

**Sisters in Crime:  
Developing Analysis of a Learning Organization  
Through Critical Feedback**

A SSHRC Internal Research Grant Study  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Researcher: Dr. Patricia A. Gouthro

**Participant Information Package**

## **Introduction**

This study emerged from my combined personal interest in mystery writing and my academic interest in women and lifelong learning. As a professor in Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning at Mount Saint Vincent University, the primary focus of my research has been on women's learning and learning around citizenship, civil society (which includes community-based organizations), and governance. As a part of my research program I am interested in exploring opportunities for learning in grassroots, community-based organizations. In this study I am exploring some of the possibilities for learning in an organization that has a central focus on women and their work as crime fiction writers. The concept of the learning organization is gaining momentum as government, industry, and academia are all interested in exploring strategies to facilitate learning throughout the lifetime (although not always with the same objectives in mind). I am interested in finding out more about the characteristics of learning organizations that are supportive of women's learning experiences and that support learning in community-based contexts.

In the Fall of 2004 I attended the Bouchercon conference as I wanted to learn more about writing and publishing in crime fiction. At the conference I attended a presentation at a breakfast hosted by the *Sisters in Crime*, which was my first introduction to the organization. I was impressed with the focus of the organization, the mandate towards inclusion, and the clever strategies that women devised to tackle sexism in a way that did not alienate others.

This research project has developed as a way to learn more about *Sisters in Crime* as a unique learning organization that supports women (and men) in the field of crime fiction. You are being asked to participate in the second phase of the research project, which is a follow-up feedback loop in which I am asking participants to reflect upon a presentation and/or written summary of my findings from the initial research project. The preliminary analysis reveals that understanding the components of an organization that has grown from a small group of women to an international organization with members coming from diverse backgrounds is not an easy task. An additional complication has been the realization that changes in the field of publishing which are increasingly being shaped by the forces of globalization and emerging technologies are also an influence upon the organization and its members. I believe that my initial analysis can be strengthened by receiving an additional layer of feedback from participants who are members of SinC and who understand, better than anyone else, the complexities of this organization and the field of mystery writing.

This package includes a brief overview of my research background as well as a letter that outlines the components of informed consent that are an integral part of this research study, so I ask you to please review this and let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Following that is a short list of questions. If you choose to participate in this study, I would invite your response to these, once you have had a chance to review the information around informed consent.

Thank you!

Dear Participant,

You are being asked to participate in a research study that involves a feedback loop from participants responding to the initial findings of a research study in which I examined *Sisters in Crime* as a unique women's learning organization. This study is funded through an internal university research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The benefit of this research will be to increase our understanding of grassroots learning organizations, in particular, in the field of crime fiction. From this we can learn more about the challenges that women authors face, and the supports and policies that can be implemented to facilitate their learning opportunities.

I will be sharing an oral presentation and written summary report with potential participants that overviews the initial findings of my research study on Sisters-in-Crime. You are being asked to provide feedback on these findings in one of the following ways:

First of all, participants may provide oral and/or written feedback after I have given the presentation on the research project at the conference session. Notes will be taken on questions and responses made directly to the researcher after the presentation at the conference.

Secondly, if you would like to take time to provide more a more detailed response, I invite you to answer the brief, open-ended set of questions included in this package. Responses may be returned in one of the three following ways:

- Put in the box at the door after this session concludes
- Mailed back to the researcher
- The questionnaire may also be downloaded off of the website and then emailed as an attachment back to the researcher

If you choose to fill the questionnaire out and return this then this will be taken as consent that you are willing to share this feedback with the researcher. You are not asked to include any identifying information. While I cannot guarantee anonymity, I will follow the following precautions to keep your identity secret. No names will be used in publications that come from this research and I will change or delete any features that I deem may risk identification from the responses, ie. names of family members. The only other individuals who will have access to your responses will be my research assistants, and they will sign an agreement of confidentiality. The data will be kept in a locked cupboard and destroyed six months after the study is completed. The responses may be used to provide data for academic papers, a book and/or papers directed to a broader audience than the academic field. Quotes from your responses may appear in these papers and may be used in other presentations (ie. at academic conferences). Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and it entails minimal risk to you. If you have any questions about the research study, please feel free to contact me at [patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca](mailto:patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca) or (902) 457-6103. If at any time, prior to, during, or after the study you have any concerns about the way in which the research was conducted, please feel free to contact the Chair of the University Ethics Committee at Mount Saint Vincent University, c/o the Research and International Office at (902) 457-6350. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Patricia Gouthro

## Information on Research Investigator

**Dr. Patricia A. Gouthro**  
**Associate Professor**  
**Faculty of Education, Mount Saint Vincent University**  
**Halifax, Nova Scotia**  
**B3M 2J6**  
**(902) 457-6103**

[patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca](mailto:patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca) (work)

[pgouthro@accesswave.ca](mailto:pgouthro@accesswave.ca) (home)

### Educational Background

B.A. and M.A in Sociology from the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario  
Ph.D. in Foundations in Education from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

### Teaching Background

Patricia Gouthro has experience teaching in community colleges, through her own business, and as a part-time faculty member in undergraduate sociology courses. For the past ten years, since completing her Ph.D., she has had a full-time faculty appointment at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is currently an Associate Professor and program coordinator of the Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning program in the Faculty of Education.

### Research Background

Patricia Gouthro has published research in a number of different academic journals, including *Studies in Continuing Education*, *Teaching in Higher Education*, the *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, *Convergence*, and the *Canadian Journal for Studies in Adult Education*. Her research interests focus on understanding the emerging trends in lifelong learning. She is particularly interested in women's experiences in lifelong learning and in developing a critical feminist theoretical framework for analysis. Drawing upon her experience in teaching in Jamaica through the Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning program, she has also written on the challenges of teaching in cross-cultural contexts and conducted life history interviews with Jamaican adult educators. She recently completed a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded grant on lifelong learning trajectories for women in Canada. She has also completed one Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) grant on active citizenship, and is currently working on another CCL grant on citizenship, community-based organizations, and governance. In addition, she is currently working on a research project to investigate Sisters in Crime as a women's learning organization.

**Faculty Website:** <http://www.msvu.ca/Education/faculty/pgouthro.asp>

**Research Website:** [www.lifelonglearningresearch.ca](http://www.lifelonglearningresearch.ca)

## **Questions for Participants**

**Instructions:** Please feel free to answer these questions any way you wish. You may want to respond to some of the findings that were presented, but you may also decide to bring in different or alternative perspectives that have not yet been taken up by the researcher. Only answer the questions that you wish to respond to. \* The following page can also be used for additional comments/questions to the researcher.

Mailing Address is included on researcher biography sheet. To respond electronically, please go to [www.lifelonglearningresearch.ca](http://www.lifelonglearningresearch.ca) and go to the Sisters-in-Crime section to access these questions.. Responses can be emailed as an attachment to [patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca](mailto:patricia.gouthro@msvu.ca)

**Can you tell me about your connection to the Sisters-in-Crime organization?**

**Do you think that Sisters-in-Crime has sustained its focus as an organization to support women mystery writers? Can you explain your response?**

**What do you think are the differences/commonalities of participating in Sisters-in-Crime at the local chapter level in comparison to being involved with the national (international) level of the organization?**

**What do you believe are the strengths of the Sisters-in-Crime organization?**

**What do you believe are the most significant challenges facing the Sisters-in-Crime organization?**

**Any additional comments/questions that you would like to contribute:**

**Thank you!**

