom she says, have learned to tell her what is really happening in life. She finds their honesty especially important when it comes time to make decisions.

They used to skirt around it, but then they realized “she’s gonna do what she wants to do so it’s better to support her decisions or
she'll keep on making these mistakes anyway. Because I need to figure it out before I get out there or otherwise I just won't make it.

Lyn’s experience of her relationship with her mother is also based on honesty and mutual respect. To her, she and her mother have an equal relationship with her mother treating her as an adult. “She just treats us like adults; assumes we are and encourages us to do our best”. Some of the lessons Lyn has learned from her mom about life have rubbed off in her relationships with her peers. “I think I use that with my friends: ‘Don’t put yourself down’, and ‘Be positive’”. One of the areas identified by Lyn as a direct outcome of her mother’s influence, is her body image. She believes that because her mother modelled self-acceptance as she was growing up, and talked openly with Lyn about the mixed messages in the media about women:

I know I’m not as down about body issues (as my peers), like saying “I’m so fat...” I don’t think about that as much as my friends do. I don’t care. And peer pressure and stuff like that; a lot of people have to do what their friends say or they don’t feel right. I don’t worry if my friends are going to hate me. I do what I want.

The message of being true to yourself has gotten through to Lyn, and she credits her mother’s wisdom and their honest relationship for this.

Francine also sees her mother as someone she can go to for advice and wisdom, someone who seems to “have done all that stuff
before”. Francine says “I'm just amazed by her because sometimes when I watch her try to teach us about other people or things like that, she seems to know everything.” Francine sees herself as naive in comparison to her mother, and values her mother’s consistent views and beliefs about life. While she doesn’t agree with all of her mother’s ideals, Francine respects her mother’s commitment to her values, and keeps them in mind as she begins the exploration of her own values.

She has things she believes in that never change. She’s very consistent. Now that I think about her beliefs I can see that there are things I don’t like and I don’t want to incorporate that into myself. Like the fact that she’s very quiet; almost too quiet. So when there’s a problem, she won’t say it.

In contrast, Francine’s other heroic figure, her music teacher, is experienced by her as loud and passionate about what he believes. His “absolute passionate intensity” was what really inspired her. She reports that she also talks to him about some of the issues she is struggling with, and that his approach is different than her mothers:

We talk in class, but we talk out of class more than we talk in class, and I can see parts of his personality that I really like. Like the fact that he’s sort of opposite to my mother in a lot of ways; he’s loud and he’s really passionate about a lot of things and his problems, and he’ll say it. He won’t just swallow it.
By having both role models in her life, Francine believes "they balance each other off". This is very important to her, because she sees both of them representing different facets of her character.

I think having both of them there is really important, because if my music teacher wasn’t there I would only have my mom’s perspective and I think even though she has insight into things, and in many ways I am a lot like her, the fact that she is so quiet, would frustrate me. But then if I only had my music teacher, I know I would be drifting away and not thinking about practical things: just thinking about the ideal in society and how life should be.

In having both, Francine believes she can access the wisdom of two different perspectives, thus creating her own.

*Theme 5: The heroic figure acts as an echo.*

Just as a place of refuge provided by the heroic figure worked to complement the advocacy function for participants, the corollary of the sage is the echo. Participants spoke of the heroic figure as someone who gave a balanced perspective and engaged them in dialogue about life. While this may seem much like the same function as the sage, the difference lies in the action of listening and providing feedback, not just telling stories, modelling beliefs and sharing wisdom. While there is certainly some overlap between the two themes, they serve to complement one another rather than compete for significance.
Isobel experienced the echo with Mrs V. when she faced an important decision. By engaging in a dialogue that challenged her long held beliefs, Mrs. V. was able to help Isobel to come to some conclusions:

She helped me make a decision about what I wanted to do. Ever since I was young I've always wanted to teach. And what influenced me against being a teacher is that people sort of look down on them. See, back home we don't really have a middle class. You're either rich or poor. To be a teacher is sort of like...well they get paid O.K. in some schools, but public school teachers are really looked down upon. I was starting to apply to colleges and stuff and I didn't know what I wanted to do; there was no way I was going to be able to teach. When I told my mom that she laughed. That's how bad it is. But Mrs. V... There was one time she was talking about vocation and fulfilment and it was really weird, because I had never told her I wanted to teach, it was something I kept to myself. And she told us her life story and how she wanted to teach for fulfilment.

Hearing Mrs. V's story of decision and commitment, gave Isobel the courage to begin the dialogue about making her dream of teaching a reality in a culture that did not support her aspirations. Even when she talked to Mrs. V. about decisions she was facing whether they involved
drinking, sex or career, the answer invariably put the responsibility for choice squarely on Isobel's shoulders.

It's up to you. You were given the ability to decide. You think about what is right and if you want to do it, go ahead, but don't do it for the other person, do it for yourself.

Isobel also valued Mrs. V.'s ability to be consistent in her fairness and balanced perspective toward others. This open-mindedness and acceptance of others was reflected as a subordinate theme in many of the participants' experiences with their heroic figure. Isobel has incorporated these attitudes into her own way of dealing with people:

What she did was she showed me how to be fair. That's the thing. I weigh everything now before I judge. I try to see both sides. If you want something, then go and get it, but you also have to use common sense. Is it right? Is it going to benefit all those concerned?

Isobel was able to use Mrs. V. as an echo to practice her emerging values. This function of accessing her wisdom, but also having the freedom to 'try it on for size' with the support of her heroic figure, was very powerful for Isobel.

Allyson spoke many times of the non judgmental relationship she had with her aunt which was based on her aunt's openness about her own life and how Allyson dealt with the same kinds of challenges.
regarding conformity that were now facing her.

I'd call her a risk taker because some of the stories she's told me, she's taken risks that have not had very good effects, but I wouldn't consider her a risk taker because the only way you can learn is through your experience and she's learned a lot through her experiences.

Allyson values her aunt's stories about her experiences but recognizes that she must go out and see things for herself, based on her aunt's model of exploring the world:

She's travelled around a lot and I plan to do that, not following in her footsteps but more like she did. I mean, she saw it and she did it, so I want to see it and I want to do it. I guess it is a decision I've made that I want to travel, so I guess I did get that from her.

For her part, Allyson's aunt is clear about the responsibility for action residing with Allyson herself. She relates that her aunt is "the only one who says if you want it, you've got to make sure that you can do it." This attitude reveals itself in many of Allyson's beliefs. "You don't need a man to make you happy", she says, "If you want one, you can go get one."

While many of these ideas originated in discussion with her aunt, Allyson has clearly taken them on for herself.

Lyn's dialogue with her mother often takes the form of healthy debate over moral issues they have different views on, such as religion.
While her mother holds strong beliefs about the presence and value of spirituality, Lyn is not so sure.

Sometimes we don’t see things the same way, but I try not to argue with her. She’s religious you know, not like strict but in a spiritual sense and she made us go to church for years just so we would have a background to decide for ourselves.

Lyn respects her mother’s views about religion and yet, is able to remain true to her own exploration about her beliefs. “I still believe in some of the big ideas, but I’m not deeply spiritual, I guess” she says. And while her mother would like her to go to church, she accepts that Lyn is still working out her position on this issue. Meanwhile, their dialogue continues.

Francine sees her mother’s function as an echo one of providing a balanced perspective on life.

I know I can be very narrow minded and stubborn about things, so if I see something, that’s all I see. If I didn’t have her balanced perspective I wouldn’t consider it; it would be difficult to see that all by myself.

As mentioned previously, Francine really values the ongoing dialogue with both her mother and her music teacher because both are able to give her pieces to the larger puzzle of understanding herself. She likens having them both there to having a “kind of constant character analysis”.

By engaging in dialogue about her choices with both heroic figures she
gains insight about who she is:

I think it's kind of like a constant character analysis. I do things, and I talk to them, and they respond. And when they respond, they tell me what they see, things that I can't see, so that really tells me: because I can't really see who I am. People always have a strange or a warped self image, and so when you see what other people see, it's really important information.

Francine believes that no one has the ability to see her as a whole. “Everybody only sees a little bit and I think I can say I need all of them for input”. Asked if her heroic figures act as a mirror for her, reflecting back the images she presents, Francine says it is “more than that. They don't just tell you what you're like, they tell you how it felt for them and what else you could be.”

Anna values the way her parents act as advisors, allowing for discussion and debate about her choices, but never telling her what to do. “They help me with everything”, she says. “Actually, my parents respect my right to make up my own mind so they don't make decisions for me about anything.” The process of discussion about Anna’s choices is very much a dialogue. When faced with decisions about university, Anna says:

Yeah, I talked to my mom about it and we analyzed the pros and cons of going to each university. But the decision is up to me.
She says she'll support me going to whatever university I want, so that's usually how it goes; I make decisions for myself but I also ask my parents for their opinion.

Misha also comments on how much she values being able to make her own decisions, with the lessons her heroic figure, Mr. X. has given her about herself providing that support.

I think it's really up to me. I've got to decide for myself. I'm going away to Eastern Canada to work on my English and I just think that's a decision I made for myself. But I know my strengths and weaknesses and I think maybe he helped with that.

Part of the process for Misha was an internal dialogue. When she was younger, she believed most of the things Mr. X. told her because they fit with her values. "I accepted it because mostly what he said were things I believed in", she says. However, over time, as she began to more closely examine some of the ideas he presented her with, Misha began the process of taking what fit, and leaving the rest. Many things still fit for her as "life proved him out and I could be sure of what he taught me". Other things needed to be discarded as she grew and experienced more of life:

When you look at your role model, you can find some faults. You realize as you grow up that they are human beings. You can look up to that you don't have to be like them. The parts that fit for me
are the ones that I will pursue, the rest I can leave and accept as part of who they are. Like several of the other young women in this study, Misha was able to incorporate the wisdom of her heroic figure in a way that made sense to her and in so doing, created her own internal echo which continues to serve her well.

**Importance of a Role Model**

During the heroic figure interview, participants were asked about their beliefs regarding the importance of having a role model, and whether the gender of the role model made any difference to them. The more general term role model was used in order to allow participants to identify someone who may be beyond their personal relationship with their heroic figure. This was important because a role model is often perceived as providing support to young people, especially in areas of career decision making and value conflicts.

There was general consensus among the participants that having a role model was very important to them, regardless of gender. They did not seem to distinguish their heroic figure from the idea of having a role model; both were seen as valuable, but slightly different. The distinction came in their experience. A role model was experienced as more distant and less personal, while a heroic figure was someone well known to the participants. They also agreed that it is very difficult for young women to
find a female role model they can connect with personally, and all felt strongly that a personal relationship with their role model is the most valuable aspect of having someone like that in their life.

Francine seemed to sum up what many participants felt about the importance of having a female role model:

I think it’s important that both males and females have role models. Maybe being female now, it’s slightly more important for us because our roles are changing; so having a role model who is a woman would help. Finding a person whose qualities you admire; someone who has the passion to say something important regardless of the consequences, is always important.

Many participants talked about their perception that it is much easier for men to find role models than for women, especially in the workplace. Misha said:

Role models come from all over, but I think women do have more of a struggle than men because it’s harder for women to find someone in business they can trust and admire as well as find the opportunities to meet them.

Allyson echoed this sentiment when she said:

For someone like me to find a significant role model is a lot more difficult than it is for males because men have so many examples. Politics, sports figures, tons of them out there, tons of well known
and respected males, but females who find a field and excel in it are much fewer.

Anna believes that having role models from both genders is valuable because it allows for a more balanced perspective:

Women and men are quite different in many ways and so, they need different role models so they can follow them and have some examples to look up to. They have very different points of view, and you don’t always see that until you go out into society and talk to both men and women you admire. Both views means you hear both genders.

Isobel also reflected on the importance of having many role models in life, each providing support at different times:

I don’t think it’s really good to have only one role model because there are a lot of people with good qualities. Mrs. V. has a lot of good qualities but there are other people I admire with qualities she doesn’t have. I guess it’s sort of like berry picking, you know? Take the best of everything. It’s good to have more than one.

Based on these comments, the difference between role model and heroic figure for the participants seems to be subtle. The distinction appears to revolve around the concept of relationship. The heroic figure experience is multifaceted for the participants and folds in modelling as well as the other functions and roles discussed in this chapter. The
primary requirement for the heroic figure is the relationship which evolves between the participant and the person they perceive as heroic. While role models may take many forms, the heroic figure designation is usually reserved for a specific person with whom there is a history.

Validation Interviews

Validation interviews were held with all participants three weeks after the heroic figure interview. The purpose of the validation interview was to allow participants an opportunity to respond to the researcher’s interpretation of their experience. Participants were asked if they wished to make any corrections or additions to the summaries as presented. The purpose of the validation interview was twofold: one, to ensure that the participants felt understood by the researcher regarding this topic; and two, to provide a balance against any suppositions the researcher may have allowed to colour the interpretation of the interview. This is an important feature of the hermeneutical process (Kvale, 1983). The questions asked in the validation interview were:

1. Do you feel that this summary accurately reflects your experience of having a heroic figure in your life, particularly their influence on your life?

2. Are there any thoughts or feelings that you would like to add to your story?

3. Is there anything written in this summary you feel is inaccurate,
that you would like to have taken out or changed?

4. Was the interview method used conducive to sharing your experiences effectively? Do you feel the questions were appropriate or did you feel they restricted you in any way with regard to your telling your story?

All participants felt that the summaries shared in this thesis were accurate reflections of their experience of having a heroic figure. Several participants mentioned that they found the process of talking about their heroic figure illuminating and that the intense nature of the questions did not discourage them from sharing their views. Said one participant:

I was a little nervous at first because of the sudden opening up I had to do, but after that I was never more comfortable with anyone I had just met! I feel the questions were appropriate and in no way was I restricted.

These comments were typical of most participants, with several noting that they had not thought about the role their heroic figure played in their lives before this interview.

Summary of Thematic Analysis

Five major superordinate themes regarding the experience of having a heroic figure were universally evident in the participant interview data. These superordinate themes revolved around the function held by the heroic figure in the participants' life. Five subordinate themes, which were more subtle and not always accessible
in each interview were also included because they complemented each theme. Of the five superordinate themes, the overriding theme seemed to be that the heroic figure was experienced as a benefactor: someone who provided alternatives and modelled choices in life. The other four themes seemed to act as corollaries of each other; the heroic figure as encourager balancing off the function of providing a refuge for participants, and the heroic figure as sage and teaching life lessons through stories complementing the function of echoing or providing feedback.

The overriding theme of the heroic figure as benefactor was found to be very powerful for each of the young women and served to keep open the gate for myriad possibilities about what shape their lives could take. Each of the participants referred to alternatives presented to them by their heroic figure and talked about how having these choices was important to them. A subordinate theme to being a benefactor was the sense by the participants that their heroic figure had been through their own struggles to arrive at their current place. Seeing that their heroic figures often had to follow a unique path in life, often different from the accepted cultural values around them, allowed the participants the freedom to explore their own options.

The theme of the heroic figure as an advocate was reflected through the participant's experiences of having their heroic figure provide
them with the support they needed when they were struggling through a value related or goal oriented decision. The participants’ experience was one of having their heroic figure advocate on their behalf and act as an encourager, but not to the extent that the heroic figure made the decision or took action for them. The aspect of support in the face of inner conflict was very prevalent in the interviews, and seemed to provide participants with a feeling of empowerment rather than of being rescued from their problems.

Complementing the role of the advocate, many heroic figures were experienced as providing refuge for participants, in the sense that they were experienced as representing consistency, safety and a touchstone for them to return to after their forays in the world. A subordinate theme of connection was also evident as the young women talked about their feelings of belonging and relationship which provided the context for a safe place to explore issues and ideas with their heroic figures.

Many participants also talked about the stories their heroic figures told them about life, which led to the theme of the heroic figure as a sage in their lives. These were stories about life, which illustrated values and lessons the participants often assumed themselves. The subordinate theme of the heroic figure as someone who had a wealth of life experience and was wise presented itself as participants talked about the insights gleaned through these stories and examples. This translated as
a source of wisdom participants felt they had access to whenever they needed guidance about particular issues.

Finally, the theme of the heroic figure as an echo acted as a corollary to the functions of the sage. Although the difference was subtle, participants differentiated the two functions by virtue of the dialogue which occurred with the heroic figure on an ongoing basis, often initiated by them. Their experience of having an echo focussed on being heard, and also getting important critical feedback and validation from their heroic figure. The subordinate theme of the heroic figure as accepting and non-judgmental was very strong. Participants felt that having this open and unbiased dialogue allowed them to achieve a balanced perspective on whatever they were dealing with.

**Associations with Identity Status**

Erikson (1968) believed that the formation of a sense of personal identity was a pivotal issue in the psychological development of adolescents. Negotiating identity issues may be thought to begin before the high school years and will continue well into adulthood. In identity research, differences in how individuals respond are directly related to the age of the respondent. Therefore, it is important to frame the analysis of the identity interviews done with participants in this study based on the definition of each status relative to the age group being studied, in this case middle adolescence (Waterman, 1993).
The four identity statuses, according to Marcia (1966), can be determined by measuring identity formation along two dimensions: exploration (crisis) and commitment. Exploration through crisis refers to demonstrated stability in goals and values as evidenced by an articulated belief system that shows some degree of self reflection. The least developmentally sophisticated status is identity diffusion, which basically reflects that the individuals in this status have made no commitments to who they are or what they stand for in life. Adolescents in this status may reflect their lack of commitment by responding to questions about vocational plans with no clear idea of what they want to do. Other things are more important to them, such as body image or perceived social desirability (Archer & Waterman, 1983).

Foreclosed adolescents show commitments they will strongly defend but will offer no evidence of thoughtful questioning underlying their assumptions. Commitments are typically extensions of the values and expectations of significant others, often from within the family, and are assumed without question. Conversely, adolescents in the moratorium status show evidence of actively seeking information in order to decide between alternatives they perceive as available in the world. The moratorium status initiates activity to resolve questions, perhaps by reading, talking to friends, teachers or other significant figures to reflect on what is personally meaningful; in other words, to find
out what ‘fits’ for that individual. *Identity achievers* have already experienced moratorium and have made a commitment that they are living out in their lives or will put into place in the near future (Archer & Waterman, 1983). Identity achievement involves finding the delicate balance between the constructed self of childhood and the created self of adulthood.

Waterman (1993) states that in early and middle adolescence, many individuals will be scored Identity Diffuse or Foreclosed regardless of domain. However, the participants in this research were scored as being at different identity statuses both in a global sense, and within the identity domains of politics, religion, occupation and sex (See Table 2). It was decided that both global and domain identity status scores would be used to report the results in order to examine more closely any associations with the heroic figure experience that may exist. Each participant was given a primary identity status designation, and where appropriate, a secondary identity status was also assigned. The secondary designation, also called an identity style, is representative of an emerging style of dealing with issues of crisis and commitment; that is, one may approach decisions about occupation for example, primarily as an individual in the Moratorium status, but emerging themes reflect the underlying presence of an Achieved style, indicating some thought has begun as to the nature of commitments in this area (Archer & Waterman,
1993). This reflects the organic nature of the identity formation process, with each participant at different stages of crisis and commitment in the various domains. The focus of this discussion however will revolve around the global identity status, in keeping with Matteson's (1993) work about the importance of using the global score when the objective of the research is to make comparisons between individuals in the various statuses. This method of presentation reflects Josselson (1987) who used global identity scores in presenting detailed portraits of women who were in different statuses.

In this study, several patterns emerged with regard to associations observed between the experience of having a heroic figure and the overall identity status of participants (See Table 2). These patterns seemed to reflect the salient function served by the heroic figure for the participant, supporting Archer's (1993) contention that models are important sources of information for adolescents by providing alternatives through direct imitation or contrast. For example, there was a similarity between Allyson and Isobel, who were both designated overall as being in the Moratorium status with movement toward Achieved status. They both chose a heroic figure whom they perceived to be someone who was willing to take risks to follow their beliefs, often at the expense of conflict with those around them.

Within specific domains, both young women also showed identity
achievement in the area of their sexual beliefs, suggesting that perhaps by having an opportunity to discuss value based decisions with their heroic figure, and receiving support for their decisions, they have been able to move through crisis to commitment in this area. In the areas of religion and occupation, both young women are in moratorium and actively exploring their position on these issues. According to Archer (1993), Identity Achievers often identify models who have strongly influenced their choice of commitment. In both cases, their heroic figure seems to have served as a catalyst to begin this exploration by encouraging them to explore alternatives, thus supporting the function of the heroic figure as benefactor and advocate.

Another association between the choice of a heroic figure and overall identity status revolves around family relationships. Archer (1993) states that among this age group, parents are the most common model. Both Anna and Lyn chose their mothers as their heroic figures, and both are designated as primarily Diffuse with a secondary style of Foreclosed. In addition, both young women show a mixture of Foreclosed and Diffuse styles in response to questions about their sexual beliefs and occupational choices, suggesting that they have just begun to explore these issues. This seems to indicate that their heroic figures, their mothers, are functioning strongly as a refuge by providing the safe place they need to return to; a place of belonging and connection.
### TABLE 2
Identity status designations on the Clinical Identity Interview

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<td>Lianne</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F(D)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D(F)</td>
<td>F(D)</td>
<td>D(F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**

A: Identity Achieved

D: Diffuse

F: Foreclosed

M: Moratorium

*Note: First letter represents dominant status; letter in parentheses represents secondary style.*
Lianne, who shows the most diffusion across the four domains, also chose a family member as her heroic figure. In examining the subthemes evident in her heroic figure interview, it appears that her Grandmother played two roles primarily; the refuge and the sage. Given the amount of diffusion across the four domains, it seems that Lianne finds the memory of her Grandmother's stories and acceptance as a safe place to begin her exploration. At this time, with no crisis confronting her and her values regarding sexual relationships foreclosed, Lianne can safely live within her Grandmother's experiences rather than base her beliefs on her own interactions with the world.

Francine, the only participant whose primary style is Foreclosed with a secondary style of Moratorium, shows Achieved status in the areas of Politics and Occupation. This suggests that her heroic figures, her mother and her music teacher, represent the inner conflict she is experiencing in her future choices about her life. Her mother’s strong influence is evident in her career plans and political beliefs; yet her music teacher represents the passionate alternative, and thus she is still exploring overall. Francine seems to be showing activity which supports personal commitment which may include “talking with people knowledgeable in the chosen area, becoming friends with people of similar orientations and pursuing a relevant hobby. The analysis of Francine’s identity interview suggested that there may be cultural factors
at work as well; given that she is bi-cultural and has been able to blend familial and personal ideals in some domains, she can be viewed as Achieved overall with some exploration still to do. Her heroic figures have primarily acted as a refuge in the case of her mother, and as a benefactor in the case of her music teacher. One has provided the safe place to return to after exploration, while the other has modelled options and encouraged her to take risks.

**Summary of Associations with Identity Status**

The functions filled by the heroic figure in the life of the participant seem to tentatively reflect the salient needs of each stage of identity formation these young woman in this study were currently experiencing. While all participants were able to relate experiences of their heroic figure functioning in each of the roles described in this research, the importance of each role seemed to vary with the identity status of the young woman being interviewed. Those participants who were primarily in the Moratorium status with Identity Achieved styles seemed to be able to identify the experience of having the heroic figure in their life for all the identified functions: echo, sage, benefactor, advocate and refuge, but recognized the function of benefactor as being the most salient for them. Conversely, those participants who were primarily in Diffused status overall seemed to experience the heroic figure most strongly as a refuge and place of belonging and connection. No particular domain seemed
more significant than another in examining the associations between identity status and the experience of having a heroic figure.
CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion

Introduction

This study used an open-ended, semi-structured interview regarding the experience of having a heroic figure, followed by Marcia’s (1966) clinical identity interview as adapted by Josselson (1987) to shed light on the following research questions:

1) What is the experience of Grade 12 girls who have a heroic figure in their lives and are able to share that experience?

2) How does the experience of the heroic figure relate to their current identity status as measured by Marcia’s (1980) four categories of identity formation?

3) How does the experience of having a heroic figure relate to their commitment to specific beliefs and values they hold?

The data were analyzed using a hermeneutic method of analysis based on isolating “meaning units” (Giorgi, 1975) and describing resulting phenomenological themes (Van Manen, 1990), keeping in mind the greater social and cultural context of the participants (Kvale, 1983). In keeping with the hermeneutic tradition of analyzing text, the participant’s actual words and phrases were used to create themes (Kvale, 1983). The identity interviews were analyzed by an independent researcher who had experience both using and scoring the clinical identity interview.
This chapter will examine each of the three research questions in light of the findings of this study, examine related literature and discuss the implications for practice in the field of counselling psychology. In addition, suggestions for future research will also be provided.

**The experience of having a heroic figure**

The data generated from the heroic figure interview suggest that the young women in this study experienced their heroic figure as playing specific roles in their lives. These included the function of a benefactor, or provider of alternatives; an advocate, or someone who helped participants translate ideas into action; a sage, or teacher of life lessons; an echo, or someone who engaged in a dialogue about life with participants; and finally, a refuge, or someone who provided a safe place for the participant, along with a sense of belonging or connection.

These functions reflect several of what Catford and Ray (1991) call “the steps along the hero’s journey” (p. 37) for both the participant, who is negotiating the process of identity, and for the heroic figure, who has experienced it themselves. Using a literary framework, based on the early work on myth by Joseph Campbell, Catford and Ray (1991) see each of us negotiating the tasks of life much the same as the early archetypal heroes, albeit with symbolic quests rather than literal ones. According to them, our task is much like the ancient hero. We must find the courage to challenge long held convictions and slay our own internal
‘dragons’ by confronting our fears. By doing this, we access our inner wisdom to guide us, much as the ancient heroes had magic talismans and wizards to help them deal with dangerous parts of the passage.

The first phase of the hero’s journey, which they call “Innocence”, involves the beginning of questioning the status quo, or in identity related terms, the beginning of crisis and exploration as individuals move away from the Foreclosed status. The heroic figure’s function as a sage, the embodiment of life experience, seems to help the participant begin their own heroic journey. There was some evidence that several of the participants were doing just that, as they recalled their heroic figure’s stories about life and began to question what fit for them. Many participants mentioned this sifting process as a meaningful stage of moving into independence.

The second phase of the hero’s journey involves “the call to adventure”. Here, the participant must reach a crisis in some area of their life and begin to test the ideals they hold by actively seeking alternatives as evidenced by the Moratorium status of the identity process. The heroic figure’s function here was often that of the refuge; allowing the participant to move out into the world and try out their new found ideals while still having a place of safety and consistency to return to. Participants often described the importance of having that safe place, variously using metaphors such as safety net, anchor, and a wise old tree
to describe the feeling of being held.

The third stage of Catford and Ray's (1991) hero's journey is "Initiation". This involves the participant moving out into the world more and more independently to explore alternatives and beginning to make commitments. Here too, is the death of some possibilities and the birth of others. "It starts with an initiation into strange other worlds; a journey of maturation and transformation in which the hero is confronted with the possibility of death (p. 39)." The heroic figure as benefactor allows the participant to realize the scope of the paths they can take. The resulting confrontation with choices and alternatives often begins a crisis which results in an exploration of their inner strengths and talents. As crisis turns to commitment, the heroic figure provides support and reassurance that the "bottomless pit of indecision" will be surmounted. Participants in the study who had confronted decisions which were turning points in choices about value decisions or their career directions spoke of the importance of having a model who also made difficult choices in their lives.

The fourth stage of the hero's journey involves receiving assistance from "Allies" along the way. As Catford and Ray (1991) put it, "sometimes they appear at the initial threshold and provide protective amulets or advice. Other times, allies appear at the moment of crisis and provide the wisdom for resolution and transformation (p. 40)." It is here
that the heroic figure's role of the advocate becomes most salient. Those participants in the study who were actively pursuing options and alternatives in their lives described the importance of having someone help them create a plan and implement it into action. Catford and Ray call this "strategizing" and talk about how important this stage is in the hero's journey. "The ally provides the hero with the means to bring about the essential transformation necessary for the a successful hero's journey (p. 40)."

The hero's journey is often used metaphorically as an explanation for the human experience of change (Drake, 1992). In her discussion of the female hero's journey, Drake (1992) describes the universality of the heroic experience of the call to adventure; followed by loss or disillusionment; resulting in anxiety and anguish over indecision and inner conflict; and finally, a new identity as the journey is complete. This parallels the experience of the two participants who were able to identify the stages of coming to terms with their own struggles around certain value conflicts.

Several participants were able to see that their heroic figures had gone through these stages themselves in finding their own unique way in the world. True to Noble's (1990) description of the four 'dragons' female heroes face, many of the heroic figures chosen by the participants had clearly confronted themselves, believed in their own vision, struggled
against cultural voices which sought to silence them, and taken action to realize their goals. Lyn's mother, for instance, is a case in point. As Lyn described her, she had to make a difficult choice to leave a marriage, return to school in her 30's as a single parent, and confront the traditional values of her family regarding the choices she made. Other heroic figures had taken non-traditional paths, such as Allyson's aunt, who had travelled across Canada and lived in remote places; ran her own business and had chosen not to marry. These models had clearly influenced the young women as powerful examples of people who were living life on their own terms.

While the romantic adventure paradigm of the heroic journey is used as the context for this discussion because of its prevalence among North American culture, it is worth noting that this tradition has its roots in history and literature that has been modelled after the male experience. The female hero's journey is more closely aligned to the female identity experience of connection and relationship, involving others throughout the process (Drake, 1992).

Participants also experienced their heroic figures as empowering. This was reflected in the advocacy function many described as an important component of their heroic figure experience. In her book about ordinary women who have led extraordinary lives, Chellis (1992) interviewed women who would be considered heroic by Noble's (1990)
description of the 'dragons' they faced. After interviewing these women and hearing their stories of their own heroic journeys, Chellis identified four heroic features common among the women. These included: having survived a major crisis, surmounted the crisis through personal effort, emerged from the experience with previously unknown strengths and abilities, and in retrospect, find value in the experience. The outcome of this journey, says Chellis, is often the ability to empower others. By triumphing over their own particular circumstances, the heroic figure is often potent enough to cause a transformation in another person. Isobel, whose heroic figure was her religion teacher, spoke of the empowering experience of having a model who supported her in confronting the system, just as she had been courageous enough to teach in a way which was different from those around her.

The aspect of relationship was an important factor in the experience of having a heroic figure for the young women in the study. Many participants stated clearly that the relationship with their heroic figure was the most important part of having them in their life. Adams-Price and Greene (1990), in their study of secondary attachments and self-concept in adolescence, found that young women tended to choose romantic rather than agentic figures as their role models. This study did not find that to be the case; rather, the importance of having a heroic figure who had negotiated life's hurdles in some meaningful way was
very apparent. Perhaps because the study focussed on the heroic figure, which seems to embrace a relational and primary attachment experience, the results cannot be seen as comparable.

In any event, the aspect of relationship was particularly salient to the participants in their choice of heroic figure, as evidenced in the fact that all heroic figures played a parental role of some kind and were, for the most part, in the immediate lifeworld of the participant. It seemed that the heroic figure for these young women was someone with whom they had a bond which went beyond friendship, and involved negotiation of some type of crisis together.

This was at odds with Darling's (1991) study which determined that by the 11th grade, non-parental influences begin to outweigh the role of parents and family in the area of mentoring. However, Darling did find that mentors provided both challenge and support to the young people in her study, reflecting the experience of the participants in this study with their heroic figure acting as an advocate and as a refuge. Significant also is Darling's reference to the lack of cross-gender parental influence found in her sample, something which three participants clearly named as salient in their experience of being challenged to grow and take risks. Darling concludes that perhaps adolescents who have been challenged by parents begin to move on to challenging themselves and actively seeking out others to challenge and
stimulate them. This was seen somewhat in the comments made by participants about the importance of having many role models and the need to explore using mentors from both genders.

Several theorists have postulated that females' relational ties to significant others provide a context in which young women can explore their strengths and begin to individuate. Miller (1984) believed that a girl "can move on to a larger and more articulated sense of herself only because of her actions and feelings in the relationship (p. 84)". While the prevailing theories of development have postulated that separation from others equals maturity, this study has illustrated the notion that connection is an important part of the ability to achieve a differentiated self. As Stern (1990) says, "for women, even a task as distinctly self-oriented as identity formation may mean defining oneself in relation and connection to other people (p. 74)". This is echoed by Chodorow (1974) and Stiver (1984) in Stern (1990) who both pointed out that "a woman's need to feel related to others is a crucial aspect of her identity and allows us to understand why women are so threatened when there is the danger of alienation" (p. 74).

**Association of identity status with the heroic figure experience**

Erikson's (1968) original work on identity formation was based on the premise that the identity task reaches its ascendancy during adolescence and continues to be refined throughout adulthood. Most of
the original research done in this area was done using males. Later, Gilligan’s (1982) findings regarding the development of identity in women revealed that women typically define themselves in relational terms that imply growth within the context of intimate connections. In this study, many of the intimate connections described by participants involved family constellations. Congruent with Adams and Montemayer’s (1983) findings, family connectedness as evidenced through the experience of support and cohesion was associated with positive identity formation in adolescence. Grotevant and Thorbecke (1982) also found that parental influence was most salient in adolescence, while Hamid and Wyllie (1980) saw adolescent foreclosure as representing a first attempt at separation from the family, often in the form of taking on the values of others without questioning them. Archer and Waterman (1983) suggested that perhaps parents could help to maintain the diffuse state common in early adolescence by discouraging attempts at independence. Some support for this was shown with the two participants who were designated as primarily Diffuse by the clinical identity interview: both seemed to experience their heroic figures most strongly in the role of sage and refuge, relying on them to reinforce their present world view.

While the sample in this study was limited to seven participants, the distribution of identity statuses among participants was quite even.
(See Table 2). In keeping with Grotevant et al.'s (1982) finding, participants did show variation across the four identity domains. Archer and Waterman (1983) state that the most movement toward identity achievement occurs between the tenth and twelfth grade, a finding reflected in the results of this study. In their overview of studies done on identity status of adolescents of both genders from the 6th grade to college, they found that at the twelfth grade, the majority of participants were at the foreclosure status (47%), followed by diffused status (34%) and with 4% and 15% of participants at the moratorium and achieved status respectively. Only one study reviewed by Archer and Waterman (1983) showed different results and that was one using young women only. Here, the results were more in line with the findings of this study, with 50% of participants in Moratorium, 19% at Achieved status, 17% foreclosed and 14% labelled as diffuse. In the current study, 3 of the 7 participants were in moratorium status, representing roughly 43% of the sample, 3 were identified as diffuse, and one as foreclosed. It is interesting to note that those labelled as Diffuse were also all using foreclosed styles as their secondary identity status, indicating that perhaps the family acts as an anchor for adolescent women as they begin their identity struggles. As Josselson (1987) found in her study of women’s identity using individual cases:
Anchoring is a way of attaching to aspects of the adult world, of having a berth in it. For women, this attachment involves connection to other people, even in the world of work. Anchoring for women is like a rapprochement process, where elements of the outside world are brought back to or through an important other to be integrated and made part of the self. (p. 178)

Since the results of this study generally reflect those findings of identity studies done with women, it would appear that gender could be a significant variable in the examination of identity status.

It is important to realize that identity formation is an on-going developmental task. As pointed out by Archer and Waterman (1983), there is a reason for young women who are foreclosed to remain tied to family beliefs and values, as they grow at their own rate toward a time when they begin to feel more comfortable about challenging long held traditions. “To undermine these early commitments before the skills needed to experience a productive moratorium have developed is to invite disorientation and insecurity” (p. 213). Each identity status appears to have its own style of negotiating developmental tasks. Those participants in this study who were identified as being primarily in moratorium, but using identity achievement styles in several areas, seemed to use what Josselson (1987) called the “rapprochement” style of dealing with crisis and commitment. They would use their mentor as a touchstone, going out into the world and coming back to safety when they needed support. Josselson reports that identity achieved women “tend
to separate themselves from their childhood selves gradually and incrementally, preserving relatedness at each step” (p. 187). This finding was certainly reflected in the experience of the participants.

**The experience of having a heroic figure: crisis and commitment**

Central to the identity formation paradigm is the idea of crisis and commitment as turning points in the process of creating a differentiated self, capable of having separate beliefs, values and opinions (Marcia, 1980). While identity commitments made in adolescence may be short-lived since the probability of an identity achiever in high school remaining true to those commitments through four years of college is low (Archer & Waterman, 1983), the long term decisions made as a result of those commitments are often significant. Crisis most often precedes commitment and may precipitate decisions and actions. This study attempted to determine if the experience of having a role model relates to the level of exploration (Moratorium) and commitment (Identity Achievement) regarding life choices made in adolescence.

Given the five functions performed by the heroic figures of the participants in this study, it would appear that role models do play a significant role in encouraging these young women to begin exploring and taking action regarding the alternatives in their lives. The role they play seems, in part, to be directly related to the participant’s current identity status in that those participants who were already in Moratorium
and actively exploring issues made wider use of the heroic figure as an echo, an advocate and benefactor, while those participants who were identified as in the diffused status were more likely to see their heroic figure as a refuge and safe place, as well as a sage who held family or cultural values for them.

As stated by Newman and Newman (1988):

A robust personal identity is formulated as a result of experiencing a period of open questioning and reworking of childhood identifications and values, sometimes referred to as a period of identity crisis. Following this crisis, certain roles and values are established as essential to a view of life and a sense of meaning. Essential to identity achievement is that commitments be made following a period of experimentation or crisis and that these commitments are perceived as an expression of personal choice (p. 552).

The experience of the participants was one of being supported by their heroic figures in going out to try on the various alternatives available to them. Particularly for those participants who were identity achieved in specific value related domains such as religion and sexual beliefs, the function of the heroic figure as an echo who engaged them in meaningful dialogue about their beliefs, and empowered them to take responsibility for their choices, was very significant. In her discussion about identification with significant others, Archer (1993) points out that while each of the identity statuses may use role models to assist them in
exploration, the difference lies in what use they make of their identified model. Identity achievers, for example, are more likely to identify one or more models who have strongly influenced their choice of commitment, while a Foreclosure will describe only a family member who holds similar values. Identity achievers will also be more likely to question their role model and take the parts that fit, while leaving the rest. This directly reflects the experience of Isobel and Allyson, who described feeling comfortable with admiring and valuing their heroic figure for the role they had played in their lives, while at the same time acknowledging that they had no desire to live anyone’s life but their own.

Identity achievement is important for structuring boundaries between the self and others (Newman & Newman, 1988). This was reflected in comments made by participants regarding their beliefs about the importance of having a role model. Most participants felt strongly that one cannot be someone else, one can only learn from someone else. One participant, for example, who had two very different heroic figures which seemed to represent the internal struggle she was experiencing about her true identity, identified clearly the aspects of each role model she valued and would like to cultivate in herself, while recognizing that her life would be very different. Another participant stated that she had no desire to be her heroic figure, only to access her wisdom.

In general, our society has traditionally provided adolescents with
a period of sanctioned moratorium where they are free to explore identity alternatives. Marcia (1980) contended that identity achievement may be a longer process for young women than for young men, since part of their unique struggle is to not only experience connectedness, but to develop an ideology about relationships (Gilligan, 1989), while at the same time struggling to reach independence and separateness (Stern, 1990).

This study found that identity development is definitely an ongoing process, with each status finding a unique way to negotiate the process. Identity achievers, for example, typically struggle to honour the need for exploration they have and are actively looking for choice and continually recombining elements of experience into their personalities. This is in direct contrast to Foreclosures, who carry with them childhood solutions to their developmental dilemmas (Josselson, 1987). Reflective of Grotevant et al.'s (1982) suggestion that it is important to consider adolescence as the root of development, not the fruit, the heroic figure can act in any or all the roles experienced by the young women in this study at different points of crisis and commitment during the identity formation process.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study may assist counsellors who deal with young women of varying identity statuses in understanding the role of a significant adult in their lives. The semi-structured, open ended heroic
interview constructed for this research may prove useful as a tool for exploring the experience of having a meaningful role model in a client's life. Often, young women may be able to identify someone meaningful to them but may not have explored the functions fulfilled by this person. Understanding the role of their heroic figure can help young women access their role model in a more meaningful and deliberate way. Several participants in this study commented specifically at the validation interview that the experience of discussing their heroic figure was helpful to them. Given that this study indicates a range of functions of the heroic figure related to the participant’s identity status, identifying the roles played by the heroic figure in the participant’s life may shed light on the developmental issues being negotiated at that time.

Josselson (1987) noted that women’s identity concerns become crucial in young adulthood as young women who begin their exploration and commitment in high school, act on those decisions in college. Awareness of the on-going nature of identity formation can assist counsellors in allowing young women to pursue identity tasks as per their own unique timetable, without imposing culturally constructed milestones of ‘maturity’ on them (Archer & Waterman, 1983). This is a difficult task given the gender specific pressures young women face regarding their decisions around marriage, family and career. Enns (1991) believes that counsellors should “encourage women to consider
exploratory roles and help young women to become aware of, understand, and actively contend with the social pressures that make extended exploratory identities difficult" (p.211).

The ongoing process of attachment to significant others is an important source of identity, maturity and personal power for women (Gallos, 1989). The heroic figure, whose example is one of providing alternatives, may be a powerful ally in counselling young women who are dealing with identity crises. Peterson (1981), in her study of women across generational boundaries, found that women who had the courage to make decisions which may have conflicted with family or societal values, most often had a strong female role model who had done something similar. There was a sense among the women in Peterson’s study that they had been ‘given permission’ to be different by these other women who went before them. Awareness of the power of this identifactory modelling may assist counsellors in helping young women explore alternatives. By providing them with a mentor who has gone through a similar experience, either in person, or through the use of bibliotherapy, the counsellor can empower the client to come to her own decision with support and an increased awareness of various paths available to them. Says Chellis (1992) in her discussion of the therapeutic power of group counselling for women: “relationships and connection are the vital elements of growth...there can be no true sense
of self without the experience of healthy, healing relationships” (p.12).

In a discussion of women’s development, Bardwick (1980) in Gallos (1989) describe studies that show that women consistently hold their personal relationships as more meaningful than career interests and achievements. Feeling successful for professional women was more complicated than just amassing the outward signs of success.

As awareness grows in the research about women’s style of relating to the world in an interconnected way, perhaps counsellors can begin to reframe young women’s concerns about relationship issues as a strength which can help them explore their options through a mentor, and can assist them in navigating the workplace. Since counsellors in the high school setting often discuss career related issues with young women, they could make use of the relational style many young women have by focussing on a holistic approach to career exploration with emphasis on consulting and networking to collect information. A recent study of female entrepreneurs sponsored by the U.S. National Foundation for Women Business Owners (1994) and reported in the Vancouver Sun, showed that women used their relational strengths to create a family-like atmosphere at their companies and consistently consulted with outside agencies. Women entrepreneurs were also more likely to think of their relationships with their employees, suppliers, vendors and customers as an interconnected network, whereas men in
the study were more likely to see their organization in hierarchical terms, compartmentalizing relationships and affiliations.

In terms of career mentors, many participants commented that it would be difficult for them to find female mentors or role models. Given that all the participants in the study mentioned the scarcity of female role models available to them, which reflects Hamilton's (1991) finding that few young women could identify female occupational models, there seems to be a need for counsellors to create mentoring opportunities for young women who are seeking them. An outcome of this research seems to indicate that a mentoring program for young women, especially in the area of career, would be very useful. Matching interested young women with older female mentors who have negotiated their own heroic journey, may assist young women in working through the crisis stages of their career identity, or alternatively may help them begin their exploration process. As Waterman (1989) noted in his discussion of curricula interventions for identity change, for individuals uncommitted to identity related goals, values or beliefs it is very important to increase the range of alternatives they are exposed to since they are then more likely to find something which will engage their interest which may lead them to a commitment. It is important that young women understand that commitments do change, and exploration is all about making commitments in the face of knowing they may not work out. Exposure to
a mentor could heighten awareness of the fluidity of the process of crisis and commitment. Finally, a mentor or heroic figure could be used by the counsellor to provoke awareness of existing but hidden doubts the young woman may have about identity related issues. Through the sage function in telling their own story, a heroic figure may 'give permission' to the young woman who is struggling that it is all right to feel unsettled and confused about her life. “Not only may exposure to models serve to induce identity crises, but it may aid in the establishing of successful resolution to such crises by allowing consideration of alternatives through the identification process” (p. 392).

Suggestions for future research

This study attempted to investigate the experience of young women in Grade 12 who had heroic figures. Due to the restrictive nature of the study, only those participants who met the screening criterion of being able to articulate their experience of having a heroic figure were invited to participate. An obvious extension of the study would be to expand the criteria to include all those who come forward, with the goal of comparing the experience of those who are clear about their heroic figures and those who are not, as associated with their identity status.

Both the heroic interview and the identity status interviews were carried out by the researcher, which resulted in some contamination of the identity status interviews. Ideally, the interviews should have been
done by two separate people. Also, although the interviews were analyzed by someone with experience in the area of identity research, the lack of experience on the part of the researcher in using the Clinical Identity Status Interview may have influenced the outcome of the analysis. Future research could look at doing these interviews separately, and having a trained co-researcher carry out the identity interviews and analyze them independently. Alternatively, a more standardized measure of identity status could be done in advance of the heroic interview to allow for representation across all four statuses. Participants would be chosen on the basis of their identity status and their awareness of having a heroic figure.

The small sample size of this study also dictated the range of identity statuses reported. A larger sample would perhaps show clearer patterns of relation between the function of the heroic figure as experienced by the participants and the associated identity status. Promising evidence is shown in this study to indicate that those young women who are currently in Moratorium are more likely to identify a role model who will play the role of benefactor and provide them with alternatives, while those who are clearly Diffuse may gravitate toward someone who protects their current world view and reinforces their values, thereby providing a refuge. There is also a question as to whether identification with a heroic figure who may represent a function
most specific to certain identity statuses may also serve to 'hold' the participant in that status by providing reinforcement for them to remain there. For example, will a young woman who is currently in the Diffuse status begin to identify with her grandmother more strongly as she begins to challenge the things she has been taught? This research would indicate that this might be the case for some young women.

While this sample was culturally varied, there was no clear measure of the association cultural variables may have with the choice of a heroic figure or the impact of that on identity development. Future research could isolate the cultural component of having a heroic figure and determine whether this is a salient variable. The three participants of Asian extraction who were relatively new to Canada all chose heroic figures who primarily represented the role of the sage and refuge, but coincidentally or not, all three were also in the Diffused identity status. Teasing out which variable has more impact on the choice of a role model, culture or identity status, could prove useful for counsellors with adolescent clients of varying cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the five functions of the heroic figure discovered by this study are somewhat supported by other models of the hero's journey (Catford & Ray, 1991; Drake, 1992). Future research may explore how prevalent these functions really are, and whether they are more likely to be found among the experience of female participants. Identified heroic
figures could also be contacted and interviewed to determine their experience of being a heroic figure, thus providing a natural check of internal consistency between the participant and her heroic figure’s experience. In addition, research could be done to determine whether participants identify heroic figures which may also serve to hold them in a specific identity status rather than encouraging them to move on.

**Conclusion**

This study attempted to determine the experience of heroic figures in young women of varying identity statuses. It was discovered that the young women in this study experienced their heroic figure as playing five distinct roles: that of benefactor, advocate, sage, echo and refuge. The salience of these functions seemed to vary by degree with the identity status of the individual, but shades of these roles were found to be universal across this sample. The young women also reported that having a role model was very important to them, but that finding a female role model would be more difficult for them than for a male of similar age to find a male mentor, since there are more male role models from which to choose. This study illustrates the finding that having significant role models can help adolescents with decision making and allow them to pursue alternatives vicariously. In addition, the presence of a heroic figure seems to be related to the presence or absence of specific identity crises being negotiated by the participant. Also, the research that clearly
shows women form their identity through connection with others is supported by this study, especially in the choice of heroic figures who play parental roles in the lives of the participants. This research shows that identity status and culture are both salient variables in the choice and experience of having a heroic figure, and that the relational nature of women's identity makes mentoring an ideal choice for intervention when young women are in identity related crises.
References


Different routes end up in similar results for both men and women. (1994, July 21). The Vancouver Sun. p. 36.


Appendices
ATTENTION GRADE 12 GIRLS

A STUDY ABOUT YOUR HEROES

Do you have heroes? Is there someone in your life that is an important role model to you? If so, I would really like to talk to you!

I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia conducting a study of Grade 12 young women and their experience of having heroes. If you are female, in Grade 12 and are able to volunteer for two one hour interviews, please sign the list below with your name or give your name to Mr. Sadler. I will contact you in the next few days. All names and information collected in this study will be kept confidential.

THANK YOU!

Connie Maske
Appendix 2

Screening Interview Format
Participants in this study will be screened by the interviewer using the following questions after explaining the purpose of the study and defining the term 'heroic figure':

I would like to define what we mean for the purpose of this study by the term 'heroic figure'; that is any person or persons whom you feel is a role model for you in some significant way. This person may be living or dead; it could be someone you know personally or have a relationship with, such as someone in your family or a friend; or it could be someone whom you admire a great deal but don’t know personally, although you may know a lot about them.

1. You have indicated interest in participating in a study which will be looking at young women's experience of having a heroic figure. Could you tell me a little about your hero and/or heroine?

2. What is it about this person or people which make them so important to you?

3. Would you be willing to talk about this topic with me in more depth for about an hour or so in a taped interview, providing that all information is kept confidential?

4. What does 'identity' mean to you? Would you be willing to spend an hour talking to me in a taped interview about your beliefs related to politics, religion, occupation and sex, again provided that all information is kept confidential?

The purpose of the screening interview answers to the above questions is as follows:

Can the participant clearly identify one or two individuals whom they see as being pivotal in the formation and exploration of their personal beliefs and values?
Appendix 3
University of British Columbia
Participant Informed Consent Form

Project Title

The experience of heroic figures in adolescent women of different identity statuses.

Investigators

This project is supervised by the University of British Columbia, Department of Counselling Psychology. Dr. R. Young, Dr. R. Tolsma and Dr. T. MacBeth Williams and Connie Maske, are the research investigators. This project is being carried out by Connie Maske as a thesis requirement for a Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to explore the role of experiencing a heroic figure in adolescent female identity formation. The investigators are interested in how young women in Grade 12 describe the meaning of having an important role model and how this may be related to their particular stage of identity development.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, this is what you will do:

Volunteers will be screened for appropriateness for the study. Participants who meet study criteria will then participate with the researcher in a one hour semi structured interview regarding their experience of having a heroic figure in their lives. Following this, each participant will be involved in an identity status interview for one hour with the researcher in which they will answer questions designed to explore identity status.

A few weeks after the second interview, a follow-up interview will occur with each participant. The purpose of this interview is to give each participant a summary of the interviews as interpreted by the researcher and to check for accuracy of understanding. At this time, any concerns and questions the participant has will be answered, and the researcher will provide a sense of closure to the experience. A letter with the results of the study will be sent to all participants.

All of the information collected will remain completely
confidential and under no circumstances will the participants be identified in any way when analyzing or describing data for the study. Audiotapes and forms will be coded and the only individuals who will have access to the information will be the researcher and the members of her committee, already named here. Some direct quotes taken from the interviews may be used in discussing the findings of the study. If this becomes necessary, the source of the quote will be disguised in such a way so as to respect the confidentiality of each participant.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your involvement in this study has no bearing on your academic performance in class and no one in the school will have access to this information. Please note that there may be sensitive issues which arise during the interviews and it is important that you understand that you may stop the process at any time if you feel uncomfortable. As a trained counsellor, the interviewer will ensure that you have time to talk about and resolve the experience in a way that makes sense for you.

Benefits

Participation in this study will allow you to explore your feelings about what it is like to have a hero or heroine: someone you really look up to, an important role model; and determine in a conscious way how this person has affected your life. By participating in the identity status interview, you may become more aware of your beliefs and how they relate to the people with whom you choose to identify. Finally, by exploring these issues, research shows that as a young woman, you may begin to have a clearer sense of the importance of relationships to your own process of creating an identity.

If you have any questions or concerns about what you’ve read here, please feel free to contact me (Connie Maske) at 925-4736 and leave a message so I can call you back, or my advisor, Dr. Richard Young at the University of British Columbia at 822-6380.

I acknowledge having read this form and having received a copy for my records. I understand that signing this form means I give my consent to the researcher to participate in two interviews as outlined above. The total time required to participate in this study will be approximately three hours.

Name of Participant: ____________________________
Participant’s signature __________________________
Date __________________________
Appendix 4

Heroic Figure Interview Format

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study which is being conducted as a requirement for the masters program in the department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Drs. Richard Young and Robert Tolsma of the Counselling Psychology department and Dr. Tannis MacBeth Williams of the Psychology Department are my supervisors.

This interview will involve your discussion of the experience of having a heroic figure in your life and what the impact of that experience has been. At this time I would like to review again what we mean by the term 'heroic figure'; that is any person or persons whom you feel is a role model for you in some significant way. This person may be living or dead; it could be someone you know personally or have a relationship with, such as someone in your family or a friend; or it could be someone whom you admire a great deal but don't know personally, although you know a lot about them.

The interview will last approximately an hour and as we discussed in our last meeting, this interview will be taped so that I can listen to your ideas without having to interrupt you or stop you to write something down. From time to time, I may ask you a question or summarize what you have said to help me ensure that I understand what you are saying. The tape recording of our interview will be written out, or transcribed and assigned a code number, so that all identifying information such as names will be taken out. Once again let me remind you that all information will be kept strictly confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns about what I've just said that have not been answered

---------------------Turn Cassette recorder on---------------------
Heroic Figure Interview Questions

1. To begin with, could you tell me about a person in your life whom you consider to be a heroic figure for you?

2. What is it about this person that makes them heroic for you?

3. In what ways has this person had an impact on your life?

4. How would your life be different if you had not known (known of) them?

5. Can you think of specific examples of events in your life where having a hero and/or heroine influenced you in some way? Could you tell me about that?

6. How did having a hero and/or heroine make a difference in these situations?

7. What does it feel like for you to have someone in your life you really look up to?

8. How much do you think having a heroic figure in your life has contributed to your sense of “who you are” and what you believe?

9. As a woman growing up in this world, do you believe having a significant role model or heroic figure is more important for you than it would be for a male the same age? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. Do you believe that your future plans and goals have been influenced by having a heroic figure in your life? If so, how? If not, why not?
Appendix 5
Identity Status Interview

Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study which is being conducted as a requirement for the masters program in the department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Drs. Richard Young and Robert Tolsma of the Counselling Psychology department and Dr. Tannis MacBeth Williams of the Psychology Department are my supervisors.

As I explained to you the last time we met, the purpose of this interview is to find out what you believe about certain topics such as politics, occupation, sex and religion. Information which you give about these topics in answer to the following questions may help you to clarify what you believe and increase your self-understanding.

The interview will last approximately an hour and as we discussed in our last meeting, this interview will be taped so that I can listen to your ideas without having to interrupt you or stop you to write something down. From time to time, I may ask you a question or summarize what you have said to help me ensure that I understand what you are saying. The tape recording of our interview will be written out, or transcribed and assigned a code number, so that all identifying information such as names will be taken out. Once again let me remind you that all information will be kept strictly confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns about what I've just said that have not been answered?

________________________________________________________________________

turn cassette recorder on
APPENDIX 5
Identity Domain Questions
Source: adapted from Marcia (1964) and Schenkel & Marcia (1972).

Religion:

*Do you have any particular religious affiliation or preference?
*How about your folks?
*Ever very active in church? How about now? Do you get into many religious discussions?
*How do your parents feel about your beliefs?
*Are yours different from theirs?
*Was there any time when you came to doubt any of your religious beliefs? When?
*How did it happen? How did you resolve your questions? How are things for you now?

Politics:

*Do you have any particular political preference?
*How about your parents?
*Ever take any kind of political action-join groups, write letters, participate in demonstrations, etc.?
*Any issues you feel pretty strongly about?
*Any particular time when you decided on your political beliefs?

Sex:

*What are your views on having sex? How do you decide whether to have sex with someone or not?
*Have you always felt this way? Have you ever had any doubts? How did you resolve them?

Occupation:

*What are you planning to do after completing high school?
*When did you come to decide on your choice? Did you ever consider anything else?
*What seems attractive about ____________?
*Most parents have plans for their children, things they would like them to go into or do. Do yours have plans like that for you?

*How do your parents feel about your plans?

*How willing do you think you’d be to change if something better came along? What might be better in your terms?

*Do you plan to marry? Do you plan to have a paid job after you marry?

*Do you plan to have children? Be employed after you have children? Why or why not?
APPENDIX 5

Clinical Identity Status Interview
Source: adapted from Marcia (1964) and Schenkel & Marcia (1972).

1. If there's a person who you want to know you, what sorts of thing would you tell them about yourself?

2. What was most important in the last two or three years in terms of making you the way you are? What influenced you the most? Before that—say, during high school? How about before that—like in elementary school?

3. In the last few years, who of all the people that you've known during that time did you like the most? Before that? (You've talked about boyfriends and pals. Is there someone that you liked in a different way?)

4. Who of all these people did you most want to be like? Did you become like them in any way? Who of all the people that you know now would you most like to be like?

5. Right now, what is the thing you like to do most? If you had a lot of free time, what would you put it to? (In a more general sense, what would you like to put our life to if you could arrange things any way you'd like?) (What would you do? Is it something you've seriously thought to putting your life to?) Now how far would you go to do that? How much trouble would really take for this? Would you delay status, marriage, money, take real risks?

6. How do you imagine your future in the next year? In the next five years? In ten years?

7. All of us have daydreams, even though we don't necessarily take them seriously. What kinds of things do you daydream about? Is there a daydream that you've had continuously, something that you like to daydream about when you listen to music or are alone?
Appendix 6
Parent Information Letter

The following text was placed on University of British Columbia, Department of Counselling Psychology, letterhead and signed by parent/guardian of participant:
April 25, 1994

Dear Parent:

My name is Connie Maske and I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. For the past eight months, I have been working in the Counselling Department of Lord Byng Secondary School in a practicum placement under the supervision of Mr. Bob Lewis, Counselling Department head. Currently, I am conducting research at the school for a thesis project in the area of adolescent identity formation.

Your daughter has indicated an interest in being a participant in my study involving Grade 12 female students. The project is being conducted as a requirement for the masters of arts in Counselling Psychology program in the department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Drs. Richard Young and Robert Tolsma of the Counselling Psychology department and Dr. Tannis MacBeth Williams of the Psychology Department are my supervisors. Both the University of British Columbia research ethics committee and the Vancouver School Board Research department have approved this study.

This letter is to let you know the purpose of the study; the procedures and time commitment involved for your daughter; and to request your permission for her to participate. Having an opportunity to discuss and explore their ideas about occupations and other aspects of the future can help young women clarify their goals. The time commitment involves two one hour interviews and a half hour debriefing interview. All interviews will occur outside of class time.

I have enclosed a copy of the participant consent form your daughter must sign to become involved. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me (Connie Maske) at 925-4736 or Dr. Richard Young at the University of British Columbia: 822-6380. Thank you for your support.

I acknowledge having read this form.

I do/ do not give my permission for my daughter________________ to be involved in the study described in the enclosed participant consent form. I understand that the time commitment involved is approximately three hours.

Parent Signature: __________________________________________

Please have your daughter bring this form with her to the first interview.
Appendix 7

Heroic Figure Interviews
Validation Interview Protocol

A follow up interview of approximately 15-30 minutes was conducted within four weeks of the heroic figure interview. A summary of the transcript was given to the participant to read. They were asked for their comments and given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to be used in the thesis. They were asked whether they would like to make changes to the summary, and also consulted about the interview method used to collect the data.

1. Do you feel that this summary accurately reflects your experience of having a heroic figure in your life, particularly their influence on your life?

2. Are there any thoughts or feelings that you would like to add to your story?

3. Is there anything written in this summary you feel is inaccurate, that you would like to have taken out or changed?

4. Was the interview method used conducive to sharing your experiences effectively? Do you feel the questions were appropriate or did you feel they restricted you in any way with regard to your telling your story?