

## **Exploring Graduate Students' Identity Work: The Unspoken Curriculum**

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### **Abstract**

*This study unpacks assumptions about the unspoken or tacit identity work of graduate students. Grounded theory was developed from interviews of 63 graduate students who were asked what they thought they would obtain both personally and professionally as a result of their studies. Two major areas emerged: their use of and relationship to knowledge (Knowledge Modus Operandi) and a set of metaphors that represent the identity work in which they were engaged. It is possible to regard graduate school as a holding environment, as students further their sense of themselves in interaction with school and with their faculty.*

**Keywords:** identity work; holding environment; adult development; metaphor; epistemology; grounded theory; graduate students; motivation

### **1. Introduction**

Most adults who initially seek out formal learning to help them deal with external change do not realize that it is also likely to engender internal change. ... Though adults' expressed purpose is usually to work toward pragmatic goals, thoughtful self-reflection often reveals more complex desires. (Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler (2000, p. 9).

The simple question of why graduate students put themselves into formal education has not-so-simple answers. What are they "up to" when they apply to and attend graduate school? Knowing more about this question is a natural interest of administrators, counsellors and professors. Research has pointed to possible reasons why graduate students enrol, like developing job skills (Rozanski, 2008), cognitive skills (van der Merwe, 2009) or gaining professional benefits that are weighed against the costs of obtaining them (Pasternak, 2005). Some seek mastery, while others want to demonstrate superior performance (McCollum & Kajs, 2007). Some adult learners come back intentionally for stimulation, social contact, or as part of a life change (Morstain & Smart, 1977). Knowing more about the overt and underlying agendas for attending professional graduate school is useful for those who have administrative interests such as marketing or evaluating programs, as well as to faculty.

Recent research has opened an intriguing door for inquiry into what linkage there may be between advanced education and training, and what can be called identity work (Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley, & Littlejohns, 2006). Identity work is how we develop and sustain a sense of ourselves (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). The answer to the question, "Who are you?" reveals identity. Responses could be "an intensely curious person" or "a person who wants to get ahead." For example, activities through which identity work can occur, in terms of seeing oneself as a rising professional, could be achievement of required credentials necessary for advancement. Through participation in activities related to getting ahead, a view of self is enacted and cultivated.

Identity work is not only the creation of a professional identity (Kreig, 2010), but includes a larger more encompassing sense of self. The place in which identity work occurs, whether physical space (Ellsworth, 1997) or the holding environment that arises in psychologically safe relationships, has been described as transitional space (Dubouloy, 2004).

As professors in U.S. graduate professional programs, we have been intrigued about a transitional space and identity work perspective. Our rationale for doing empirical research was to gain insight into overt and tacit use of school for developing and playing out identities. We found that much was revealed through close study of student responses to 2 simple questions, “How do you think obtaining your graduate degree in Organizational Leadership will affect your career?” and, “How do you think obtaining your graduate degree in Organizational Leadership will affect you personally?”

While one could assume that students develop or grow through participation in graduate studies, our research unpacks that assumption by exploring students’ ways of knowing and growing. Lifting the curtain on the unspoken or tacit identity work engaged in by students enables us to understand them better and highlights our role as co-creators of transitional space.

## **2. Our Conceptual Grounding: Identity Work and Knowledge**

Our research is informed by ideas in the areas of identity work and evolving views of knowledge. Together, they shape both our approach to making meaning from our data and the conceptual frame that enables us to report our findings.

### **2.1 Identity work**

Identity work “refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1164) as individuals. It is the “inward cognitive processes of identity creation and maintenance” (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006, p. 1032). Recent discussions (Dubouloy, 2004; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Sturdy, et al., 2006) have pointed to the other-curriculum of identity work that managers and/or business school students engage in as a parallel process to their formal schooling.

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) offer the concept of an identity workspace, which is an institution that provides a holding environment and assert that, “managers are increasingly likely to invest business schools with the function of identity workspaces (p. 55.)” A holding environment, in their view, is a “social context that reduces disturbing affect and facilitates sense making” (p. 50.) Traditionally, a holding environment is one that arises in the personal relationship between a psychiatrist and an analysand or a teacher and student (e.g. - Game & Metcalfe, 2009) In a holding environment, a richness of possibility occurs when a student is “in the presence of someone who guards them without interference. [T]hey learn to trust their authentic responses” (p. 48.) In other words, an identity is waiting to emerge and through the provision of a mutually created holding environment, it can be discovered and elaborated. Safety, dialogue and exploration are guiding values as the work occurs between individuals.

Thinking of a business school as an institution in which this kind of human development work can and should naturally occur invests a program or school with a (perhaps) unintentional function of providing a holding environment that supports identity work. Dubouloy (2004) has the view that through collective coaching and training, high potential managers can rediscover their true selves, engaging in another example of identity work. Organizational environments, which are in such need of creative, independent leaders, erode authenticity. Managers “appear to have unconsciously buried their true talents and desires in order to please others” (p. 468.) In the EMBA group who are the subject of Dubouloy’s study, the overt motivation is to acquire “theoretical and practical skills” (p. 469) and to gain a credential that will enable them to qualify for greater responsibilities. What really happens is that they have an unanticipated experience and open up their capacity for using their talents. They use the training experience as a transitional space, in which the intersection of “the external world of reality and the internal fantasy world of each individual” (p. 469) enables rediscovery of identity.

In contrast to the disjoint between overt motivation and unexpected access to psychological recovery through participation in graduate school as described by Dubouloy (2004), Sturdy, et al. (2006) report on a different outcome. What really occurs in management education is not the formal study of subsequently applicable techniques. Instead, what students gain is self-confidence that they have knowledge and a legitimacy that others will think and feel that they know. They engage in what the authors deem interpretive activity, a processual approach to the concept of identity. Through engaging in studies, future managers experience *becoming*. They don’t find an identity, or rediscover a previously hidden aspect of self, they experience identity. What is generated is identity associated with a sense of power and control, an earned legitimacy, recognizable by others and useful within a managerial role.

### **2.2 Knowledge**

While epistemology has been central to discussions of adult development (i.e. - King & Kitchener, 2004) or student development (Baxter Magolda, 2006), our angle is somewhat different.

We are interested in how students think about their use of knowledge and what their relationship is to knowledge. From the student perspective, what purpose does knowledge serve and what happens as a result of being involved with acquiring it? Considering knowledge as something produced or learned by human societies in the study of human settlement (Agrafiotis, 2002, p. 12-13) offers typologies characterized as "Forms of Knowledge" or "Mode of Knowledge." Agrafiotis distinguishes types of knowledge as tools, commodities, symbols or matrices of transformation. Although the scope of our concern is an internal psychological process, rather than societal level theorizing, his typology forms a close pattern to what we heard our research participants expressing. Another discipline with insights into the use of and relationship to knowledge is evident in Pickering (1995), who offers a contrast between "the representational and performative idioms" (p. 5) in his study of the practice of science. Representation is an effort to produce knowledge that reveals the real nature of the world. A performative idiom instead considers "the doings" (p. 21) – how we, as agents, interact with knowledge.

Like Agrafiotis (2002), our focus is on knowledge as something that is produced. Like Pickering (1995), we are interested in what occurs in interaction with knowledge. For the purposes of our discussion, we consider what our research participants think they do with knowledge or what happens as they engage in learning knowledge, what we term their Knowledge Modus Operandi (M.O.). We note the processual concept of knowing, as discussed by Cook and Brown (1999). In addition, we are influenced by the notion that learning can be transforming (Mezirow, 2000). These authors provide frameworks for understanding how we can seem to operate so differently in our epistemologies and for considering graduate students' relationship to knowledge and knowing.

The context of our study is graduate students in an Organizational Leadership master's degree program, so consideration of growth from a leadership perspective adds dimension to our conceptual frame. In an applied use of Kegan's (1994) Constructive Developmental Theory, Harris and Kuhnert (2007) offer a theory of leadership stages – "identifiable patterns of meaning making or ways of knowing that people share" (p. 48). The subjective understanding through which leaders interpret their world is stimulated by what Kegan (1994) calls, "the fit or lack of fit between what the culture demands of our minds and our mental capacity to meet those demands" (p. 9). In the face of demands, adults may meet more complex problems with better answers and through the development of greater complexity in their own thinking. An increase in understanding within a level is called "lateral development," while movement to the next level is deemed "vertical" and constitutes a qualitative shift in perception of complexity (Harris & Kuhnert, 2007, p. 49). Change occurs in three domains: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive.

Cook and Brown (1999) regard explicit knowledge as one aspect of epistemology. This is knowledge one possesses, as in, "Robert knows auto mechanics" (p. 382). Having, getting and being able to speak about a topic are all possible with a conception of knowledge as an entity that can be possessed. There is an additional view, however, that foregrounds the knowing that is contained in action and reflects the "epistemic work done by human action itself" (p. 382.) In practice, there is *knowing*, as in, "Robert is fixing cars" (p. 382). Knowledge is not just that Robert knows, it is that his knowing is generated in action as an "epistemology of practice" (p. 383). Knowledge as a noun doesn't fully capture the process (or processual) quality represented by the verb knowing. There is knowledge that one has and knowledge that one does. This is reflective of what Besley and Peters (2005) call performative epistemology – "knowing, doing, acting and making...relating knowing to the mastery of a technique" (p. 123).

Transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000) adds another aspect to our conceptual grounding. When adults experience a failure of their current understanding for explaining their experience, they can become engaged in a period of deep and critical self-reflection. Through questioning assumptions and trying out new understandings, new frames of reference can be developed, leading to very new and more complex perspectives. They can have experienced a transformation in meaning schemes and developed a new way of looking at themselves, others and their larger environment. While transformational learning is posed as a process theory of learning, it also describes the experience of adult development.

In summary, the models we have discussed look at knowledge and knowing differently. In Harris and Kuhnert's (2007) Leadership Development Levels, knowing transforms to a qualitatively different stance as new configurations of self, intrapersonal and cognitive constructions are stimulated. In Cook and Brown's (1999) typology of epistemology, there is knowledge that is possessed and knowing that emerges in action. For Mezirow (2000), adults can experience learning that is transforming, with the stimulation of distinctly different ways of making meaning of their world.

Recognizing that changes in how individuals know and how they evaluate knowledge occur as a developmental process, we focus on a different aspect of the connection between knowledge, knowing and identity work.

Our perspective considers people's use of and relationship to knowledge and knowing, as we believe this provides insights about what identity work graduate students are experiencing as they engage in their studies.

### **3. Methods**

This study is an analysis of graduate students' responses to the inquiry, "How do you think obtaining your graduate degree in Organizational Leadership will affect you professionally and personally?" The purpose of our research was to develop a better understanding of what graduate students are up to, in terms of identity work, as they engage in their studies.

#### **3.1 Data Collection: Sample, Data Collection Process, and Approach/Design**

This research was based on data collected from 63 interviews conducted in pairs by students as an assignment for a course in organizational research between Fall 2007 and Spring 2010 taught by the first author. Participants were master's degree students in a U.S. university in a Mid-Atlantic state. The sample, composed of 25% men and 75% women, varied in undergraduate backgrounds from Biology to Education and also varied in professions from student affairs to non-profit administration to marketing and data support.

Two open-ended, semi-structured questions were administered by students to each other, under supervision, as part of their professional development as researchers. Interviewers posed follow-up probes to the two questions as needed. Each interview was recorded or noted by hand and transcribed verbatim by the students.

#### **3.2 Approach**

We used grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) to create a conceptual model of the interrelationship of the categories we found emergent in the data. Using a process of consensus and constant comparison of emerging codes and categories with the data and checking categories with new data, we generated concepts directly from the data. Grounded theory is considered a subjective process dependent on the researcher's abilities. The analysis of data can be extensive and time consuming and as Strauss and Corbin (1997) suggest, may test the endurance of the researcher. However, the benefit of using an inductive method of analysis is that the findings are strongly supported by the data due to rigorous analysis and the result is a conceptual framework for a new, but highly recognizable understanding of the phenomenon. University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained for this study.

### **4. Data Analysis**

The intuitive decision to use metaphor occurred during consensus building. As we moved from data to findings using metaphor, we engaged in a highly inductive process, what (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010) classify as "subjective contextualization" (p. 323). We generated our findings with pragmatic criteria of "usefulness and interestingness" (p. 317), expressed in a form that we and others could find helpfully descriptive. We moved away from raw data and into inference and induction in a relatively early phase of our work.

Working together with one set of data we engaged in "thought experiments" (Flick, 2002, p. 206) as we tried out meanings and metaphors that would best represent what we were coming to understand. As alternative metaphors and meanings came to mind, we selected the best explanation for what we were seeing, given our own creativity and deep respect for the research participants. We evaluated alternatives and excluded those that did not encapsulate the patterns observed. We pursued this process until the meaning became manifest, which we finally "generalized by testing it against further cases" (p. 206).

Two core ideas emerged: relationship to knowledge and identity work. First we captured participant's relationship to knowledge – as an entity, as a tool, or transformative in nature. Along with this we wrote "I statements" (abstracts) to distil the essence of what the data said that led us to their view of knowledge. For example, for participants who use knowledge as a tool, the descriptive sentence could be, "I learn skills to help me do things I haven't done before." Second, we came to consensus on a more interpretive or abstract level of analysis by writing "I want" statements for each participant by finishing the sentence "I am in search of a holding environment where I can...". We hoped that we could "hear" the unspoken hidden pursuit of identity work in the graduate school environment. For example, "I want endorsement and respect." The answer helps us understand the participant's sense of self and their identity work. Working as a team provided the opportunity for deep immersion into the data and rich, creative discussion.

#### **4.1 Use of Metaphor**

Our own thought processes are influenced by the use of metaphor for representing complex thoughts. Using metaphors suited us as a creative tool in data analysis.

Metaphors communicate meaning in creative conceptual ways (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The use of metaphors enabled us to represent our thinking as a concept (Lakoff, 1993). Perhaps even more pragmatically, metaphors provide a communication function, “a complex patterned set of properties in a shorthand” (Glucksberg & Keysar, 1993, p. 422) in a more efficient way than leaving our findings to rumble about in charts and tables. The results can be seen in Table 1 at the end of this article.

## 5. Findings/Discussion

As mentioned above, we found two core ideas. We will discuss Knowledge M.O. first and then Identity Metaphors. Because the two core ideas intersect, Table 1 provides a unified set of findings. While there are many potential platforms for discussion of our findings, we have chosen to frame them as intriguing challenges to us as instructors.

### 5.1 Knowledge Modus Operandi (M.O.)

A brief description of participant’s use of knowledge and relationship to knowledge follows, which is the material we have named Knowledge M.O. The levels are Knowledge is an entity, Knowledge is a tool, Knowledge CAN BE transforming, Knowing is doing, and Knowledge is transforming. For those participants in the first two positions who regard knowledge as an entity or a tool, there is an operational quality to the relationship. Knowledge is something obtainable and/or useful. There is an exchange or transactional relationship with knowledge. It is as if the students in these positions wonder, “What can I get from having it or using it?” or “What will it do for me?” When knowledge is an entity for participants, a characteristic interview response is, *Having knowledge will qualify me for future jobs*. It is as if the participant was speaking about a badge – it is having the badge that opens doors, not the knowledge that went into earning the badge.

Agrafiotis (2002) writes of this form of knowledge as a commodity that could be traded. When knowledge is a tool, as in this sample paraphrase, *I gain skills that will help me do my job better*, its value is in its application. In contrast to those who believe knowledge is something that one gets or one has, the final three positions regard knowledge as something that changes them, for example, in their view of themselves or of the world. Within these three positions there is a transformative possibility in having a relationship with or interacting with knowledge. The first of these recognizes the influence of interacting with knowledge: *I can see that my view of myself is changing, knowledge can change me*. The second operates on the basis that knowing and transformation occur through experiencing and reflection on experience, as in, *My knowing reveals itself through my practice*. Like Cook and Brown (1999) and Besley and Peters (2005), knowing is evidenced in doing. The third is knowledge is transforming, as in, *I see myself and others with new eyes*. This position is reflective of progression to a new level, from a constructive developmental perspective (Harris & Kuhnert, 2007) or the creation and reintegration of a new meaning scheme, from a transformational learning perspective (Mezirow, 2000). Knowledge M.O. categories are summarized in Table 1, along with exemplary quotes that illustrate the stance that participants displayed in their interviews.

In order to tell a better story of how Knowledge M.O. plays out, we now introduce the Identity Metaphors, which are also summarized in Table 1. Among our participants, we found Mirror Person, Map Person, Scooter Guy/Gal, Filly/Colt, Escalator Person, Journeyman and Architect. We found two additional potential identity metaphors currently coded within one of the other metaphors. With more data, these may emerge as distinct types.

### 5.2 Identity Metaphors

Each metaphor is discussed from the identity work perspective below.

Our typology is not hierarchical, nor is it developmental. We do not imply that students move from one position to another, or that one position is more advanced than another. Instead, we think of it as an organizing tool for better understanding the students we interact with as professors. However, some of the positions contain a possibility of change, while others represent a focus on exploring and getting the most out of an existing perspective. We have adopted Harris and Kuhnert’s (2007) terminology of vertical for the former and lateral for the latter, except that we regard these as activities rather than steps in development. For example, a Map Person is engaged in lateral activities related to achieving and satisfying perceived external requirements, while an Architect is engaged in vertical activities related to change and the generation of new personal insights.

Mirror Person, (4 of 63), is distinguished by an understanding that knowledge is a commodity (Agrafiotis, 2002). When we look for the relationship to knowledge in Mirror Person we see a student metaphorically standing in front of a mirror admiring him or herself holding his/her newest acquisition—the diploma. When we examine data from Mirror Persons, we see reflected a need for endorsement, respect, or validation. They demonstrate little activity or only lateral activity in their responses.

A sentence for describing the identity work of Mirror Person is: *I want endorsement so other people give me respect and doors open to me.* This identity metaphor represents students who have a view of self that seems relatively uncritical and that reflects their self-concept as high achievers. In the interpersonal domain, students represented by this identity metaphor do not see others as rich resources.

An additional example of students who see knowledge as an entity is the identity metaphor of Map Person. Map Persons are aware of self conduct. Interpersonally, they compare themselves to others. Their statements often reflect a desire to repair personal weaknesses or past poor performance. In addition they strive to overcome a lack of confidence and to attain a sense of accomplishment. The identity work is, *I want to match up*, which can include checking off accomplishments from a list of criteria for the presumed right things to do, which includes completing a graduate degree and always being sure that requirements are met. The knowledge gained from enrolment in school is something now possessed. The sense of self being cultivated is, "I am a professional with a future. I do the work I must do in order to demonstrate that I am prepared. Through my work, I will gain confidence because I overcome the mismatch between what my profile was before and what I need to show as accomplishments now. I set goals and am confirmed in my self-confidence when I reach them."

It is likely that students whose dominant expectation is to obtain a degree or a credential interact with us as if we hold something they want to possess. They may need a substantial amount of clarification on what is expected and may feel quite frustrated with being provided samples of good work, rather than a series of approvals on projects. Our good intentions to encourage independent ability to self-evaluate may appear, quite inadvertently, as absence of adequate feedback.

For Scooter Guy/Gal, knowledge has utility. Scooter Guy/Gal uses reflection and identifies behavioural and knowledge gaps that can be filled. Knowledge is obtainable from experts (King & Kitchener, 2004) and is a tool (Agrafiotis, 2002). Interpersonally, Scooter Guy/Gals recognize relationships involve exchange and outcomes involving influence can be approached thoughtfully, with awareness of others' styles. Scooter Guy/Gals want to be more functional and to gain confidence in their skills. They want to do things better. They are engaged in lateral identity work and are not poised for movement to a different outlook or perspective. There is much to develop within the identity they are currently exploring. The identity work is, *I am improving how I navigate.* This can include avid pursuit of skill acquisition, usable as tools in work and interpersonal life. These gains are seen as a satisfying professional accomplishment. The sense of self being cultivated is, "I improve my functioning by continuing to learn. By learning to do new things I haven't done before, I will be able to get around in my life, job and career better. I have greater self-esteem because I can tell that I have gained transferable skills that make me better equipped to navigate whatever comes my way."

For students who see gaining new tools as the key aspect of learning, coursework is satisfying when coaching, tips and doing are in the forefront. Design of courses for improving skills is the expectation, as is a direct connection between theory and practice. Relevance to professional demands matters a great deal.

A key feature in comparing metaphors is the direction implied in their identity work. Scooter Guy/Gal is engaged in lateral activity in their identity work. Scooter Guy/Gal is functional and desires improvement in current effectiveness. In contrast, Filly/Colt is aware that growth is ahead and wants to grow out and up, which is the first of our positions engaged in vertical activity. Instead of being fascinated by improving in current functionality, Filly/Colt grasps that he or she is the equivalent of a youngster and that there is much to do in the metaphorical process of growing up. Filly/Colt does not mistake his or her current accomplishment for the full polish of a seasoned professional, but sees evolution into this identity as eminently possible. Mastery comes from application of knowledge, so like Scooter Guy/Gal; Filly/Colt sees knowledge as useful. Filly/Colt embraces on-going development and sees a growth trajectory, all of which implies reflective capacity. Interpersonally, there is an awareness of social context and differences between people, along with a belief that these differences can be bridged. Filly/Colts want to run in fields, try out their growing sense of agency, and to gain experience and develop as thinkers and leaders.

The next identity metaphor, Escalator Person, is engaged in identity work that incorporates a vision of growing into a new view of his or her world, with the insight that knowledge can be transforming. The personally transformational (Mezirow, 2000) power of knowledge is acknowledged, but hasn't reached its full elaboration. Metaphorically, the escalator is mid-way between floors and is rising. This identity metaphor is full of possibilities and is deliberately open-minded. Like Filly/Colt, Escalator Person is engaged in vertical activities, with growth to a new perspective on the horizon. Until the next level is within sight, it is invisible (Kegan, 1994), so Escalator can see there is a floor above, but hasn't reached it yet. To an Escalator Person, it is possible that a new view of self and others can come about with an open mind.

Active in self-awareness, he or she seeks insight on personal strengths and weaknesses, with an intention to address them. The development of critical thinking is highly valued. In regard to other people, becoming conscious of other's views is a rich experience. Escalator Person is receptive to insights, sees future horizons and wants to become the best person he or she can be. The identity work is, *I want to open my mind*. This can include working on developing critical thinking, cultivation of abstract thinking and capacity for analysis. There is a sense that knowledge has the potential to transform perspectives. The sense of self is being cultivated is, "I am in readiness for the future, although I can't see it. I embrace thinking about thinking. I am poised for change and am willing to address my personal strengths and weaknesses. Just outside my line of vision, I'm beginning to see the outline of whom and what I can be in the future." For students who have a sense that their views and even sense of self can be profoundly influenced by engaging in graduate studies, helpful questioning by faculty encourages comparison and reflection, as in, "Could you take the other person's perspective and restate the conflict?" Encouragement of dialogue based on a student's emergent sense of knowing and agency is another possible means for supporting this work.

For Journeyman knowing and transformation occur through experiencing and reflection on experience. Knowing is processual; knowing is doing. Journeyman wants to experience learning, growth and change. In the inner world, there is awareness that perceptions of self have changed and in relation to the outer world, Journeyman can see how others perceive him or her. There is a striking emphasis on the role of experience for Journeyman. While not diminishing the importance of formal learning, experience is a constant theme. Reminiscent of Cook and Brown's (1999) epistemology of practice and Besley and Peters (2005) performative epistemology, Journeyman engages in vertical activities that build on doing and experience. Journeyman is highly reflective about his or her own perceptions. For Journeyman, the identity work is, *I want to cultivate perspective shifts*. It can include taking material that is being learned and trying it out by reconsidering past experience in light of this new content. Involved in developing mastery, there is recognition of personal change and the desire to keep experiencing and reflecting, with the hopes of continued growth. The sense of self is being cultivated is, "I seek new perspectives and discover them as I take action. I enjoy learning from listening to other people's experiences. Having a new way of thinking changes my vision of how things work."

Students who are involved in developing knowing, rather than gaining skill sets as a primary goal, are likely to engage in a good deal of reflection on experience and to enjoy the challenge of action-type independent projects. Rather than being driven to meet criteria, they are more likely to take ownership of their own projects, with clarity that learning can mean a lot more than earning grades. To Architect, knowledge is transforming. Architect designs his or her life, which means generating perspectives and reintegrating them into more complex views. An Architect seeks growth in self-awareness and regards interpersonal interactions as containing mutual influence. Architect wants to let perspectives interact. The sense of self being cultivated is, *I want to generate and integrate perspectives*. This can include wide-ranging curiosity about seemingly remote topics. Support and challenge from faculty can be received in the spirit in which they are offered. From Mirror Persons to Architects, there is a very wide range in how these graduate students undertake their hidden curriculum of identity work. Taking the view that we are faced with this range every day in our classes and that we are unwitting participants as this work unfolds is a stimulating perspective. Pragmatically, it has meant that we are more reflective about our role as we engage with our students in mutual creation of a transitional space.

## **6. Limitations/Conclusion**

One limitation to our study is that we relied on data generated by students interviewing each other. Their responses could have been influenced by the nature of their relationships or their common experiences.

Also, we understand that using metaphor comes with its own limitations. The use of metaphor can result in imposed meaning not reflected in the original perceptions and words of the participants (Robert & Kelly, 2010). This limitation was mitigated by our consensus process of data analysis which included two researchers. Once a good metaphor is created, it can be tempting to be overly wedded to it. However, metaphor can also result in unforeseen and surprising insight. Horton (2002) writes, "even the supposedly shared act of attending university as a midlife student is not shared at all, save outwardly. Metaphor usage can illuminate just how different or similar the encompassing perceptions are" (p. 286). We found metaphor allowed us to layer and make sense of complex, abstract ideas in concrete images.

Our purpose in this study was to understand what students are "up to," the hidden agendas while in graduate school. As a result of this study we created a theory with two strong components: 1) identity work, influenced by our prior knowledge of adult development and 2) students' Knowledge Modus Operandi, which stretched our understanding of epistemology.

We spent hours in consensus building to categorize and code interview data. We aimed for originality and playfulness and simultaneously, strove for usefulness. In the end we generated concepts to explain the tacit and overt work engaged in by our students. Our study offers an empirically-based, creative theory of identity work. It also provides a unique perspective on students' epistemology by identifying Knowledge Modus Operandi. The study captures the implications for higher education interactions between teacher and student and highlights the potential for examining our practice in new ways. The metaphors, expressing the overt and tacit work engaged in by students, help us to understand our students better and are a potentially infectious, easily-adoptable short-hand for a form of diversity we encounter as professors.

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**Table 1. Knowledge M.O. and Identity Metaphors**

Identity Metaphor N = 63	Knowledge M.O. (Use of and Relationship to Knowledge)	Identity Metaphor Sentence	Identity Work (In Search Of...)	Sample Quotes
Mirror Person N = 4	Knowledge is an entity	I already know how everything works.	I want <u>endorsement</u> : So other people give me respect. So doors open to me	"[I] think that my way to leadership is a natural path because I have the natural characteristics to be a good leader and by obtaining the MA I am improving or getting the characteristics that I do not have."
Map N = 25	Knowledge is an entity	I hope and think I can set the right course for my life, according to the stated requirements.	I want to <u>match up</u> : Correct past performance. Overcome lack of confidence Fix gaps and flaws	"It will give me a degree of credibility." "Achieving my master's degree will show that I am able to complete a goal I set for myself." "Once the degree is obtained it will be giving the folks who said I couldn't a slap in the face" "[In my field] if you don't have at least a master's you aren't trusted as much as someone that has a graduate degree."
Scooter Guy/Gal N = 11	Knowledge is a tool	I learn skills that help me do things I haven't done before.	I want to improve how I <u>navigate</u> : Job Everyday life Career advancement	"I've seen the benefit of taking classes through learning new skills. I use these skills everyday by thinking strategically and purposefully." "It will allow...me to make managerial leadership decision(s). I'll be more knowledgeable and conscious of decisions that I make."
Filly/Colt N = 8	Knowledge is a tool	I learn new skills and can see that I will evolve. I am embedded in social context.	I want to become I want fields to run in so I can <u>develop</u> : As a leader As a thinker	"I have gained insight and clarity in resolving problems, utilizing problem solving skills and strategic planning." "It will provide me additional skills to manage staff, better understand myself, and enable me to lead groups, organizations and people in the future."
Escalator Person N = 8	Knowledge CAN BE transforming	I am poised for change and keep options open (but don't rush me.)	I want to <u>open myself</u> to insights and future horizons: To address my strengths and weaknesses To think critically, To become the best person I can be	"I want to develop a more open mind...think more abstractly, deal with more concepts, manage others effectively and learn about myself." "It will open my eyes to effective communication styles and leadership behaviors in order to make a difference in organizations." "It is giving me an idea of a big picture."
Journeyman N = 5	Knowing is doing	I was an apprentice, have become a journeyman and want to be a master. I want to experience learning, growth and change.	I want to <u>cultivate</u> perspective shifts.	"This is challenging me to dig deeper, my experiences and reflect upon them. It's given me an opportunity to grow and develop." "My experiences are already affecting my career as I have been able to define connections, resources and higher goals." "It's giving me a new way of thinking as a group, as a team, and because I'm learning more about sharing the tasks, responsibilities and rewards...this is a new vision of being a leader."
Architect N = 2	Knowledge is transforming	I open my life holistically.	I want to <u>generate and integrate</u> perspectives.	"It has brought me happiness, first and foremost. It has given me a stronger understanding of myself, but also others." "It gives me confidence to influence strategy, i.e. – to place more input during meetings at work and be more innovative and implement more strategies." "I have a better insight of life as a whole."