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All the World's a Stage: Players on the Academic Landscape

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In this article, we introduce the specific group of 15 scholars whose stories are featured throughout this special issue. This article emphasizes the academics' feelings of being excluded, with particular attention to their discussions of marginalization, lack of belonging, and identity struggles. Most notably, all found that the prevailing academic context made it difficult to establish and maintain a sense of belonging within academe.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.
— Jaques (*As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7, lines 139–142)

The stories in this special issue are drawn from a group of 15 Education scholars across Canada who engaged in conversations over a four-year period. The participants include individuals from different career stages, including graduate students, newly hired faculty members, and more experienced untenured or tenured faculty members. The group of 15 includes the 4 authors of this collection plus our collaborator, Annabelle Grundy, and 10 other scholars who we have met in our forays through academe. These individuals are introduced here (pseudonyms are used

for non-research team members) to provide a frame for the articles that follow. All were asking their own questions about what it meant to be or to belong in the academy, and trying to find spaces for themselves within academe.

The Cast of Characters

Consistent with the demographics in Education Faculties, Schools, and Departments in Canada, most of the participants are White (Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT], 2011–2012). Women are over-represented in our group (3 men and 12

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women) compared to faculty appointments (52% women in Education) and somewhat higher than graduate participation rates (74% women in Education). The two most senior participants in our study (the only Full Professors) are both White men. Consistent with overall demographics for Canadian university teachers, two women identified as members of racialized minority groups; both were first-generation adult immigrants. Another participant emigrated from an English-speaking, European nation as a young man. No participant claimed Aboriginal identity or ancestry (compared to 1% overall, CAUT, 2011–2012). At least 9 participants discussed their roles as parents and 4 as grandparents. Ages ranged from 20s to 60s, representing the Millennium Generation through the Silent Generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991); there were no university teachers under 30 (cf. CAUT, 2011–2012). While some participants discussed spouses or former spouses, none self-identified as queer. Few participants discussed their class backgrounds, but there was some diversity evident from those who reported this information. The demographic details provided here are those that the participants highlighted in their interviews, which means that participants did not necessarily report complete and comparable information. These are the demographic details that factored in the stories they told about their academic lives and their struggles to belong.

The 15 participants are introduced in what might be considered an ascending order of academic seniority, recognizing that academic careers do not follow a single continuum

and cannot be readily rank ordered (McGinn, 2007).

Annabelle is a second-generation, White woman in her 20s. Her parents emigrated from the UK to Canada where her father was a professor prior to his retirement. She is an artist with a Bachelor of Fine Art. She is hard of hearing and communicates through speech reading and sign language. She completed her master's degree early in the research project. Initially, she had planned to pursue doctoral studies and continue into an academic position. She decided instead to enroll in a program to teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and she is now employed full time as an art teacher in a school for students who are deaf.

Jingyi had been an award-winning teacher in China and had taught new teachers in that country prior to coming to Canada as an international graduate student. She completed her master's and doctoral degrees in Education and she became a Canadian citizen. Her son was born in Canada. She had applied for academic positions in her field but had not been hired and was teaching in the local school system and operating a private business.

Mary has a professional background as a counsellor. She has been hired for a series of shorter- and longer-term contract positions over many years at one university. Throughout this time, she has applied for several continuing appointments, but has been unsuccessful due (at least in part) to her incomplete doctoral degree, which has been delayed due to multiple changes in doctoral supervisors, coupled with a heavy teaching load. She remains hopeful, but not always optimistic that the ongoing demand for counselling courses and the evident shortage of

qualified faculty will allow her to eventually obtain a continuing appointment that will provide the security and the time for her to complete her doctorate.

Kenneth is a White male in his 30s, married with one child. He is employed in a full-time, non-tenure-track position in teaching development at a university. His Ph.D. is incomplete and has been on hold for some years, yet he imagines finishing it one day. He has gained considerable recognition for his teaching and devotes his time to teaching, teaching development, and scholarship of teaching rather than the dissertation study he began.

Nancy is a White woman who is married with adult children and became a first-time grandmother during the research project. She undertook a Ph.D. in Education after years of employment in the health-care sector. She completed her Ph.D. during the period of the research project and has worked in various university-based research or administrative positions subsequent to the research project.

Anne is a married, White woman. She completed her Ph.D. in Education just before the project began. She was working in a full-time, non-tenure-track position with heavy service commitments within a university. She continued to consult job postings and secured a tenure-track academic appointment with greater emphasis on scholarship and teaching after our final interview. This position necessitated relocating away from her husband, combining the stresses of a new faculty position with the challenges of a long-distance relationship.

Renée is a White woman with adult children and a grandchild. She had worked in the health-care field prior to

pursuing a Ph.D. in Education. She graduated with a Ph.D. at the beginning of the study. She was initially employed in a limited-term, non-tenure-track faculty position. She submitted many applications and was invited for several interviews during that first year, and accepted a tenure-track position in a location far from her family in her second year. Despite her excitement about this position and all that it had to offer, she continued to consider other employment options that might allow her to better connect her personal and professional lives in one geographic location.

Frances taught for many years before returning to graduate school and then went on to a sequence of shorter- and longer-term contracts at a university, eventually securing a tenure-track appointment. She is an artist and an art educator. Her initial application for tenure was rejected, which she attributes in part to the failure of the committee to adequately count peer-reviewed artistic works. She subsequently took up a tenure-track position at another institution where her scholarship seems to be more heavily valued, but she still feels some trepidation about the “backroom decisions” to be made by a new set of evaluation committees.

Tania is a White woman who was a new mother at the beginning of the research project. Her parents had immigrated to Canada from the UK prior to her birth. She spent 3 years in a tenure-track faculty position at one institution before her maternity leave. In that time, she received contract renewal, but found the process damaging. After her 12-month maternity leave, she relocated her family and began a tenure-track position at a new institution, an offer that she had accepted prior to her

maternity leave. Subsequent to our final interview, she applied for and received tenure and promotion to Associate Professor at the second institution.

Michelle is a White woman in her 30s from a rural, working-class background. When this project began, she was an untenured Assistant Professor with the promise of a tenure-track position as soon as one became available at her institution. Over the course of the project, she received first a tenure-track position and subsequently tenure and promotion to Associate Professor.

Lillian was a performing artist and then a school teacher before she decided to pursue graduate education and eventually an academic career. She was appointed on a contractual basis at one university where she was denied a tenure-track position in her fourth year of employment, a decision that prompted her to seek other employment. She secured a tenure-track appointment at another university, but continued to question whether she wished to remain in the academy, especially during a subsequent one-year medical leave. Despite this lack of certainty, Lillian did return to her position at the second institution and is now a tenured, Associate Professor.

Carmen is a White woman in her 50s and the mother of two children who were enrolled in postsecondary education during part of the research project. Growing up with a sister with disabilities informed her personal and professional development. She had been a special education teacher and curriculum leader for many years before she began doctoral studies in her 40s. During the latter stages of her doctoral studies, she worked full time for another university, initially on a contractual basis

and later with a continuing contract. Upon completion of her Ph.D., her position converted into a tenure-track position, but she left that institution to begin a tenure-track position at a second institution, where she was employed at the beginning of this project. She moved institutions yet again in the midst of this project to another tenure-track position. She secured tenure and promotion to Associate Professor during the project.

Min is a woman of colour who came to Canada as a poor immigrant. She married and spent 10 years raising her family before beginning graduate study. Throughout the project, she was a full-time, tenure-track faculty member. She received tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor during the research project.

John is a White, upper-middle class male in his 50s. He entered teaching as a second career, before pursuing doctoral studies and entering academe as a third career. He grew up in a challenging household, which he sees as a contributing factor in his tendency to act as a caregiver and peacemaker, to strive for security and avoid risks, and to be a “workaholic.” He was a tenured Associate Professor with over a decade of experience in the academy when the project began. His first application for promotion to Professor was rejected the year before this research project began, but his reapplication two years later was successful. He contemplated various moves to other institutions during the research project, but remained at the same institution for the duration of the project, shifting into an administrative role.

Mike is a White man from the UK where he taught for many years before pursuing graduate study in Education in North America. He has

adult children and now grandchildren. He is a tenured Full Professor in his 60s who held senior academic appointments throughout most of the research project.

Facts and Acts: Performing Personal and Professional Lives

The above cast of characters provides some professional and personal details about each of the participants. We could easily have provided different details about any of the individuals. Each individual makes choices about how to present self in any given context. Renée was most explicit about her role as a “masseuse” massaging her identity in different contexts and to fit particular job postings: “I am very aware that I perform my identity differently in the classroom and faculty meetings and so on. . . . I am foregrounding a piece of me when I go [to an interview].” All of the other participants engaged in similar practices, emphasizing particular details in one setting and keeping others hidden. Over multiple years, we have come to know each other in various capacities, revealing truths about ourselves as our relationships grew.

With the exception of Jingyi and Annabelle, the participants are employed in academic settings, although some changed institutions or roles during our time together. Despite their academic appointments, Mary and Kenneth see that their incomplete Ph.D. degrees have hindered their academic careers. Anne has completed her Ph.D., but was less than settled with her position at the time that our interviews concluded. Others have tenured or tenure-track positions, yet still remain unsettled.

In their academic lives, the scholars described feeling either typecast or miscast. They variously described feeling the need to hide who they were

or what they believed or sensing that this information was ignored or overlooked by others around them. The participants’ stories echo other research accounts and personal anecdotes showing that academics who bring valuable research and teaching skills and a spirit of excitement to the academy are too often penalized if they do not fit the established roles within the department or Faculty where they are appointed (Martin, 2000; Pinnegar, 1998; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Expressing viewpoints in faculty meetings, gaining popularity with students, providing service to the university, and maintaining good relations with colleagues can work against newcomers who expect to be judged primarily on the quality of their research and teaching. Although promotion and tenure are the traditional benchmarks for assessing academics’ worth or belonging in the academy, there are other less formal places where recognition as a legitimate player can become problematic (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The road to belonging in the academy is a journey that begins at least as early as the decision to enter doctoral studies. It can, however, be fraught with visible pitfalls as individuals reach various milestones, including comprehensive examinations, the dissertation defence, job interviews, annual reports, contract renewal, tenure, and promotion as well as the less visible pitfalls involved in negotiating the politics of academic institutions. Along the way, many academics face the choice to give up themselves in order to keep their academic appointments or to give up the academy to keep themselves. For women, in particular, as Martin (2000) notes, “the academy charges an exorbitant admission fee to those women who wish to belong” (p. xxiv).

The scholars engaged in this project tended to define themselves by their experience in academic settings and how they and others saw them as legitimate or illegitimate members of an academic community. Throughout the project, we sought to uncover the individual meanings that the 15 scholars ascribed to their experiences, rather than inscribing theory-based constructions over the participants' stories. We learned that issues of history and continuity often collided with academics' conceptions of their work, their relationships with colleagues and students, and the connections they established between their personal and professional lives (Martin, 2000). Such issues rendered them vulnerable to the ways and mores of the academy and to the saga-keepers who kept earlier stories alive through their telling and retelling. We saw that the ways they were "negotiating the meanings of [their] experience of membership in social communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 145) influenced their identity building. Identity became a locus of social power that involved a sense of belonging or of being a certain person and simultaneously entailed the vulnerability of belonging to a community that partially defined who they were or could be. Identity invoked issues of both epistemology and ontology. The challenges they faced left them feeling excluded, prompting discussions about marginalization, lack of belonging, and identity struggles.

Peripheries and Margins in Academe

Participants used the terms periphery and margins interchangeably to discuss their personal positions within their departments and universities, as well as to characterize their departments' positions within their university

structures. Theoretical perspectives, research interests, cultural background, and gender seemed to be the key features that participants connected to marginal positioning.

Tania characterized her experiences on the periphery during her first academic appointment as having multiple aspects. She reported, "I was definitely on the periphery in that department for many reasons and on the periphery in my program, then in the department, then from the boys' club and the girls' club." More broadly, she found that, like many Education departments, her "department was on the periphery in multiple ways" within the institutional hierarchy. As Tania observed: "when I think about periphery, it's part of being cold and not like there's a place for you to walk in or be part of" and "a feeling that you are kind of on the outside." In particular, she found that her research interests were "seen as something on the periphery in my department and my program, so there was no one really interested in that, interested in collaborating in that area." Over time, she did find collaborators who respected her work and tremendous interest from graduate students, but she continued to feel that the department as a whole "didn't see [her research] as being relevant." Academic freedom allowed her to pursue whatever research she wanted, but did not ensure a space for her in departmental life, a factor that led to her decision to leave the first institution where she was employed.

Part of Tania's definition of the periphery involved having no "place for you to walk in or be part of." She was discouraged when her departmental colleagues showed little interest in providing a place or a room for her, both literally and figuratively. Her research

was considered irrelevant or only tangentially related to departmental emphases. Her teaching was limited to a small number of courses she was deemed competent to teach, even though she believed that her doctoral training provided sufficient background to teach several other courses. She asked herself repeatedly why the institution chose to hire her, yet seemed to show little interest in what she could contribute. She contrasted her experiences in this first academic appointment with her experiences as a doctoral student, which were “I think it was the exact [opposite], maybe I have a faulty memory but I felt very much like I was a member of that community and my ideas were valued there.” Tania’s sense that she was not a valued community member left her feeling peripheral to the department.

Kenneth described how the notions of margins and periphery characterized his entire career as an aspiring academic: “it’s funny because all of those words seem to fit for me right from the start of my academic career I’d say as an undergraduate really.” He completed a joint major combining a traditional discipline with a new field, where he saw the new field as peripheral within the academy in every way: “It saw itself as on the periphery . . . as a kind of a radical place, a place where you could maybe do street theatre instead of an essay or something in some courses.” The peripheral status of this field was particularly evident in relation to the other half of his joint degree in a traditional discipline: “It was like two worlds. So I experienced a sense of belonging in [a traditional discipline] but not very well and then belonging in a [new field] and sort of the traffic between both departments. I mean it was a strange and odd feeling.”

Throughout his master’s and doctoral studies, Kenneth continued to perceive himself on the margins as he combined the traditional mainstream discipline with more radical, non-mainstream interests in the newer field. It was not, however, just Kenneth’s radical theoretical interests that kept him on the margins, he also found himself marginalized by his evolving interests in pedagogy. He was drawn more and more to teaching, and devoted considerable time to exploring his interests in the scholarship of teaching. Although Kenneth feels on the periphery most of the time, he does feel that he can effect change in university teaching. He is confident in his ascribed role as a “superstar” in teaching and teaching development work, and has chosen a somewhat peripheral research field (the scholarship of teaching) where he feels most comfortable and most competent.

Min has always felt “on the margin” in multiple ways. Min is an immigrant who learned English as a Second Language when she arrived in Canada as a young woman. Even in her home country, Min wasn’t in the “mainstream” because she was from a poor family with an illiterate mother and wide gaps in age between her and her older siblings. As an undergraduate student in Canada, Min was the only female philosophy major, which alienated her from her male peers with whom she felt a lack of connection because she was unable to join conversations about hockey and other “male” interests. Similarly, as a graduate student and now faculty member, she has often been the only woman, the only Asian, the only person who arrived as a poor immigrant. As someone from a non-mainstream cultural and philosophical tradition, she “always felt

like a guest . . . on this planet, in this country, in that Faculty.”

Despite feeling marginalized in many ways, Min is quite comfortable with her position: “I am so accustomed to being marginalized or not belonging or whatever language you use; it’s almost my comfort zone. I think I would feel uncomfortable if I were in the mainstream.” Min has always excelled in ways that built confidence in her and the work that she does; so even though she feels on the periphery, she is comfortable being there. Min describes her past experiences as “character-building” experiences that have contributed to her well-being and her acceptance of a marginal position.

Our research participants were clear about their marginal positions, but they also articulated that such marginal positions could sometimes be positions of moderate power and influence (Kenneth) and sites of comfort (Min). Peripherality may not be a wholly negative state. The participants saw that peripherality could be simultaneously empowering and disempowering (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and could provide feelings of both belonging and non-belonging.

Participation and Belonging

Despite feeling on the margins in many ways, participants also discussed situations and moments when they felt they belonged. Kenneth, for example, described a strong sense of belonging within the higher education pedagogical community. When he worked first as a teaching assistant and later as an instructor, Kenneth felt he belonged and even began to see teaching and teaching development as a preferred career choice. These feelings of belonging also related to the relationships he developed with other members of the teaching

development community and to his recognition within that community (e.g., when he was nominated for a prestigious teaching award).

Renée expressed two distinct perspectives regarding belonging. On some days, Renée felt she belonged to her department, and that she fit in and was included by her colleagues. She attributed these feelings to her relationships with faculty members whom she had known for a long time and who respected her and her ideas. On other days, Renée felt that she didn’t belong to any particular discipline due to her interdisciplinary background: “I struggle because of the type of research that I am interested in and I feel that I don’t belong in any disciplinary department and this is a source of tension for me.” This tension was particularly evident for her as she prepared applications for academic positions in a range of different departments and interdisciplinary units. Renée’s sense of belonging is somewhat fleeting and temporary, much like the 1-year contract position that she held when she first joined the research study.

Min’s sense of herself as a guest reflects a slowly emerging sense of belonging. Like other long-term and frequent guests, she has begun to feel less like a guest and more like someone who belongs. This feeling of belonging was related, in part, to reactions from other departmental colleagues: “In general, they are happy to have me. There is a sense I get and feel through the colleagues that I am fitting very comfortably with. They are always warm to me, supportive.” Students’ reactions were even more strongly positive and contributed to her sense of belonging. Students expressed their appreciation and interest for Min’s work and

regularly oversubscribed her graduate courses requiring the provision of multiple sections of her course. These oversubscribed courses, however, also meant that she taught more students than her departmental colleagues, but received the same credit. The additional teaching responsibilities detracted from the time available for her to concentrate on research and publishing.

Tania experienced the paradox of belonging through her affiliation with a research centre at her first institution. Even though the centre was housed within her department, belonging in the research centre meant that in some ways she did not belong in her department. She blamed some of the struggles she experienced during contract renewal on her affiliation with the centre.

Aligning myself with one of the strong faculty members who was involved in the centre, immediately put me on a hit list with a subgroup in the department. . . . There was more to the subgroup than I realized at the time. It was bigger than I expected. I knew there were dangers in becoming involved with that centre, but it was also the only place where there was a really active program of research going, so many opportunities to participate and get involved in grants and projects. . . . I think the jump start that that gave me on my career was invaluable.

Renée also described a paradox underlying her attempts to belong. As she prepared various job applications, she felt a need to “play the game” and “massage” her identity to fit particular job postings. She expressed concern that this massaging and game playing was paradoxical given her theoretical and

personal commitments to social justice and equity. She felt that she was “perpetuating the game by playing into the game that [she] was trying to challenge in her research” and was concerned that her success could be “at the expense of these other marginalized groups.” She worried that finding a place herself to belong could prevent others from belonging.

It is clear that belonging and non-belonging are parallel notions. Belonging in one way frequently signalled non-belonging in other ways. Like other academics whose stories are documented in the literature (Breslauer, 2002; Hannah, 2002; MacDonald, 2002; Martin, 2000; Miller, 2002; Trépanier, 2002), the participants recognized both positive and negative aspects of participation and belonging. Paradoxes and contradictions were evident in their stories, and there was an ever-present sense that any feelings of contentment or comfort could be short lived or could have a negative undercurrent.

Identity Struggles

The participants reported that interacting with others in academic settings played a significant role in how they themselves participated in the academic environment and how they developed and performed their identities as academics. John expressed a sentiment that many of the participants shared when he explained, “there’s something so deep for me in taking my identity from the work that I do.” For Tania, identity involved issues of self-esteem and how people in her academic environment influenced the sense that she held. Tania recalled her emotional reaction to receiving a somewhat negative evaluation from her department, the corresponding sense of

isolation she felt, and the resulting damage to her self-esteem:

There's a whole self-esteem wrapped up in this career. It's not the kind of career you do half. Your whole being is wrapped up in it and academics always talk about that. It's a, I think, maybe a strange career in that way . . . it's just so all consuming. You have so much often wrapped up in it, that I think what happens is, when you do find yourself on the periphery and without a way to navigate... the main thing that happens is it eats away at your self-esteem.

Similar to Tania's belief that self-esteem is essential to building an academic career, Kenneth recalled how he felt when he didn't progress quickly through his Ph.D. program. Kenneth said that he initially felt like a "loser," but felt better about his progress when he participated in a review of his institution's Ph.D. program and realized that the lack of structure in the program contributed to a lack of incentive for students to finish. Kenneth also described how acquiring a job that he loved prevented him from finishing his program, but that it improved his overall self-esteem.

Over time, Kenneth began to identify more with teaching than research, negatively affecting his identity as a researcher. As a part-time employee at one institution, Kenneth did not feel like an important member of the university community and had no support or encouragement to do research. When he obtained a full-time role with more responsibilities, however, his identity changed. He began to feel more respected by other academics and less snubbed as a staff member. The full-

time position also gave him the flexibility to give conference presentations, strengthening his research and presentation skills.

Renée described herself as White, mature in age and demeanour, and someone who has "the appearance of authority and legitimacy" and "conveys a sense of the kinds of identity that fit in." For these reasons, she characterized herself as "low maintenance" for prospective departmental colleagues on selection committees where she interviewed for academic positions. She found that in some ways it was easier for her to talk about issues of race and marginalization than for scholars of colour to engage in these discussions because such issues are not seen as "her issues." She suspected that selection committees perceived her as someone who would conform easily to the norms of the department. She also considered herself a "self-starter," which she saw as an asset in the academic community where "shrinking resources" affect the productivity of academics.

During her first year of contractual academic employment, Renée accurately anticipated interview success due to her perceived fit in academe, yet she took nothing for granted and prepared extensively for each interview. She even carefully considered such superficial choices as what to wear during interviews:

I'm very conscious of how I dress and because I know that it is these exterior things that send messages about how we are different and the same. . . . So I am very careful to present myself as someone who doesn't appear rigid, who appears open to ideas and open to difference. I am conscious of the way that we

attach meaning to those sorts of differences in dress, differences in hairstyle, differences in language.

Based on her consciousness about how clothing can influence judgments, she elected to wear professional attire in bright colors that would make her memorable to selection committees: "I thought if they don't remember anything about me or they cannot remember my name, they'll remember it was the one with the bright blue leather jacket and she said such and such."

Participants were clear that their academic identities related to the ways that they felt about themselves, how they chose to present themselves to others, and how others perceived and responded to them. Identity is simultaneously an individual and a social construction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nesper, 1994; Wenger, 1998); however, it cannot be divorced from wider institutional structures and power relations.

Finding a Place in the Academy

Throughout our conversations, participants described multiple facets of their participation and belonging in academic settings. They saw themselves as variously belonging, not belonging, and partially un-belonging. They considered the prices for belonging, and made judgments about when these costs were acceptable or too high. They recognized that belonging in one sense meant not belonging in other senses. They viewed themselves simultaneously in marginal and central positions. Marginal positions sometimes entailed a sense of marginalization from central concerns, while at other times, the participants perceived their marginal positions as positions of moderate power

and influence or comfortable spaces. It was not uncommon in the interviews for participants to express simultaneous belonging and marginalization. As Kenneth said, "it's odd being both on the periphery and belonging at the same time." Regardless of their positioning at any one time, they perceived both benefits and drawbacks to their location. Their stories and descriptions provided a tempered and reflective perspective on life in the academy. Although they had all experienced disappointments and uncertainties, they saw themselves growing from these experiences and, at times, provided a "positive spin" on their stories. In recent American Educational Research Association conference sessions, discussants have asked, "where are the positive stories?" (K. A. Ward, personal communication, April 15, 2004) and "why are all the metaphors negative?" (B. V. Laden, personal communication, April 24, 2003) when researchers present stories from academic life. Our participants shed light on the double-edged nature of their interactions and placement in academe.

The participants identified personal and institutional strategies to maximize positive and minimize negative aspects of academic life for themselves and others. They described their personal attempts to negotiate the norms of institutional practice and the mores of the academy. Tania and Min both emphasized the importance of staying true to themselves regardless of what was going on around them (cf. Hamrick & Benjamin, 2002; Martin, 2000; Tovell, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). While Tania and Min emphasized the need for scholars, especially newcomers, to be true to themselves, Kenneth focused on the importance of scholars figuring out their identity and

purposes. He recalled how his decision to take a leave from his doctoral program left him feeling relatively powerless until he accepted a full-time position with greater responsibility and a more prestigious title, which made him feel more positive about himself and more confident that he would finish his Ph.D. on his own terms. For these scholars, these were survival strategies that allowed them to hold onto some central core in spite of the pressures and emotional damage they experienced during troubling times. Beyond figuring out what they wanted and “sticking to it,” our participants also emphasized that individuals should not let the situation determine their reaction. It is not the situation, but how you perceive and react to it that matters. As Min said, “If another person were to predict my position or look through my eyes right now, the person might feel totally alienated, very uncomfortable, right, might be crying and all that, but I don’t. I have somehow made sense of partial un-belonging.”

Lave and Wenger (1991) propose the notion legitimate peripheral participation to describe learning that is an “integral part of a generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p. 35). The adjective “legitimate” of this irreducible concept addresses the fact that newcomers participate in the activities of a community rather than being excluded from them. The adjective “peripheral” indicates the possibility to participate to different degrees, in more or less inclusive or engaged ways. Lave and Wenger argue that there is no centre, no full participation, no point that individuals need to move toward. Any sense of a centre is always moving. This is the tension between reproduction and transformation within a community.

Socialization is not a unidirectional process.

Hay (1993) critiqued Lave and Wenger because he felt they did “not go far enough” (p. 35). He expressed concerns about the impotence of newcomers in most communities: when you are at the periphery, you have little power to influence future directions for the community or other decisions. Hay argued that typically only those who have “bought into” the community can have substantive impact on changing that community, but those individuals are already so vested in and implicated by the community, that little change is possible. Without the power to exercise creativity to transform the community and its practices, many newcomers are subject to existing practices. Hay argued that newcomers could be more active in choosing the communities and practices relevant for them. In so doing, those newcomers could experience more liberating, rather than oppressive, engagement. Our participants identified personal strategies that helped them take some control of their academic lives, even from their peripheral locations within academe, yet they frequently felt powerless.

Heaney (1995) argued, “All participation is peripheral and legitimate” (p. 3). There is no central or core or even fuller participation. Everything is peripheral, and—this is where he provides an extension to Lave and Wenger’s theory—he talked about the transformative nature of learning “on the edge” (p. 3). He described the periphery in terms of “dynamic and at times chaotic energy” (p. 3), arguing that all the action happens at the periphery. From this perspective, there is no continuum where people progress toward a moving centre or centres;

instead, they are continually interacting at the edges of what is possible, what is permissible. Although they often felt excluded and undervalued, our participants nevertheless saw the potential transformative power of their positions on the edges of the academy. They saw the importance of their personal strategies of resistance and change, but could not ignore the institutional cultures within which they worked. The institutional workings of power influence the kinds of participation that are impeded or delegitimized in any setting. It is worth considering Probyn's (1990) reminder that, "in creating our own centers and our own locals, we tend to forget that our centers displace others into the peripheries of our making" (p. 176). In any community, it is important to be cognizant of who gets left out, a point that Renée reiterated multiple times in

her interviews. As Heaney (1995) argued, exciting stuff happens on the peripheries, which is all the more reason to pay attention to those who are not part of an established central community.

Simplistic interpretations of periphery, belonging, and identity as wholly positive or wholly negative do not hold. Personal, social, and situational factors influence when and how different positive and negative aspects become apparent in a given situation. Importantly, it is not up to researchers to assign feelings of marginality or belonging; individuals must determine for themselves the dimensions of their experiences and how they will choose to live out their academic lives. This, however, does not limit the culpability of other members of the academy who are complicit in creating and maintaining non-inclusive structures and practices within academe.

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