

PERSISTING FROM THE MARGINS: THE JOURNEYS
OF THREE WOMEN OF COLOR TO AND IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Barbara F. Kessel

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Education, Culture, and Society

The University of Utah

August 2016

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in poststructural feminist theory and feminist race theories, this qualitative study explores the education trajectories of three Women of Color for insights into their persistence to and in higher education. Specifically, through narrative analysis of the participants' authoring and re-authoring of their student subjectivities, this research investigates the relationship between lived experiences, complex identities, and education decision-making. Data were generated in a university class that employed (post)critical feminist pedagogy to center education experiences of underrepresented students. Data included participants' education histories, journals, and class assignments, participant interviews, and classroom observations. Findings illustrate how attending to students' situated contexts and lived experiences provides better understandings of persistence to and engagement with higher education. The three case studies presented point to the necessity of understanding the role families play in persistence to higher education in more complex ways to build upon the multiple forms of capital and support that families provide in students' trajectories to higher education. A second finding was that histories of participation in earlier schooling, specifically experiences with racism, sexism and classism, created challenges to engaging with education. Findings showcase the agency with which participants drew upon lived in re-authoring themselves to persist with and in higher education.

Dedicated to Mom and Dad

&

Bryan and Bri

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank the three women who participated in this story for giving so generously of their time and sharing their lives so intimately with and through me. *October*, *Crimson Butterfly*, and *OMITTED*, you have been a great inspiration and have pushed me to complete this dissertation work so that the important insights from and questions raised by your stories can be brought to a wider audience. I was fortunate to conduct research in a Gender Studies class. Thank you, Dr. Susie Porter and Dr. Kim Hackford-Peer for facilitating the experience.

My sincere gratitude to the department of Education, Culture, & Society for financial support during the early years of the Ph.D. program and for the wealth of learning provided through my teaching assistantship. The Steffensen Cannon family provided financial support through the scholarship established in memory of Ellen Cristina Steffensen Cannon. Thank you for this generous gift.

I would like to thank the members of my committee: Dolores Delgado Bernal, Donna Deyhle, Leticia Alvarez Gutiérrez, and Barbara Dray for their wisdom and insights, their encouragement, and their patience throughout my dissertation journey. I was especially fortunate that my chair, Dr. Verónica Valdez, joined our faculty just as I was beginning my doctoral journey and that I was her teaching assistant during my first year in the program. Her wisdom, patience, and mentorship as a scholar, researcher, and educator were all critical to my successful completion of this journey.

There have been many friends and colleagues who have made this process enjoyable, bearable, and possible. Thank you, Alicia DeLeón, Delila Ombërbašić, and Irene Ota for your friendship and support. Our regular check-ins and grounding reminders to one another kept me sane during the most grueling parts of this journey. My writing group deserves special thanks: Judith Flores Carmona, Belinda Otukolo Saltiban, DeeDee Mower, Sundy Watanabee, and Kim Hackford-Peer, I appreciate your insights, scholarship, and sharing laughter, tears, challenges and solutions along the way. You have been friends, mentors and sister scholars. I witnessed each of you become doctoras! Your successes have brought great joy and inspiration. There are several dear friends who have been with me since long before I began this crazy academic journey and have remained present through some of the most difficult moments of my life. Thank you Robin Maxon, Bismilla Harjhoon, Theresa Palacio and Sheila Barela.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. Words cannot express my love and gratitude for my Mom and Dad, who filled the well of strength I draw from to realize my dreams and transcend life's challenges. Though they are physically gone, they are always with me. Thank you to my seven siblings, their spouses and my nieces and nephews and my in-laws, Diane and Eric for your love, laughter, and the strength of family. I lovingly remember my nephew James, who passed away in 2010.

Bri, since you were 3 years old, you've thirsted to see and explore the world. You are my every-day impetus for making it a better place, which is a gift beyond measure. Above all, I thank my troubadour extraordinaire for patience, encouragement, grounding, caretaking, joy, and love during the many years of academic work. Bryan, thank you for the music and for so much more.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Discourses proclaiming the importance of and the opportunities afforded by education have been longstanding in the United States. Massachusetts' first Secretary of Education and advocate for the establishment of the common school, Horace Mann (1979), famously argued in 1848: "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (p. 124). Mann believed that with an educated populace the grave disparities between wealth and poverty, and the problems that accompanied such disparities, would be eradicated. Education was also seen as the means to establish common values in a burgeoning republic of diverse immigrants. Education, through a common school system, would not only produce upright citizens, but also would solidify strong capitalistic and nationalistic values that would bind the young republic together (Tyack, 2000). These ideas reflect what has been and continues to be a popular conviction: that education has the power to fulfill personal aspirations and to reform society. K-12 public schooling is now not only free and available throughout the country, but also compulsory in the United States, and postsecondary education has come into sharp focus as an educational goal. Postsecondary education is now seen as necessary to achieve middle-class status. Indeed, postsecondary education is seen as key to national objectives as well as personal success.

The discourses asserting the necessity of higher education in the United States have taken on increasing urgency in recent years. In 2009, President Barack Obama introduced The American Graduation Initiative and later introduced the Obama-Biden agenda for College Affordability. A primary goal of these initiatives is for the United States to position itself as a global leader in the number of its citizens who are college graduates by 2020 and to increase young adults' certificate and college degree completion. While these initiatives continue to relate to motivations to firmly situate the United States as a global power technologically and economically, there is little argument that postsecondary education has considerable economic, social, and quality of life benefits for individuals who obtain college degrees. The discourses enumerating these benefits increase the allure of pursuing higher education.

Day and Newburger (2002) report that while high school graduates earn an average of \$1.2 million over their working lifetime, individuals with Bachelor's degrees earn nearly twice as much—about \$2.1 million. According to the College Board (2015), obtaining a college degree also increases the likelihood for being employed in a position that offers health and pension benefits and decreases the chance of unemployment and poverty. Conversely, there is a strong sense that not pursuing postsecondary education forecloses career and employment opportunities. The Lumina Foundation (2010) estimates that by 2018, nearly two thirds of all jobs in the United States will require a college education. Beyond career and economic benefits, college graduates are more likely to report higher levels of happiness and satisfaction. They are more likely to vote, donate blood, tolerate different views, and be involved in community activities. Increased education is highly correlated to health, mortality, financial security, and general

wellbeing (Putnam, 2000).

Given the benefits of obtaining a college degree, the seeming perils of not participating in postsecondary education, and the circulating discourses in popular media that support these positions, it is not surprising that most students and their parents believe that they will pursue and obtain a college degree (National Center for Higher Education Statistics, 2012). Indeed, getting a college degree has become an important part of striving for the American Dream, particularly for Students of Color. Based on a Public Agenda survey of the public's attitudes and opinions regarding higher education, Foleno and Immerwahr (2000) found:

Higher education is perceived as extremely important, and for most people a college education has become the necessary admission ticket to good jobs and a middle-class lifestyle. Parents of high school students place especially high importance on a college education, and African American and Hispanic parents give college an even higher priority than do white parents. (Foleno & Immerwahr, 2000 p. 2)

As the above discussion suggests, from the macro-level discourses circulated by the Federal government to the micro-level desires of parents' to secure better futures for their children, higher education is seen as an opportunity worth pursuing. Yet despite the perceived importance or worth of higher education, and the belief by most parents and children themselves, that they will go to college, nearly 40% of students graduating from high school do not enroll in postsecondary education after graduation. Further, of those who do, 25% do not return for a 2nd year (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education [NCPPE] & National Center for Higher Education Management Systems [NCHEMS], 2007). Researchers of higher education have traditionally sought to understand this phenomenon through attention to two main questions: Who doesn't make it to college? And, why?

The first question has been answered fairly clearly, at least in terms of broad demographics. The discrepancy between postsecondary educational aspirations and postsecondary degree pursuit and attainment continue to be particularly pronounced for those from Communities of Color, from low-income backgrounds, and from families in which parents have not attended or completed college. Though it is important not to conflate the three groups, Students of Color are overrepresented among families of low income and those in which parents do not have a college education (Kelly, 2005; Mortenson, 2010; National Center for Higher Education Statistics [NCHESES], 2012; NCHEMS, 2007). The information about who is underrepresented in college is not new. Indeed, limitations in access to, and retention in, higher education for low-income, first-generation students, and Students of Color¹ have been acknowledged for decades (Lawrence & Matsuda, 1997; Tierney, 1992). The phenomenon of persistent underrepresentation of Students of Color has been the subject of considerable research and has often been referred to as the achievement gap in higher education. Taking a more critical stance, I refer to the pervasive underrepresentation of low-income and Students of Color in higher education as the opportunity gap, to reflect the unequal access to quality education that exists for underrepresented minorities and low-income students at every segment of the education pipeline from prekindergarten to postgraduate schooling (Astin, 2003; King, 2010; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011).

¹ Drawing upon aggregate statistics, Asian American students are not considered to be underrepresented in higher education. However, as disaggregated statistics reflect, several ethnic minorities within the Pan Asian group are underrepresented in higher education, including Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian students. I include these underrepresented Asian students through the use of the term Students of Color.

Understanding the opportunity gap in higher education is puzzling when one considers that there are continually calls for increased diversity in higher education. Lee Bollinger (2002) argues “racial and ethnic diversity are critically important to a modern education for all students” (p. 1). Bollinger further states that the importance of diversity in higher education is understood

by virtually every major institution in our society, including all of higher education - the Association of American Universities (AAU), the American Council on Education (ACE), the Department of Justice, churches, labor unions, and elementary and secondary school educators, General Motors, and twenty other Fortune 500 corporations. The corporations argue in their brief that racial and ethnic diversity in higher education is vital to their efforts to hire and maintain an effective workforce prepared for the opportunities presented by a global economy. They state that managers and employees who graduated from institutions with diverse student bodies demonstrate creative problem-solving by integrating differing perspectives; exhibit the skills required for good teamwork; are better prepared to understand, learn from, and collaborate with persons from other racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; and are more responsive to the needs of all customers. (Bollinger, 2002, p. 1)

Considering, then, that there are appeals from the President to increase college attendance and completion rates; desire by families from communities most underrepresented in higher education for young people to complete college (Foleno & Immerwahr, 2000); a clear understanding that low-income and Students of Color are underrepresented in college; and calls to increase the diversity of students in higher education, the continued underrepresentation of low-income and Students of Color is, on the surface, perplexing.

Ladson-Billings (2006) discusses the continued disparities in education in terms of the education debt that has accumulated over years of discrimination against low-income and Students of Color by the education system. The pervasive disparity in education attainment can be understood, she argues, by understanding the historical,

economic, sociopolitical, and moral policies and decisions that have contributed to the education debt. This framing of the reasons for disparities in education takes into account the legacy of inequities in education over time including denial of or limited access to education (historical); the unequal funding of schools as well as socioeconomic disparities that are correlated to years of schooling (economic); rolling back of affirmative action and the exclusion of parents from participation in their children's schooling (sociopolitical); and finally, knowing what is right, but doing something different (moral). The accumulation of these debts over time, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues, could not but lead to a disparity in education outcomes for Students of Color.

Yet often times the underrepresentation of students from low-income families and Students of Color is discussed as "college choice," with an eye to who chooses to go to college and the decisions they make. Trying to understand the issue in these terms is tantamount to saying "What's wrong with these people?" The oversimplified and uncritical implications of the term "choice" are discussed in the literature review. I retain it here to refer to the body of literature that corresponds to understanding who does or doesn't apply to college and the decisions that are made around higher education. Researchers have approached these questions, drawing from many perspectives and utilizing several units of analysis (Perna & Thomas, 2006). Considerable research has focused on specific variables related to the question of who doesn't make it to college by studying race and/or ethnicity (Bensimon, 2005; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Osegura, 2005, Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011) or socioeconomic status (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Oseguera & Astin, 2004). To understand why students have not pursued higher education, research has considered factors such as school context

including campus and school climate, tracking, and college preparation curricula (Louie, 2007; Perna, 2006; St. John & Asker, 2001); lack of academic preparation (Eccles, 2005; Perna, 2004); and family influence (An, 2010; Karen, 2002; Kim & Schneider, 2005). Less research has focused on students' experiences of navigating through the education system to enroll and engage in higher education (Louie, 2007).

The conflicting discourses surrounding higher education—who desires and has access to it; what factors contribute to its pursuit and success; and its purposes, costs, and benefits—are taken up and circulated by researchers and the media. These discourses also reflect and are reflected by the multiple layers of context that influence a student's education trajectory. Perna and Thomas (2006) argue that student success in accessing and persisting in higher education is determined in part by a student's situated context that includes, but is not limited to, students' demographic features, their social and community context, their interactions with universities including attempts to recruit them, and, at the macro-level, social, economic, and policy context. Given the multiple factors that contribute to a student engaging with higher education, there has been increased acknowledgment of the need to study student achievement and higher education decision-making in more complex ways (Koyama, 2007; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011) and the need for student voices in such research (Jones, 1997; Jones, 2009; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

Indeed, considering the education gap simply in terms of statistics or broad demographics discounts the experiences of many students who face considerable challenges to pursuing higher education. For example, a study on the gaps in higher education access and persistence (NCES, 2012) points to a growing gender gap in which

women outnumber men in the following racial and ethnic groups: White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. What such broad statistics leave unexamined are the ways that multiple identities and identifications that include race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, and age come together with the roles of student, parent, caretaker, and worker, among others to create the contexts within which individuals make decisions about higher education. For example, as noted above, several underrepresented ethnic Asian groups are rendered invisible when their numbers are subsumed in Pan Asian student statistics.

Similarly, as Rollock (2007) argues, looking at engagement with education solely in terms of numbers renders Black girls invisible against the highlighted challenges of their male counterparts. Likewise, increased enrollment in higher education of women across many racial and ethnic categories does not mean that women are uniformly succeeding in higher education, that their challenges have been eradicated, or that this is an area that does not warrant further inquiry. In order to tackle the opportunity gap in higher education, then, it is important, foremost, to name the historical and continued inequities that are produced and reinforced through power relations. Indeed, as the data from this research suggest, the challenges that face underrepresented Students of Color, low-income, and first-generation students, such as lack of guidance toward college, difficulty paying for college, and exclusionary campus environments, to name a few factors, are as salient for Women Students of Color and they are reflected in their experiences, even as they persist to and through higher education. Further investigation, then, is necessary to determine both how to ameliorate these conditions for all students in relation to the pursuit of postsecondary education, and to consider how Women of Color

persist to higher education despite continuing to face multiple challenges to doing so.

The research presented in this dissertation considers the disparities in higher education through a feminist approach that aims to understand the multitude of factors that influence the trajectory to college from the perspectives of three Women Students of Color. Centering the women's narratives of their trajectories to higher education, this study approaches the question of the opportunity gap in higher education through an interest in how these Women of Color *made it* to college and how they author their stories to reveal their trajectories to higher education. Rather than erasing the challenges they faced, in light of their successful engagement with higher education, I point to the complexity of their trajectories, the strength they drew from their lived experiences, and how they practiced agency in authoring and re-authoring themselves as students to persist to and in higher education.

This inquiry began through my explorations of my own movement through the education system as a first-generation college student from a low-income family who pursued higher education despite many challenges along the way. As I reflected back on my experiences, I thought about my family and extended family, my peers, and growing up in rural North Dakota. I wondered what made some of us pursue higher education, and how and why it became a defining part of my own life. As someone who is now pursuing postsecondary education at the highest level of doctoral studies, I often find the difficulties I experienced along the way erased, as my successes in education have become part of the larger story of the overrepresentation of women generally, and White women especially, in higher education.

I developed an interest in the intricacies of education stories of other graduate

students I knew, quickly coming to realize the breadth of experiences and importance of situated context in making decisions to pursue higher education. I was fascinated not only by my peers' education trajectories, but also with their tellings of how they pursued higher education, their challenges to doing so, and how their complex identities and identifications mattered in that process. The research presented here is the result of the seeds planted by these early interests. It speaks to the larger richer context in which students are making decisions about higher education, and what it means to their lives. It reflects the desire to bring to light the experiences of Women of Color who are increasingly under erasure through their inclusion in disaggregated statistics in higher education. It is also a response to the call for more complex studies of student identities and student experiences in their own voices. Finally, it is a reflection of my feminist commitments to the pursuit of equity in education at all levels.

This study focuses on three undergraduate Women Students of Color, their experiences with/in the education system, and their trajectories to higher education. I pay particular attention to the development of the women's senses of themselves as students or *student subjectivities*, the moments they highlight in that process, and its importance to their education trajectory. Specifically, this research asks:

- 1) How did three Women Students of Color develop a sense of who they could/should be in relation to education (or student subjectivities) and how did their complex identities and identifications figure into this?
- 2) How did their student subjectivities matter in their decision to persist to and in higher education?

I sought to answer these questions through the investigation of the following:

- The aspirations and hopes the women assigned to higher education in their lives.
- The experiences with/in education that participants highlighted as important in the development of student subjectivities.
- The relationship between participants' complex identities/identifications, their student subjectivities, and their decision-making regarding higher education.

In order to explore the nuance of participants' experiences within their situated contexts, I present their narratives as narrative case studies in Chapters 4-7. I argue that, although case study research is not and does not aim to be representative of larger student populations, research that centers the lives and experiences of Women Students of Color can help higher education administrators and educators better attend to the nuances in the experiences of underrepresented students and in their education decision-making.

Attending to these nuances is vital in order to avoid the erasure that comes when data on underrepresentation in higher education are presented in aggregate form and discount the intricacies of student experience. Additionally, research which explores student experiences from their own complex identities and identifications, including racial, ethnic, religious, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic positionings as well as roles in which they participate such as student, daughter, parent, caretaker, and worker, fills a definitive gap in the research which tends to collapse its focus into a single line or occasionally dual lines of analysis around categories traditionally explored in relation to education such as race, gender, socioeconomic status. In privileging Women Students of Color and their self-authoring through their education narratives, and by attending to the experiences they highlight in their education trajectories, I position them as an important holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002) in understanding attainment issues in

higher education.

In my attention to their complex identities and identifications, I draw upon poststructural feminist theory which, rather than attempting to understand subjects in fixed and easily identifiable positions, works to rethink the logic of such positions. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) note: “Poststructural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its ability ever to represent the world of lived experience fully” (p. 33). At the same time, I incorporate feminist race scholars in education, who emphasize the ways that students are differently positioned and have different experiences and access to choices within schools (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Fordham, 1993) and have engaged in research that disrupts the normative understanding of girls and young women as White and middle class. Indeed, these scholars point to the need to both trace and deconstruct these normative discourses while contextualizing the lives of students in terms of their complex and multiple positionalities as gendered, raced, classed beings. The research presented here adds to this discussion, while also attending to calls by feminist researchers in general for girls and young women to be involved in the production of knowledge about themselves (Driscoll, 2002; Driver, 2007).

This study contributes to feminist studies of education and critical studies exploring the opportunity gaps and the education debt in higher education. It does so by further disrupting identity categories yet attending to students’ identifications as they author them in relation to the development of their understandings of themselves as students, and by making stronger links to the relationship between identity, student subjectivity and education decision-making. This project is designed to better understand

how students in higher education have and continue to negotiate the multiple, and at times conflicting, discourses about who they are and who they can or should be in relation to education and how this matters to their decisions around the pursuit of higher education. The relationship between students' self-identifications and their student subjectivities are primary to this exploration. The data suggest that multiplicities of identity, while perhaps requiring negotiation in relation to student subjectivity, also facilitate re-authoring of student subjectivities, allowing students to continually position themselves as agents of their education trajectories. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework utilized to guide this study: poststructural feminist theory and feminist race theories.

Scaffolding the Research: Feminist Theories

In this section, I bring together the theoretical frameworks that guide this research. Specifically I bring together poststructural feminist theory and feminist race theories. I begin by outlining poststructural feminist theory and feminist race theories, highlighting the insights produced by the tensions between them and employing them in concert to define the concepts of identity, power, and agency as they relate to the research presented in this dissertation. I then draw upon two conceptual tools from sociocultural theory in order to underscore sociocultural contexts as an important aspect of schooling. Specifically, I discuss schools as discourse communities—in which certain rules, behaviors, and participants are recognized—and histories of participation in education to apply poststructural feminist theories and feminist race theories more precisely to sites of formal education and learning.

Poststructural feminism and feminist race theories

Feminist theories are committed to the elimination of inequality, with particular attention to gender inequality. Recognizing that biological sex and the expression of biological sex through gender continues to permeate the way society generally and education more specifically are understood and researched, feminist researchers are committed to understanding the ways that sex and gender are infused in power relations (St. Pierre, 2000). While there are many strands of feminist theory, here I highlight two, bringing poststructural feminist theories into conversation with what I am broadly calling feminist race theories. Poststructural feminist theory calls into question the idea of “truth” arguing that there is no certain truth. Specifically, poststructural feminist theory argues that what counts as knowledge has been framed within enlightenment discourses.

Arguing that all knowledge is partial and situated, poststructural feminism seeks to investigate discourse, knowledge, power, and difference and how they are intertwined. In poststructural feminism, there is an attempt to keep categories of humanism, such as race, gender, and sexuality (among others), unstable, understanding that these categories are socially constructed. At the same time the significance of such categories historically as well as in specific contexts, such as higher education, are also recognized. Poststructural feminism argues that there is no preexisting self or essential self, rather “we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of available discourses” (Davies, 2000, p. 55).

Within poststructural feminism “Relations of power are complex and shifting. Resistance and freedom are daily, ongoing practices” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493) and vary greatly in different contexts and in relation to different actors. Thus, “the agency of the subject in its poststructural multiplicity is up for grabs, continually reconfigured and

renamed as is the subject itself. However, agency seems to lie in the subject's ability to decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices" (p. 504).

Feminist race theories (Anzaldúa, 2007; Collins, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; hooks, 1984; 1990; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) are often seen as being at odds with poststructural feminist theory because they seek to understand how society is organized around hierarchies including gender, race, ethnicity, language, and social class. In attempting such understandings, these theories base their analyses on the experiences lived through the identity categories that poststructural feminism seeks to disrupt. Further, in direct opposition to poststructural feminism's emphasis on the circulation and dynamic function of power, feminist race theories work to make visible the location of power that is embedded in social hierarchies as experienced by women in their everyday lives. I draw upon three specific aspects of feminist race theories in this research. First, that race and ethnicity are structuring features of society that create racial and ethnic hierarchies in the United States and specifically in institutions of formal education. Secondly, webs of power relations exist in these hierarchies, and Women of Color are positioned within them in complex ways that cannot be ignored. Nor can these experiences be reduced to simplistic race, socioeconomic, or gender analyses. Finally, there is explicit attention to experiences as lived through "intersecting structural realities" (Godinez, 2006, p. 32).

In order to highlight the ways that the women in the study authored and re-authored themselves, as acts of agency despite, or at times in response to, their lived experiences with racist, sexist, and classist institutions and people, I draw upon the work

of multiple feminist race scholars (Alcoff, 2006; Anzaldúa, 2007; Collins, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; hooks, 1984; 1990; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Villenas, 2005, 2006; Villenas & Moreno, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Specifically, I employ multiple tools from their work in order to illustrate the ways that the three Women Participants of Color drew upon their raced, sexed, and classed positions along with their multiple roles as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, students, and workers to author their student subjectivities and persist to and in higher education. Employing tools from across multiple feminist race theories is especially valuable in illustrating the complexity of the women's identities and identifications. I draw from Delgado Bernal's conception of pedagogies of the home (2001) to speak to the ways that the women in this study utilize lessons and strategies from their homes and communities to pursue and persist in formal education settings. Using pedagogies of the home as an overarching framework, I then draw from and expand upon Yosso's (2005) discussion of multiple forms of capital that the Women of Color participants brought to their educational pursuits. Throughout, I complexify this analysis by drawing upon additional feminist race theories to speak to the participants' multiple identities and identifications.

Drawing upon these two strands of feminism, I acknowledge, with poststructural feminism, the constructedness of identity categories and the look toward possibilities imagined in a world in which they do not matter. Further, I point to the ability to decode and recode identity within discursive formations and cultural practices as acts of agency drawn upon by participants in their authorings and re-authorings through which resistance and freedom were ongoing practices. The research asks questions such as: How is meaning produced in specific contexts and whom does it serve? Feminist race

theories provide a lens through which to analyze the real experiences of women who are both inescapably marked by such categories for the purpose of upholding systems of inequality and who often embrace communities affiliated with such categories. Further, feminist race theories illuminate the specific power relations that Women of Color experience in their lives. To bring these multiple theories into conversation, I draw upon the work of Alison Weir (2013) who employs poststructural feminism, queer theory, and race theories in order to pay attention to the ways that differences in power relations have both been built into social structures and circulate in webs of relations. This allows for a critical analysis of places of learning as historically raced, gendered, and classed institutions while also allowing for multiplicities of and shifting identity.

Identity, power, and agency in self-authoring

Drawing upon feminist poststructural understandings of subjectivity, in this dissertation, “subjectivity” is used distinctly in reference to a sense of self. Weedon (1987) writes, “subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32). I use this term often to distinguish student subjectivities—participants’ understanding of themselves *as* students—at the same time recognizing that students have multiple senses of self that shift in different spaces and contexts and in relation to others with whom they interact and in specific roles they perform. Subjectivity is about making sense of our multiplicities. Subjectivity “organizes an individual’s ideas about what it means to recognize oneself as a person, a student, a teacher, and so forth, and arranges strategies for the realization of these multiple identities” (Britzman, 1991, p. 57).

While subjectivity refers to a sense of self, it is closely connected to the term

identity, or as Britzman (1991) suggests, to the realization of multiple identities. Feminist theorists have engaged in extended debates about the purposes, usefulness, and complications of identity categories. Feminist race theorists assert that these categories are impossible to escape and must be claimed for the experiences garnered through the social locations imposed by them and, further, that they must be used as a point from which to organize and resist. Poststructural feminists have suggested that language and categories are constructed and that by employing imposed categories, we become trapped within them. Weir (2013) draws heavily from Foucault (1982) to summarize the challenges with identity in feminist theory:

The identity of a social collective enables social power and carries the hope of liberation, but it also carries the danger, for each individual, of imprisonment...the modern individual is constituted through disciplinary regimes of power that name and classify, that enable individuation only as they imprison: subjected. In short identities are both sources and ends of freedom and identities are the shackles that imprison us. (p. 2)

On one hand, identities are historically constituted through power relations and oppressions and yet resistance movements have relied upon solidarity garnered through organizing around shared identities and experiences that come out of these identities. Weir (2013) argues that even movements that have been most critical of stable identities, such as queer and trans movements, have also relied upon these identity categories for solidarity and resistance. Further, even the most insistent critics of identity agree that it cannot be escaped both for the ways that identity categories are imposed by society and for the ways that they make us intelligible to one another and ourselves. Thus identity categories are inherently bound up in power relations as they are contested and embraced.

My own feminist understandings and commitments and my analysis of participants' lived experiences with/in education necessitated putting poststructural and

feminist race theories into conversation. I find Weir's (2013) theorization of identity most fruitful for the research presented in this dissertation and for drawing connections between identity, power, and agency. Weir combines feminist theories employing poststructural theories, feminist race theories, and what I read as (post)critical theories, which offer hope for a sustained resistance without an essentialized subject or an intellectual liberator (Lather, 1992). Weir relates the importance of identity to a wanting a meaningful life:

I am not asking about the categories I belong to or the characteristics I can enumerate... I am not asking what makes me the same as others or what makes me unique. I am asking, rather, what matters to me? What is the meaning and significance to my life? In other words, to what and to whom am I attached? With what and with whom do I identify? We're talking about the experience of belonging, of connectedness, of being held together. By the values, ideas, commitments, attachments, and relationships that matter to us. (Weir, 2013, p. 70)

Here, she refers to the personal sense of oneself in terms of an individual life with a personal sense of one's life purpose. At the same time, she points to this development in relation to others. This definition of identity is both located in the individual sense of being able to hold oneself together as stable, with personal goals, values, and a vision of future possibilities, as well as in the socially interconnected sense, as this is done through one's relationship to others and through one's attachments. Attachment and relationship to others are often made cohesive and comprehensible through identity categories. Weir (2013) addresses the paradox of identity categories in this way:

Identities cannot be simply given and objective, nor can they be solely products of conscious or intentional choice. As individuals and as collectives we are engaged in a constant dialectic between the identities we find ourselves in and the identities we are creating. More than this, we find ourselves already in *identifications with* meanings, others, 'we's—identifications that are often unconscious, and in spite of intention, but whether chosen or not are intensely meaningful for us. And we develop

and transform our identities through these kinds of identifications. (p.72)

She is arguing here that identity can and does consist of individual definitions of self that allow for complexities of being *and* for belonging in communities within which one finds oneself *and* the formations of communities that come together by choice. She is clear that she is not speaking of any sort of essentialist identity, explaining that the holding together of an identity is not about maintaining sameness through time. Nor is it about insisting upon a sameness or conformity among group members. Rather, “Holding together requires the opposite: I cannot hold myself together without continual re-creation; the self has to be reconstructed and reenacted every day, through acts of self-making and self-identification” (Weir, 2013, p. 71).

It is this notion of re-creating and re-making oneself in relation to context and situation that is significant in this definition, allowing space for possibilities to author one’s future as an individual *and* to remain connected to communities of importance, including communities that rely upon identity categories while acknowledging and resisting oppressive understandings and positionings based upon them. This definition of identity also resonates strongly with what emerged in the three women participants’ narrations of their lives, particularly in relation to their experiences with/in education. Further, this concept of identity allows for an understanding of agency and power in participants’ persistence in pursuing higher education, and in authoring and re-authoring their education trajectories in spite of struggles and contradictions they faced along the way. The struggles and contradictions that participants faced along the way varied in relation to their circumstances and their social positions, which were fraught with convoluted power relations.

With Weir (2013) I argue that because identities are complex and consist of both imposed identities and identifications across communities and connections, power must be recognized as relational and contextual—we all exist and must understand our positions and relations in webs of power. This allows for recognition of agency and the ability to make choices and act upon others. It also insists upon a critical recognition of hierarchical structures in which we are placed. It requires, Weir states, “a process of transformative self-critique and self-identification. Once I realize that I am in a relation of power with you, I need to re-identify—re-cognize—myself to accommodate that recognition” (p. 79).

I refer to these re-identifications and re-cognitions of self in the current research as participants’ self-authoring. In using this term, I draw from the above discussion of identity, and agency, as outlined in Weir’s (2013) work above alongside that of Bakhtin (1981) and Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998). I utilize Bakhtin’s articulation of dialogue in understanding oneself in relation to others through language:

Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements... The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener’s, apperceptive background. (p. 282)

This idea of struggling with a sense of self with and against the consonances and dissonances results in self-authoring. Bakhtin (1981) goes on to say, “One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by

another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse" (p.347).

Holland et al. (1998), among others, rearticulates Bakhtin to emphasize the term self-authoring. In doing so, they highlight the importance of bringing inner speech to the external world. In their articulation, self-authoring takes place within a space of authoring (Bakhtin, 1981), which comes from the larger concept of one's positional identities. For the purpose of this study, Holland's work is especially useful in that she also frames self-authoring as important to identity and as an act of agency.

Aligned with the authors cited above, I argue that for the women in this study self-authorings or re-cognitions and the re-identifications of self were important acts of agency. An understanding of participants' narrations as enactments of agency is key to this research. The shifts in student subjectivities, as narrated for this study, mattered greatly to the participants' education trajectories and their current positioning of themselves in higher education. Student subjectivities were continually in flux as participants navigated higher education. In other words, in describing how they came to their current positionings as college students, participants were continually self-authoring their student subjectivities as a part of their larger identities. This self-authoring was essential to understanding their student subjectivities and their successes and persistence with/in education.

Because the study focused greatly on their trajectories through education, participants were also narrating their histories with/in education throughout the semester. As they did so, their re-creating and re-making of selves was an important part of their recognitions of themselves in relations of power. They moved through the education

system, continually drawing upon aspects of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to re-author themselves in order to engage and, for some, re-engage, and then persist in higher education. In the remainder of this dissertation, agency will be understood as the self-authoring and the re-authoring that participants undertook as they defined and pursued educational goals, their attention to the power relations that facilitated and inhibited this process, and examination of their place in this web of power relations. With these understandings of identity, power, and agency in place, I turn to a brief discussion of schools as discourse communities and histories of participation with/in education as useful tools for understanding the how participants' experiences with/in education came to bear on their trajectories to higher education.

Tools for understanding the situated contexts of schools

As in feminist theories, sociocultural theory emphasizes the socially, culturally, and historically situated nature of human activity. Additionally, there are particular aspects of sociocultural theory that are useful in understanding the social nature of schooling and learning (Teemant, 2005). I draw upon two tools that sociocultural theory applies to learning environments to help understand schools as a very specific context that is central to this study: schools as discourse communities and histories of participation in schooling. These concepts, detailed below, allow a pointed look at the practice of developing and understanding student subjectivity as situated in students' histories of participation with/in education.

Drawing from Lewis and Moje's (2003) more critical sociocultural perspective, I utilize sociocultural tools to explore the specific tensions present in participants' school communities to consider how these tensions shaped their student subjectivities. I also

utilize them to assess schools as discourse communities in which “learning draws from and constitutes ‘histories of participation’” (p. 16). This aids in analyzing participants’ understandings of their student subjectivities in relation to other facets of identity. I first provide a description of schools as discourse communities.

Moje and Lewis (2007) emphasize how opportunities to learn are both supported and constrained in schools. These experiences inform how individuals interpret who they are in relation to others; how they have come to interpret themselves as students; and how they make decisions about continued schooling or higher education. Indeed Moje and Lewis stress that learning leaves an effect beyond the moment and bears on each future act of learning. They discuss educational spaces as discourse communities conceptualized as a “grouping of people—not only face-to-face or actual in-the-moment groupings, but also ideational grouping across time and space—that share ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting and communicating, or, in Gee’s (2014) parlance, Discourses” (p.16).

Bringing sociocultural tools into conversation with the feminist approach in this dissertation, I diverge from Gee’s definition of discourse for several reasons. First, I suggest that while the ideational grouping that occurs in schools and classrooms shares *some* ways of acting and communicating, I refute the idea that schools are places where ideational groupings (i.e., students and teachers) can be assumed to share ways of knowing, thinking, and believing. Indeed, the assumption that students share ways of knowing, thinking, and believing has been highly contested in education literature and does not account for the diversity of students in classrooms or their lived experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Jehangir, 2010b; Yosso, 2005). This in turn has resulted in a perception of deficits or disfunctionalities of some students and communities, primarily

low-income and minority Students of Color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; González, Moll, & Amati, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Saltiban, 2012).

At the same time, schools are indeed places of groupings where there is a sense of shared purpose and where there are rules and expectations around acting and communicating. Thus the concept of discourse community, with some modification remains useful. Indeed, White and Lowenthal (2011) argue that although there is no singular university discourse, “The university represents a definitive example of an academic discourse community complete with specific rules for participation therein” (p. 295). Students are expected to participate in accepted intellectual, linguistic, and social standards. In marking universities as discourse communities, I employ St. Pierre’s (2000) poststructural feminist conceptualization of discourse to expand its meaning beyond linguistic and literary discussions, and to better reflect the experiences that participants narrated for this study. St. Pierre argues:

Discourse illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others... Even more important, the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world. (p. 485)

St. Pierre’s (2000) definition of discourse can effectively be applied to understand places of learning as discourse communities. This use of the concept of discourse also acknowledges the problem with assuming shared ways of knowing, thinking and believing by asking critical questions such as: By whom and for whom are schools socially and culturally produced? Which particular set of characters and actors get to speak and are and are not recognized? Which outcomes are valued, and who determines this?

These particular questions are important, as participants were continuously thinking through and reworking their student subjectivities in relation to how they were recognized, unrecognized, and misrecognized throughout their schooling experiences. They engaged these questions both from their current positions as university students and in recounting their previous experiences with schooling. Their experiences included moments of belonging, exclusion, affirmation, devaluation, hypervisibility, invisibility, centeredness, marginality, and positive recognition. Theorizing spaces of learning as discourse communities draws attention to the contexts and happenings in classrooms, schools, and the university in which this research took place. This allows me to consider the occurrences that students described in those spaces partially as a function of the *structure* of both the classroom space and the hierarchies that are naturalized in these spaces (i.e., with administrators or professors creating rules and holding institutionally sanctioned authority) and how their experiences in classrooms and schools came to bear upon future acts of learning.

A significant aspect of discourse community is that “discourse communities produce and struggle over cultural tools, resources, and identities (both within and across communities) that provide them access to discourses and thus, to the material goods” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 17). Some participants in discourse communities of learning have better access to identities and resources necessary for full participation, or for participation that is fully *recognized* within spaces of education. Understanding educational spaces as discourse communities is of value to this study in highlighting differential access to valued identities and resources as well as the consequences of differential access. Specifically, participants in this study drew heavily upon their

experiences with/in previous education settings in authoring their student subjectivities as well as in narrating their pathways to higher education, recognizing that spaces of learning required certain ways of acting, learning, and communicating. Further, their narrations illustrated that previous experiences with learning had indeed left effects beyond the moment to influence their senses of themselves as students and their decisions about the future including engagement with education.

The concept of discourse communities provides a way to consider the history of participation that each woman in this study brings to this research—how power circulated in that participation, and how it figures in to her ongoing decisions about and experiences with/in education. The shifts in student subjectivities, as narrated for this study, mattered greatly to participants' education trajectories. That is, their student subjectivities were an important part of their sense of possibility for, and their current positioning of themselves in, higher education. In describing how they came to their current positionings as students, the three Women of Color who participated in this study were continually self-authoring their student subjectivities as a part of their larger identities. In doing so, they practiced agency in continually repositioning themselves to take advantage of the promises of higher education. These self-authorings—re-cognizing and re-identification—were acts of agency, which were critical to their navigation of systems of education and to their successes and persistence with/in education. Figure 1 depicts the self-authoring of student subjectivity, which is influenced by family and situated context. Additionally, student subjectivity—participants' sense of who they are and can be as students—is both influenced by and is related to their complex identities and identifications, as well as their experiences with/in schools.

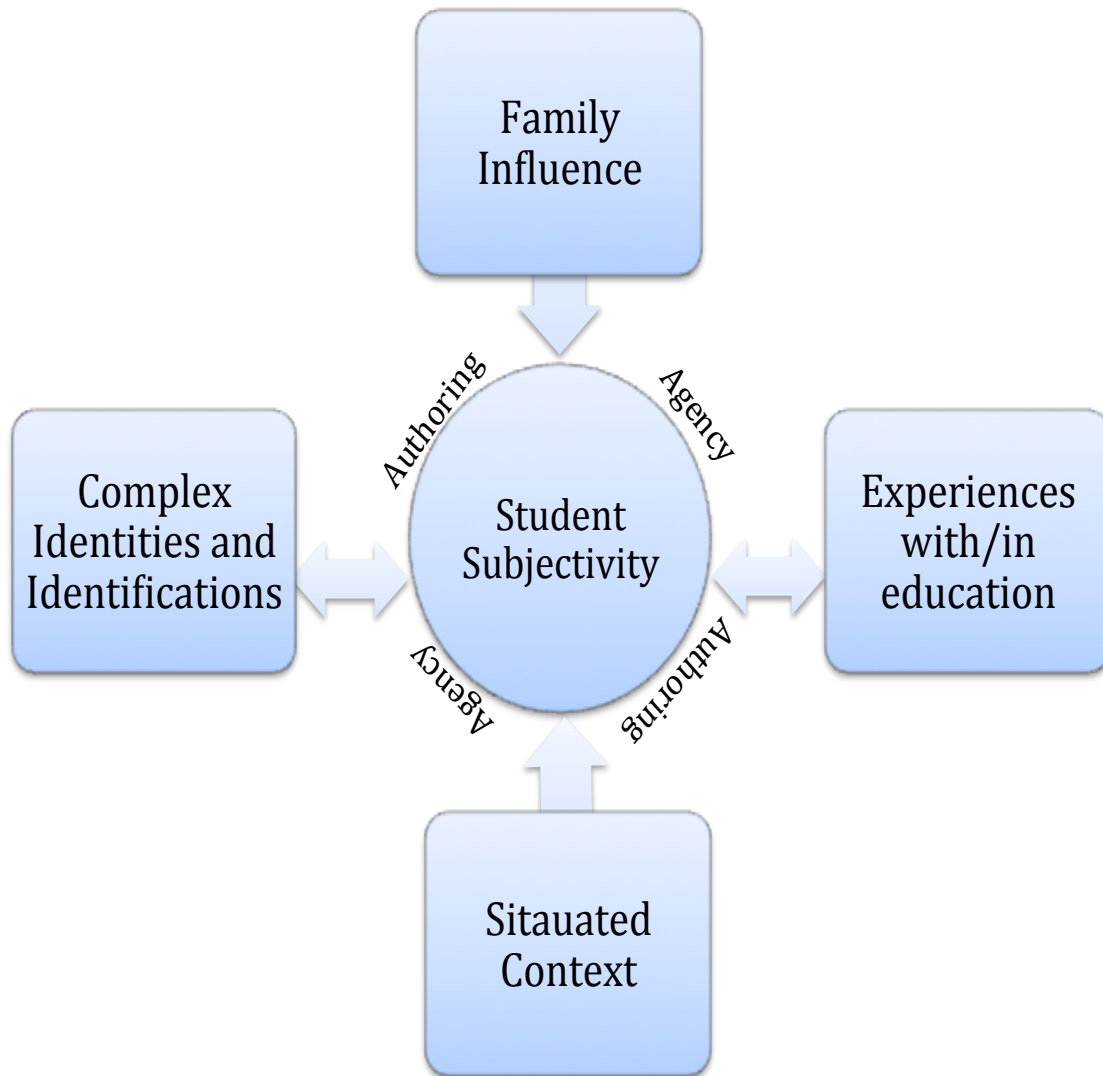


Figure 1. Student Subjectivity and Agency in Self-Authoring

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the theoretical lens used to ground this study, describing the feminist framework and the sociocultural tools employed. In doing so, I have made the case for the need for research regarding the opportunity gaps in and the pursuit of higher education from the viewpoints of three Women Students of Color who have persisted in the pursuit of higher education. I have highlighted feminist theories, with their focus on equity and equality and their attention to lived experiences of women, which pay close attention to participants' situated context, an aspect that is particularly important to this study. In the following chapter I provide an overview of the literature that brings my study into conversation with existing research in the areas of education and identity, academic identity in higher education, and the education pipeline or the pursuit of higher education. In doing so, I illustrate themes and gaps in the existing literature in these areas highlighting the strengths of this study in relation to existing research. In Chapter 3, I detail the methodology guiding this project, including an overview of the research approach, data generation, analysis processes, and ethical considerations guiding the methodological process. The second part of Chapter 3 engages in a discussion of the macro- and micro-contexts in which the study took place. Chapters 4 through 6 present the case studies of the three undergraduate Women Students of Color who participated in this study. Finally, Chapter 7 presents findings across the cases and concludes the study with a discussion of the implications for policy, practice, and further research in education.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE

The interdisciplinary approach of the inquiry at hand requires drawing upon literature across theoretical lines, disciplines, and methodological approaches. An extensive overview of the relevant bodies of literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The literature reviewed here is limited to the research and theories of identity, as it intersects with education, and education decision-making. Within these areas, the focus is further sharpened to situate this research study within conversations about student subjectivity and its relationship to decisions about postsecondary educational pursuits. For example, the discipline of psychology includes abundant research that investigates identity and education. Yet given the sociological perspective through which the current research was framed, psychology literature is drawn upon in this review only when it is part of more complex theories that emphasize micro- to macro-level analyses of student experience.

Because of the importance in considering the self in relation to social institutions such as those of the family, community, peer network, and education system, I review primarily ethnographic studies of sociology in education to inform that perspective. Similarly, anthropology of education is an important source of information foregrounding this study. As Koyama (2007) suggests: “much of what anthropology [in studies of college preparation and transitions to college] has to tell us about transitions to college is

how students negotiate schooling to create academic identifications, access and construct networks rich in social and cultural capital, and experience a sense of belonging” (p. 2304). For this reason, the anthropological study of education is an important perspective from which to consider the ways that identity has been researched in relation to engaging with higher education. Finally, in keeping with the feminist frameworks that guide this study, I review studies that place student experience at the center of research. In reviewing the chosen literature, I privilege research that situates itself in or crosses the aforementioned disciplines in the study of at least one of the following: identity and the formation of a sense of student self (also referred to as student subjectivity or academic identity), studies of the trajectory to college focusing on what has been termed college “choice,” and research in which students experiences of these are highlighted.

Identity and Education

The relationship between identity and education has a long history. From its beginnings, the public education system in the United States has relied upon identity categories to sort and hierarchize students for the purpose of educating them, creating a legacy of discrimination in schooling. Legal action and legislation has been actively pursued to redress the inherent discrimination in such practices. The landmark *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling (1954), was meant to undo some of the inequities built into the education system by outlawing racial segregation in public schools. In 1968, the passing of The Bilingual Education Act, part of Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, recognized the needs of Limited English Speaking Ability (LESA) students and provided education programs specifically for LESA students (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act

of 1972, prohibited sex (i.e., biological sex) discrimination in federally funded education programs and activities. And the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (now known as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA) requires all public schools to make a free public education available at appropriate levels and in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education). Despite the mandate of the *Brown v. Board* decision to desegregate schools, school integration had not yet been achieved by the mid-1960s. In school reform movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which again focused on creating equality in the public education system, schools were instructed to pay attention to race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, in identifying and eliminating discrimination in schools (St. Pierre, 2000).

Today, schools continue to struggle with the legacy of segregation, discrimination, and the inequities that have been built into the public school system. To date, there is no Federal legislation protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation. State laws vary in their protections of LGBTQ students. And, despite some gains in education, for example, the increase in college attendance for all 18-24-year-old high school graduates, opportunity gaps continue along lines of race, ethnicity, and social class at every level of the education pipeline from pre-K through the professoriate (King, 2010; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011). Here I am referring specifically to the link between socially constructed identity categories and the education system, which has relied upon those categories in its establishment of and research in public school systems. In the sections below, I point to research that has linked identity and education and which sets up the research that is the subject of this dissertation. Specifically, I point to research that discusses the interrelatedness of identity and learning

generally. I then move to a discussion of the term academic identity that has been used variously in research, but generally to describe the development of a learning self or an engaged learner. In doing so, I rely strongly on ethnographic studies in sociology of education and anthropology of education as well as cross-disciplinary research which draws from those traditions.

Identity and schooling

Researchers have studied identity in relation to schooling in many ways. One line of research explores students' detachment from schools from middle school to high school (Tierney, 2002). Lack of connectedness to school socially and academically has also been connected to decreased college attendance (Perna, 2006). Patterns of disconnection from school have been framed both as active resistance to schooling, as when school represents a threat to students' sense of themselves, some aspect of their identity, or their culture; as marginalization within schools; or as an interplay between being rejected by and rejecting schools (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Deyhle, 1995, 1998; Fine, Weis, & Powell, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; McDonough, 1997; Ogbu, 2003; Saltiban, 2012; Weiler, 1988; Willis, 1981). Marginalization within schools can be formal, as when students are separated through tracking and school-within-school programs, or social marginalization by peers or school personnel (Noguera, 2003; Oakes, 1985). Early resistance theories pointed to the ways that resistance can set students up for failure in the education system. For example, in framing learning as for White students and refusing to "act white" or engage with schooling, Black students in Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) study were left with little opportunity for social mobility. Other research highlights the ways that students successfully navigate schooling without losing their

cultural identity. Gibson (1988), for example, studied experiences of Sikh students in high school, describing students who were strategic in engaging in learning through accommodation and acculturation, but without fully assimilating. Students did not resist schooling, but rather found value in it and found ways to participate in school without compromising their identities.

There is a large body of research that focuses on reinforcing student engagement and a sense of belonging through multicultural curricula and classrooms. This research focuses on developing a rich curriculum that ensures quality education for students by teaching in a way that is familiar to them as well as using multiple strategies to enhance learning, and teaching critical thinking skills. Multicultural education proponents emphasize the development of a positive self-concept for all students through a reflection of the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. Further, multicultural education calls for attention to oppression and power in society (Banks & Banks, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter, 2015).

Scholarship on identity and learning has also emphasized the dynamic nature of identity construction and reconstruction in schools. Davidson (1996) explores the mutually constitutive relationship between ethnic/racial identity and learning. Specifically, she uses a sociocultural perspective to argue that identity and learning are mutually constituted in institutions of education. She is one of several scholars who discuss the ways that schools contribute to the crafting and shifting of identities (Holland & Lave, 2001; Perry, 2002; Roberts, 2001; Weis & Fine, 2000; Wortham, 2006). These studies emphasize that identities are formed through social relations, with particular emphasis on relations that develop through schooling.

Finally, drawing upon critical theories of education, critical legal scholarship, and multicultural studies in education, Scholars of Color began to link race more explicitly to racial inequalities in schools. As an important point of distinction here, much of the research cited above has also included discussions of race. However, critical race scholarship began pointing explicitly to the intrinsic nature of racism in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). Critical race theory in education has provided important tools to link education as an institution to the history of inequality in the United States more broadly and in schools specifically. This has provided several important insights into current gaps in attending higher education, as discussed in the introduction. Critical race theory as it has been applied to higher education and decision-making is reviewed in the literature on college “choice.”

The above literature, concerned primarily with K-12 studies, has established the scholarly interest in and connection between identity and schooling. Regardless of the approach taken to study the relationship between identity and schooling, it is clear that identity and learning matter to each other. In the next section, I turn the focus to studies of academic identity. This body of literature begins to make the connection to students’ sense of themselves as students, a topic of central importance to this dissertation.

Academic identity

Academic identity² is a term that is intuitively familiar in the realm of education research, yet it is poorly defined. Zirkel’s (2002) study of student role models provides

² This term is sometimes used to discuss professional identity as an academic or in discussions of faculty development (Quigley, 2011). I use the term as it has been applied to student identity in relation to education and academic success.

one of the earlier uses of the term. Though the phrase “academic identity” is used in the title, it does not appear again in the entire article. Her study is an exploration of the effect of having at least one race- and gender-matched role model on young people’s sense of opportunities available to them. She found that students with a matched role model performed better up to 24 months after the study in several measures including academic performance, thinking about their future, looking up to adults, and achievement-related goals. Her argument is that such role models are essential to seeing one’s possibilities for the future, which has implications for educational aspirations and achievement. “Put simply, young people pursue only what they can imagine as possible” (Zirkel, 2002, p. 358). Zirkel argues that mentorship by someone of the same race and gender as the student can facilitate students’ visions of their own academic success. Academic identity here is conceptualized as a sense of academic possibilities and investment in academic achievement.

Koyama (2007) argues that to experience academic identifications, students must have a sense of belonging. This is accomplished through networks of rich social and cultural capital and is possible for certain students. As she says, “students who have or gain access to capital-rich settings—particularly enhancement programs, institutionally sponsored clubs, or selective curricular tracks—fare better academically” (p. 2615). She adds that though her review of the literature mostly includes studies of high school students, students who have rich social and cultural capital are more likely to go to college and less likely to disengage from school. Importantly, she also notes that some students create academic identities that do not fall within recognized sets of “successful” strategies.

The importance of belonging in describing academic identity is also emphasized in a research study considering ethnic minority males' academic performances. Matthews (2014) specifically defines the term academic identity as a way a student gains "self-understanding and meaning by defining himself through academic values, school belonging, regard, and performance" (p. 143). Matthews develops five profiles that are derived from six dimensions of academic identity: evaluation, importance, attachment and interconnectedness, behavioral involvement, and self-efficacy. He concludes that feelings of academic identity are paramount to how students view their academic experience. Further, like many other studies exploring academic identity, Matthews argues that an individual's sense of connection to the school community is essential to having a positive view of education.

Similarly, in their review article exploring literature that "provides insight into the ingredients for academic success for URM [underrepresented minority] students at all points of the academic pipeline" (p. 443), Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper (2011) suggest that positive academic identity is highly associated with academic success. Academic identity is understood in terms of how students identify or de-identify with school. Similar to Koyama (2007), they identify a theme that is pervasive in the social sciences, and which is replicated in the research findings of this dissertation: Throughout the education pipeline, identity is important for students' academic success and persistence. Within this literature, they note the prevalence of stereotype threat, or the fear that one will reinforce negative stereotypes of a group with which they identify (Aronson, 2004; Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008) as well as its danger to the formation of positive identity and thus to academic success. Conversely, they point to research that suggests that promoting strong

identities through the affirmation of identity and racial socialization have been shown to have protective effects in a number of life domains. The most relevant for this discussion include academic achievement and motivation. Relatedly, Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper (2011) argue the importance of social support from mentors and role models. They argue for the necessity of options for identity development that allow for positive identities in relation to schooling.

Finally, White and Lowenthal (2011) argue that academic success relies upon developing an academic identity, which they conceptualize as “students’ respective exposure to academic discourse and willingness to learn and accept it” (p. 284). Drawing from sociocultural theories of literacy, White and Lowenthal focus their paper on two points: the viewpoint that academic literacy is central to success in college, including a feeling of integration, and secondly an inquiry into “the primary reasons that many minority students do not learn or appropriate this discourse” (p.285). They argue that schools, as discourse communities, require specific kinds of language use and literacies as well as the knowledge and use of the rules unique to those communities. Discourse communities, they argue, are usually exclusionary and thus “students who develop a socioculturally based literacy style that differs significantly from the literacy style used in schools start their academic careers at a major disadvantage” (p.293).

While they suggest that such acknowledgement is not a deficit view of students’ background languages or cultures, they argue that because schools privilege academic discourses, it is in the best interest of students to develop an academic identity that includes the language that is dominant on college campuses—academic discourse. White and Lowenthal (2011) pose that this does not need to replace one’s way of speaking or

writing with another, but rather allows for a form of code switching or adding another style to their speaking and writing practices. They also argue that all students shift in identity as they enter the academy and that they change and grow and “Because learning requires philosophical, epistemological, and personal change, and because learning and language are inextricably tied to identity, it is imperative that students understand the important role that identity plays in college success” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 302). What they are insisting, then, is that it is in students’ best interests to develop an academic identity that is consistent with academic discourses and codes of power. Academic identity, here, is acceptance of dominant or what has been called whitestream values—an acceptance of cultural capital of Whites as normal in the United States (Grande, 2000). Problematically, White and Lowenthal leave unquestioned the whitestreaming of universities as discourse communities, suggesting that the onus is on students to push their way into the academy—it is a unidirectional relationship.

In this section, I have reviewed the ways that academic identity has been conceived in studies of education and particularly higher education. As the literature suggests, this research is organized primarily around the importance of student belonging. Thus, it has strong parallels with the research reviewed in the section on identity and education, which focused primarily on K-12 schooling environments. This is not surprising given that, as Koyama (2007) argues in general, factors that impact college persistence and completion parallel those found to influence precollege schooling. The importance of students seeing themselves as part of learning environments comes up time and again in the literature, as we will see again in the following section on college “choice.” It was also salient in the narratives of the three Women of Color who were part

of this research study. Seeing themselves, and being seen by institutions of education, as agents and as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), is essential to students' pursuing higher education. With this in mind, I will argue for an alternative understanding of academic identity, which I refer to as student subjectivity, but first, I review the research on college "choice."

College "Choice": Closed Doors and Limited Choices

College choice research, as it is commonly referred to in the literature, has focused inquiries in many directions including which students "choose" to go to college, how students choose to go to college, who and what influences those choices, and the kinds of institutions students choose. In investigating these questions, researchers consider variables such as access to information about college, affordability, the influence of family, peer, and school personnel on choices, previous school experiences, personal beliefs, and selectivity in the colleges students choose. What remains unexamined in the term "college choice" is the assumption that students have a multitude of options available. As critical research in the areas of education argue (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002; Jehangir, 2010b; Ladson Billings, 2006; Saltiban, 2012; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) and as the data presented in Chapters 4-7 make clear, for some students, the decisions around higher education are quite limited and are often predetermined by doors that are closed to them through discriminatory practices such as tracking and exclusion throughout the pre-K through 12 pipeline. For many students who come from underrepresented populations in higher education, their entry into colleges of any caliber reflects their practical and creative cobbling together of resources and their determination. To counter the assumptions that

underlie the word choice, I refer to decision-making rather than choice, except when used by an author in her work, to reflect the difficult decisions that students make within their often-limited circumstances, about higher education.

It is clear that understanding the education decision-making process is complex and includes the aforementioned aspects, as well as others. The development of college choice models (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006) reflects increased attention to higher education decision-making as a complex process that includes situated context (Perna, 2006; Perna & Thomas, 2006). This review of this literature begins with a brief discussion of two of the choice models.

In 1987, Hossler and Gallagher developed a three-stage model to explain stages of what they call “the college choice process.” The first stage is predisposition or becoming interested in attending college. Following the predisposition stage is the search, which involves researching specific colleges as well as college-related information and applying to colleges. The third stage is choice, reflecting students choosing a specific college, enrolling and attending. A considerable volume of literature on the choice process draws from this study. Perna (2006) has suggested that this model, while a useful starting place in considering college choice, does not sufficiently attend to the multiple contexts that influence the college choice process. Building upon Hossler and Gallagher’s choice model, Perna developed a college choice model that features four layers of context that influence higher education decision-making. These layers, from proximal to distal, include 1) *Habitus*, consisting of demographic features including gender, race and ethnicity, cultural capital, and social capital; 2) Social and community context, including the influence of family, peers and community; 3) Higher education context, such as the

recruiting and other efforts by colleges and universities to attract students; and 4) Social, economic, and policy context. These factors include policies like financial aid and affirmative action that occur at a macro-level, but greatly influence college decisions for individuals (Perna, 2006). While working to address the issue of studying the situated context of students, Perna acknowledges that the model needs to be further tested and suggests that future research should examine additional dimensions of the process. She also calls for inquiries to explore “the ways in which race/ethnicity intersects with income, socioeconomic status, and/or gender to influence college-choice decisions and behaviors” (147). Indeed, these factors are essential to understanding the underrepresentation and limited choices of low-income students and Students of Color.

Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) choice model has been critiqued by some who suggest that the stages of the process may not reflect the processes of underrepresented groups (Bergerson, 2010). Most acknowledge that these models are a place from which to begin to understand the complexity of decision-making about higher education and the issues that are encompassed by the term “choice” in higher education literature. In her review of college choice literature, Bergerson notes the overwhelming disparities in college choice and the underrepresentation of low-income and Students of Color. Indeed, in the last 2 decades, studies in the area of choice have increasingly focused attention on this area. It is to this body of literature that I now turn my attention.

Recognizing the capital of underrepresented students

In the last 2 decades more critical studies on “choice” have attempted to reframe the limitations in thinking about the lack of choices for students who are underrepresented in higher education. These studies look at the ways that institutions of

higher education omit and devalue the knowledges of underrepresented students (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and position them as deficient and lacking in the skills necessary to access and succeed in higher education (Saltiban, 2012). In doing so, scholars have attempted to better understand the glaring underrepresentation of Students of Color and low-income students, emphasizing the ways socioeconomic background characteristics, race, ethnicity, and gender become part of students' decisions around and exclusion from higher education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; King, 2010; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent 1997; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Perna 2006; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

Many studies rely upon the concepts of social and cultural capital in discussing the reasons that some students have access to college and others do not. Bourdieu (1986) developed concepts of social and cultural capital as part of his structural analyses of social institutions and the ways that they maintain and reproduce privileges of dominant groups in society. Cultural capital signifies value given to cultural characteristics, such as language, cultural knowledge, and behaviors. In Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital, class status played an important part in the cultural capital that was passed down from parents to children in families. Those from higher social classes possessed the most valuable cultural capital (McDonough, 1997). Social capital refers to social networks and resources. Bringing to light the ways that social power gets reproduced in society, Bourdieu emphasized the ways that particular group membership provides social capital and the ability to maintain a dominant position in society (Perna, 2006).

Coleman (1988) applied the concept of social capital directly to schooling. He stressed the importance of social capital in sharing, through social networks and resources, the norms, language, behaviors and relationships that an individual must

undertake in order negotiate and succeed in a given context, such as institutions of education. Coleman highlights that social capital is obtained through relationship to parents and other adults, including adults in schools. Perna (2006) details education scholars' research on the ways that schools not only privilege the social and cultural capital of the White middle and upper classes, but also how schools serve to reproduce inequalities in larger society.

Studies of social and cultural capital in relation to college decision-making have been criticized on the grounds that even when they are utilized to make structural inequities visible, they are predicated on the belief that certain kinds of social and cultural capital are more valuable. This perpetuates the positioning of low-income students and Students of Color as lacking or deficient in the language, behaviors, attributes, networks, tools, and resources to be successful. As Yosso (2005) argues, race is often coded as “cultural difference” and thus the lack of social and cultural wealth become easy explanation for lower academic and social outcomes of Students of Color. It follows that researching higher education decision-making in terms of cultural capital runs the risk of posing that if students just learn academic discourses and codes of power they will be successful (see White & Lowenthal, 2011 in the above section, for example).

It seems commonsensical that if students learn the languages of power they will be more successful in accessing, entering into, and negotiating institutions of power such as colleges and universities. However, this stance leaves unquestioned the ways that institutions of higher education both devalue and exclude students from underrepresented groups, drawing upon cultural and social capital rooted in White and middle class values and privilege. This, of course, is at the crux of the problem. In attempting to understand

why low-income and Students of Color are underrepresented at institutions of higher education, research and solutions to this problem cannot be predicated upon the beliefs that maintain the exclusionary epistemologies in higher education. This is widely recognized by Scholars of Color and other researchers exploring students' education decision-making with a focus on equity and inclusion throughout the education pipeline, from prekindergarten through college.

In one of the earlier studies that reframes cultural knowledges and experiences as assets in relation to postsecondary education, Delgado Bernal (2001) explores Chicana students' journeys to college. She argues that one way that Chicana college students navigate the path to college is by employing lessons and strategies learned in the home and community. She refers specifically to "the communication, practices and learning that occur in the home and community" (p. 624) as pedagogies of the home. Delgado Bernal grounds this work in Anzaldúa's (2007) theory of *mestiza consciousness*. Anzaldúa describes the experiences of *la mestiza* who is at once Mexican, Chicana, indigenous, and queer, her languages multiple and hybrid. Despite this complexity, there is also a shared knowledge that comes from the margins. *Mestiza consciousness* develops through the multiple subjectivities of *la mestiza* and these multiple histories provide a standpoint from which to counter oppression.

Delgado Bernal (2001) analyzes her data—surveys and semistructured life history interviews focused on their educational journeys from elementary school to college—through a *mestiza consciousness* "that includes how a student balances, negotiates, and draws from her bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities in relationship to her education" (p. 628). She argues that Chicana students

knowingly and unknowingly utilize their mestiza consciousness to survive and succeed in their educational journeys to higher education. Further, their teachings from the home allow them to resist dominant deficit perceptions about their language and culture.

Following this work, Delgado Bernal (2002) called for raced-gendered epistemologies to challenge racist majoritarian views of People of Color that pervade institutions of learning and to address the complexity of experience that includes race and gender.

In a critical ethnography of poor and working-class black and Latino youth and their families, Knight, Norton, Bentley, and Dixon (2004) applied pedagogies of the home as part of their analysis to understand the ways Black and Latino families support college attendance for their children. Specifically, in examining family counterstories they illustrate how providing encouragement and support for their children through the college-going process was evident through their physical, mental and emotional support. Their research provides an example that disrupts majoritarian views of what parental involvement and investment in higher education looks like for Families of Color. They also call for a rethinking of parental involvement to include rich cultural differences in the ways that parents support their children in their trajectories to higher education.

Drawing upon the work of Delgado Bernal, (2001, 2002), Yosso (2005) argues against the deficit view of cultural “difference” from the White, middle class norms that permeate education. She advances the theory of community cultural wealth, which highlights forms of capital that are relevant to different cultural communities, particularly Communities of Color, yet rarely acknowledged in the education system. Community cultural wealth is evident through “at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (2005, p.77). The concept

of community cultural wealth is consistent with earlier research in education that reframes student and family knowledges and contributions to schools and classrooms as assets rather than deficiencies (Delgado Bernal, 1998; 2001; 2002; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Yan, 1999). Focusing primarily on asset-based research, in the following section I review a selection of recent research that addresses the calls for understanding the complicated process of making decisions about higher education through studies of students' nuanced experiences and from qualitative perspectives (Bergerson, 2010; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Perna, 2006; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

Student experience in education decision-making

In a qualitative study of educational experiences of Latino students in colleges and universities, Luna and Martinez (2013) drew upon Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model to identify the capital that Latino students used to navigate schooling. Specifically, they examined the knowledge, skills, abilities and networks that students drew upon to defeat challenges and persist and thrive in high school and colleges. Conducting focus groups with a purposeful sample of nine participants, the authors identified four types of cultural wealth in the data: aspirational, familial, social and navigational.

For example, the authors found that developing a sense of the importance of going to college—*aspirational capital*—came predominantly from parents. This was true even though none of the participants' parents had attended college. Indeed, each participant spoke of conversations with parents or experiencing struggles that came, in part, from parents' limited education as motivators for attending college. Relatedly, *familial capital*

was identified in the students' narratives. Yosso (2005) defines familial capital as "Familial capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (see Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002)" (p. 79). In addition to encouraging their children to pursue higher education and providing economic support to do so, parents taught life lessons and encouraged their children emotionally as they went through school.

A third display of cultural wealth was through social capital or through networks of people including participants' communities. Examples of social capital included peer orientation toward college in high school and peers sharing information to make getting to college easier. Participants also mentioned the importance of Latino groups especially in helping them through school-related challenges. Joining a Latino group in high school helped one student feel less alone and provided opportunities to develop skills that led to leadership opportunities. Such experiences create a sense of belonging and confidence in schooling environments, which the literature identifies as essential to higher education pursuits (Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011). The last form of community cultural wealth that Luna and Martinez (2013) cite is navigational capital. This type of cultural wealth speaks to moving through institutions that can be challenging to navigate because they do not reflect the knowledges, experiences, and skills of all students who may be interested in attending college. One example of navigational capital included developing relationships with mentors in the community whom the student could ask for help in applying for college. Luna and Martinez's (2013) study sheds light on the higher education decision-making process by disrupting discourses about lack of social and cultural capital and assumptions of disengagement from the education process that are

often leveled at Communities of Color and low-income students. Identifying cultural wealth is one important approach to both learning more about the higher education decision-making process for underrepresented students and disrupting inaccurate or biased understandings about why students from underrepresented groups are less likely to attend college.

Jehangir's (2010b) research highlights another approach: Bringing college students' lived experience into the classroom can provide insight into how first-generation students successfully navigate education decision-making. Jehangir conducted an 8-year longitudinal study of 128 students across several cohorts of a multicultural studies classroom. Participants were 84 females and 44 males who identified as African American (42.9%), Asian American (29.7%), White (10.9%), Hispanic, (8.5%), Native American (5.4%), and three students who did not choose any racial/ethnic identification. Data consisted of reflective writing and final papers of participants. Twenty-five students participated in follow-up interviews. In analyzing the data, Jehangir found that the first-generation students utilized cultural wealth to make it to the university. While her focus was primarily on acculturation to the university and the usefulness of critical pedagogy and narrative in the classroom, both of these points are relevant to the process of education decision-making as well as to the research conducted for this dissertation. Specifically, designing the study around the lived experience of first-generation students brings to light understandings about the how students make decisions about higher education that are significant to the research presented in this dissertation. Jehangir (2010b) notes: "The focus on cultivating narrative is suggested as one means of creating both ownership and place for students who have been historically marginalized in higher

education” (p.535), suggesting strong alignment with other research that calls for insight into the process of choosing college through student-centered research.

First-generation students are the less likely than any other subpopulation to complete a college degree (Kelly, 2005). In accordance with other literature that discusses students’ higher education decision-making, Jehangir (2010b) notes that first-generation students are disproportionately low-income and/or Students of Color. In stressing the cultural wealth that students utilize to pursue and engage with higher education, Jehangir’s research supports aforementioned studies that argue that students bring cultural assets that help them successfully navigate higher education. For example, she highlights the ways that skills developed through lived experiences such as working while in high school, caring for children, and serving as surrogate family members position them as problem solvers and help them to navigate complex bureaucracies and institutions. At the same time, these skills are not often recognized or valued by institutions of higher learning. She concludes, “One way to enrich their journey and similarly enrich the academy is to draw on their cultural capital, bring their stories and lived experiences into the learning process, and allow them to voice and author their selves” (Jehangir, 2010b, p. 549). In regard to the education decision-making process, it is evident that attending to students’ lived experiences allows for a better understanding of their complex identities and identifications and how they navigated the process to make it to college.

In a study focusing on women’s education decision making, Susan Madsen (2010) explored reasons for low college attendance rates and high college drop out rates for young women in Utah, a state whose majority population and leadership belong to the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) commonly referred to as the Mormon faith. While women outnumber men in college attendance nationally (57.4 % females: 42.6% males) Utah is the only state in the country in which the reverse is true with females accounting for 49% of postsecondary attendance. This holds true across categories of race and religion, a fact that is particularly significant to the focus of this dissertation research. The disparity between the numbers of African American women enrolling in postsecondary schools in Utah versus nationally is especially pronounced (see Table 1). Additionally, Utah women graduate from college at lower rates than anywhere else in the country. In her 2010 study, Madsen used a mixed-method research approach, including surveys and interviews to examine why young women made the decisions they did regarding postsecondary education including: not to attend; to attend but then drop out; to drop out and return; or to complete a postsecondary degree.

Table 1:
Enrollment of Women in Utah Public Versus National Public Institutions *

Race	Utah Public	National Public	Difference
American Indian or Alaska Native	57.8%	60.2%	-2.4%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	50.8%	53.9%	-3.1%
Black of African American [sic]	42.0%	64.9%	-22.9%
Hispanic	52.6%	58.8%	-6.2%
White	48.7	56.3	-7.6
Nonresident Alien	50.1%	46.6%	4.5%
Unknown Race	43.3%	54.2%	-10.9%

* This table is adapted from the Utah Women in Education Project (King & Madsen, 2010, p. 4)

Madsen (2010) also investigated who influenced young women in their decision-making regarding postsecondary education. The report emphasized the importance of fathers', mothers', teachers', school counselors' and administrators', and religious leaders' influence on young women regarding postsecondary education. Madsen (2010) found that the majority of participants who had never attended college had aspired to go. The primary reasons for not attending college were economic (53.7%) and family issues (40.9%). Further, those who cited family reasons for not attending were significantly more likely to not attend college or graduate from college. Of those who dropped out, the following reasons were listed: finances- 86%; unprepared, uncertain attitude- 82.3%; family priorities- 80.5% and other career opportunities- 32.7%. Each of these reasons was statistically linked to dropping out of college. Findings suggest that religion, values, and overall culture influence young women's college decision making. Qualitative data from participants suggest that while church leaders emphasize the importance of education, this does not include focusing on obtaining a degree. Because the end-goal of a college degree is not stressed, many young women reported that finishing their degree "some day" was fine or that a degree was not necessary at all.

While there are important limitations to this study which the researchers acknowledge, for example the study's underrepresentation of minority and non-LDS students (Utah is 86.1 % White while 89.8% of females in this study were White; Mormons represent 60.4% of the population of Utah compared to 80.4% of participants in the study), this research works to disrupt larger success discourses which flatten out students' experiences of gender by looking more closely at particular contexts. Further, this research also provides important insights about the local context in which the

research that is the subject of this dissertation took place by attending to the importance of religion in the context of Utah. Madsen's (2010) research suggests that students in Utah are negotiating gender discourses that are in direct contradiction to success discourses that suggest women are outpacing men in higher education. Further, local discourses often place higher education for young women in conflict with discourses that emphasize women's primary roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers. Madsen notes that this is particularly true for women of the Mormon faith, yet surely the predominance of the Mormon culture exerts considerable influence over the overall local culture, which is reflected in the overall lower attendance rate of Utah women in institutions of higher education. This is of particular interest to the study at hand, given that the three women participants in the dissertation research study are negotiating gender expectations and discourses within this same culture.

Finally, in another study of college attendance in Utah, Saltiban (2012) conducted a qualitative study that included focus groups and individual dialogues to better understand the underrepresentation of Tongan students as part of the broader population of Pacific Islander students in postsecondary institutions in Utah. Through this research, Saltiban sought to develop new frames and reference points through the application of Tongan theory to disrupt deficit notions of Tongan students and provide better understandings of their education trajectories. Qualitative methods, specifically the use of focus groups and individual dialogues, were chosen with high sensitivity to cultural values that included face-to-face interactions and an attention to intimacy and relationships in the narrative experience. Further the research served to provide epistemic privilege to Tongan student's voices and to contextualize statistics that either erase

underrepresentation (through the aggregation of data in the race/ethnicity grouping as Asian/ Pacific Islander) or highlight Tongan students' underrepresentation in colleges and universities through deficit assumptions about Tongan families' engagement with education.

Saltiban's (2012) findings complexify common understandings of underrepresented students and specifically Tongan students. For example, she found that while financial constraints were barriers for many students, they desired to go to college. These findings support the research on education decision-making that suggests economic constraints are a barrier to higher education while disrupting the notion that Tongan young people simply value making money over further their education. Further, Saltiban's results stress that families, particularly parents and grandparents, have strong aspirations for their children to pursue higher education and encourage them in this direction. Indeed, countering previous research that suggests Tongan parents find higher education "irrelevant," Saltiban recounts various measures families took to help their children pursue higher education and the ways that parents shared knowledge with one another to support each other in the pursuit of higher education for their children. Finally, Saltiban discusses her participants' agency in their maintenance of relationships and commitment to community in the face of capitalistic pressures to get ahead. Saltiban frames her work as research designed to better understand nuances of decision-making about higher education and to disrupt majoritarian views of Tongan students and families while broadening the conversations around who goes to college. She says, "I consciously seek to infiltrate the academy with 'new' epistemological frameworks that contest and problematize the complicity of mainstream research that fails to consider alternative

frames of interpretation” (p. 99).

Saltiban’s (2012) study, along with others reviewed in this section, suggests the importance of qualitative research in attending to the details of decision-making in higher education in order to better understand the role of the process and the underrepresentation of particular students. These studies illustrate how, by studying situated contexts of college students, we get a micro view that can inform in detail the intersections of identity and how such context-specific views might help us understand phenomena that are otherwise erased by aggregate statistics.

The above section of the literature began with a critique of the term choice in describing higher education decision-making, particularly for underrepresented students who have limited choices. I discussed early choice models developed to understand what has been termed in the literature as college choice, in all of its complexity. I then briefly addressed social and cultural capital, the ways it has been employed in the research on education decision-making, and some critiques of those theories as they have been applied to education. Next, the review focused in tightly on examples of research that have developed or relied upon theories developed to understand underrepresented students’ education decision-making process from asset-based approaches to research. These approaches keep the attention on populations who are underrepresented in higher education, but shift the guiding theoretical framework to reflect the strengths and knowledges of underrepresented communities. This framework closely aligns with the research that I present in Chapters 4-7, in which participants’ education trajectories are viewed in light of their experiences with/in education and the multiple knowledges they brought to bear on their decisions about higher education. Additionally much of the

research reviewed in this section was rooted in students' experiences. While studies of students' situated context have become more common, there is little research that attends to the complexity of student membership in multiple communities and across lines of identity and identification (Bergerson, 2010; Jones, 1997; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). In the following section, I highlight this dissertation's contributions to this effort.

Student Subjectivity in the Education Decision-Making

Process: Centering Student Experience

As the literature in this chapter has suggested, making decisions whether and how to engage in higher education is a complex process that involves several variables. While "choice" models provide frameworks of the complex layers involved in higher education decision-making, there have been calls from identity scholars as well as those interested in the higher education decision-making process to understand it through students' situated contexts (Perna, 2006; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011) and for further attention to the complex identities of students in which identity categories are more fluid and cross several dimensions (Bergerson, 2010; Perna, 2006; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). The studies reviewed in the last section of the literature highlighted students' experiences related to the process of making decisions about higher education, either through making determinations whether or not to go to college or recounting their path to college. By drawing directly from student experience, researchers are able to get a nuanced sense of what makes a difference in whether and how students pursue higher education and why, as well as who was a part of their decision-making process. These factors are all essential to working to ameliorate the opportunity gap in higher education. Additionally, as the above research has illustrated, eliciting this information from students themselves allows

for a more complete understanding of the process of getting to college that belies simplistic explanations drawn from deficit understandings of underrepresented populations in higher education. Yet these studies focus largely on specific student populations or from particular cultural or gendered perspectives. There continues to be a need for research that explores students' complex identities in relation to the process of pursuing higher education.

The current study responds to several areas in which further exploration of the decision-making process around higher education and the relationship of identity and identifications matter to that process. Specifically, the research in this dissertation aims to emphasize students' complex identities and identifications through the self-authoring of three undergraduate Women of Color. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) pose that research in the area of student identity must "take seriously the ways that students describe greater fluidity within identity categories (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)" (p. 591).

Drawing from a postmodern perspective that privileges shifting and complex identities including race, ethnicity, religion, social class, family history, gender, sexual orientation, and multiple roles they perform in their lives, I rely upon students' self-identifications and their self-authored tellings of their experiences with/in education. To relate this to the education decision-making process, I focus intently on the relationship between participants' complex identities and identifications and their sense of themselves as students—their student subjectivities.

Beginning from a poststructural feminist framework allowed the students' self-authorings of their identities and identifications, the questioning and disruption of identity categories, and for shifts and changes in their narratives over time. At the same time,

through the process of data generation, participants were primed to consider their experiences with/in through a critical lens and to attend to structural discriminations, such as institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism, among others, that may have influenced their education trajectories. They were also instructed to consider the various supports and barriers outside of schools that impacted their education trajectories. By combining these approaches, this study contributes to the research in education in several ways. First it explores students' self-authored identities and identifications through their lived experiences to better understand how they inform the decisions the Women of Color participants made around attending college. It also provides a space for their tellings of the experiences that mattered to their education decision-making, providing insight into that process. Secondly, analyzing shifts in student subjectivity in conversation with participants allowed me to explore the discourses students took up, discarded, or reworked in their self-authorings, providing insight into the identity work that students do in relation to education. Finally, the approach utilized in this research brings together poststructural feminist theory and feminist race theories, illustrating that the two lenses together provide better understanding of complex student identities and identifications. In the following chapter, I detail the research methodology utilized in the study. In the second part of the chapter, I provide context from broad to specific that helps orient the reader to the sociocultural context in which this study took place.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

You can't do research or teach without engaging in the construction and circulation of knowledge. And all sorts of issues are bound up in that fact—ranging from the whole matter of subjectivity and objectivity in research methods to concerns about how academic discourses and practices perpetuate or interrupt the ways that knowledge serves power and power serves knowledge. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 10)

The methodological framework of this research was designed using narrative inquiry through the implementation of (post)critical pedagogy in a university classroom. Specifically, student-centered data were generated through (post)critical feminist curriculum and pedagogy in a classroom that privileged the lived experiences of the participants through their self-authored texts, while simultaneously denying a single or unambiguous “Truth.” This framework reflects my intertwined commitments as a feminist teacher and researcher—commitments that are impossible to disentangle from one another. In this chapter, I discuss the intentionality of conducting research in a classroom, reflecting my desire to implement a (post)critical pedagogy in a site of learning as part of my research methodology, and illustrate how it allowed for a layered gathering of narrative data. I then provide a discussion of the recruitment of students to the class and, subsequently, research participants. This is followed by a detailing of the generation of data and the data analysis process. I conclude the chapter by describing the imagined and realized possibilities that such research enabled and reflect on the

messiness of such a project in relation to my own positions of power and authority.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the importance of space and place. To better understand the narratives of the Women of Color in this study and the discourses that they attempt to negotiate in understanding themselves as students, it is important to situate them within the sociopolitical context of the state of Utah, where they live and as the site within which the data were generated. I begin by discussing the specific site in which the research was conducted, specifically on the classroom space and its relationship to the larger university. This includes a discussion of how larger cultural influences and debates entered into the classroom space. To provide a better understanding of these cultural influences, I then move to a discussion of the state of Utah as a religious settlement of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, discussing how this impacted the sociopolitical climate and the culture. In this discussion, I pay particular attention to demographic changes that have disrupted the homogenous, religious-based culture and the way that gender roles developed, circling back to connect the discussion, again, to higher education. I begin, however, with a discussion of the choice of a university classroom as the research site for implementing post(critical) pedagogy to generate narrative data.

(Post)Critical Pedagogy Meets Narrative Inquiry:

The Classroom as a Research Site

My intertwined commitments as a teacher and researcher were central to the design and implementation of this research project; they are impossible to disentangle. As a teacher, my praxis has been greatly motivated by the desire for higher education to work against oppression in the world while maintaining a feminist reflexivity that allows

for an understanding of the complexity of oppressions, which are often enacted in places of privilege, such as universities. By employing student narratives as texts in the classroom, I aimed to utilize narrative inquire as part of a (post)critical feminist pedagogy to engage students as experts in relating the flow of power in the world to their own lives as students. Patti Lather (1992) writes of:

A post-modern re-positioning of critical intellectuals [that] has to do with the struggling to decolonize the space of academic discourse that is accessed by our privilege, to open up that space in a new way that contributes to the production of a politics of difference. Such a politics recognizes the paradox, the complexity, and the complicity at work in our efforts to understand and to change the world. (p.132)

I sought to decolonize the space of academic discourse by opening it up to and centering the multiple knowledges of the students in the class, particularly through assignments in which they authored and re-authored themselves as students. I saw the classroom as a site in which I could build relationships with participants over time and use multiple methods to elicit student-generated data. I wanted to encourage critical dialogue to discuss and unravel how power functions in education. The research setting had to allow for participants to develop an understanding of various concepts such as discourse, hegemony, and power and consider them in relation to their own lives. I hoped to engage students in rich dialogues through which we could identify the discourses that inform their ideas about themselves in relation to education. To engage in such rich dialogues required a space in which participants could develop relationships with one another and feel as though they could talk openly, at least to some degree.

Mindful of the power imbalances between the researcher and the researched, and hoping to expand collaborative research while embracing subjectivity, I knew that data collection would not be a one-time, minimally involved situation. For these reasons, a

classroom setting seemed an ideal place to do research. That is, the classroom setting allowed for 1) a bounded community in which relationships could develop over the course of the semester 2) a space in which a feminist (post)critical pedagogy could be enacted both through a pedagogical setting up of concepts central to this study and dialogical (co)constructions and (re)constructions of these concepts; 3) a centering of students' experiences and of students as knowledge producers, particularly through assignments in which students authored and re-authored their student subjectivities; and 4) the ability to read and reread discourses within the context of an educational space in which they are always already circulating, even when they do not appear to be. The classroom allowed a space to center student knowledge through the intentional creation of multiple forms of narrative data while employing a (post)critical pedagogy that allowed for dialogue with and between students and instructors. Central to the pedagogy was students' self-authorings of their education narratives. In the following section I detail how narrative inquiry was central to the study, through students' authoring and re-authoring of their student subjectivities.

Narrative inquiry as method

Narratives do political work. The social role of stories—how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world—is an important facet of narrative theory. (Riessman, 2008, p. 8)

This study was predicated on the belief that Students of Color are “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002), and that we as educators and researchers continue to pay too little attention to the knowledges and ways of knowing that Students of Color bring with them to institutions of learning. The study was designed under the premise that insight can be gleaned about the way students negotiate their understandings

of themselves, who they believe they are, can be, and/or should be as students—their student subjectivities—by engaging them in dialogue around such matters. I was particularly interested in student subjectivities as part of their identities in relation to education and in students' authorings and re-authorings of themselves as students as they reflected on their histories of participation in education.

The decision to use narrative came from a strong feminist epistemological standpoint. Using narrative data was more than a way to collect data for a project. It was also a way to teach students that their lives are part of a larger story about higher education and also a way to learn about them through their own authorings. Narrative as central to the structure of the class was a way of honoring the importance of their life stories and providing the classroom as a space in which their multiple ways of being and knowing were welcomed. The classroom was envisioned as a place to begin to learn from one another's experiences, knowledges, and understandings rather than leaving parts of themselves at the classroom door so they could be "filled up" with traditionally privileged academic knowledge. Chase (2008) asserts that feminists have taken up personal narrative as a method for gathering qualitative data particularly because feminists are "interested in women as social actors in their own right and in the subjective meanings that women [have] assigned to events and conditions in their lives" (p. 63).

Given my interest in how their previous experiences with and in education mattered to participants' student subjectivities and their senses of possibility regarding higher education, narrative inquiry with its emphasis on the meaning of experiences seemed particularly apt for this study. According to Chase (2008) narrative inquiry "can be characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary

approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 58).

Narratives themselves may be oral or written. They can come from fieldwork, interviews, journals, conversations, and may also be heard during fieldwork.

With this in mind, the course was pedagogically designed to center students, the subjective meanings that they assign to education, and their roles as students through narrated accounts of their educational experiences, which I refer to as student subjectivities. Significant to this pedagogical design was an understanding of students’ narrations as self-authoring. That is, through the creation of texts that centered their lives and understandings, they were encouraged to analyze and deconstruct the ways they had come to their student subjectivities—how they determined whom they could or should be in relation to education. For example, a primary assignment included students’ authoring of critical education narratives to explore their histories and experiences with/in relations of power in institutions of education. Shorter assignments, which included journaling, self-portraits, presenting media texts, and collecting artifacts from the larger campus, were intended to expand and complicate their critical education narratives (see Appendix A for syllabus). The intent of such assignments was to privilege what students wrote and said about their experiences negotiating discourses at the intersections of complex identities and identifications and in multiple spaces—particularly in educational spaces—positioning them as producers of knowledge in educational research. At the same time, it was hoped that asking students to author their experiences throughout the semester would highlight the complexities of their narratives, pushing against the tendency to tell seamless stories and singular truths (Britzman, 2000). Through these assignments,

students authored and re-authored their understandings of themselves as students.

Self-authoring, then, provided both a narrative methodological tool for students to construct who they are and display how they wanted to be known in relation to education, and to clarify, rethink, and rework their student subjectivities and an analytical tool for understanding how student subjectivities developed in relation to education. A classroom setting allowed for the collection of narratives, but also the opportunity to analyze how these narratives shifted when put into dialogue with those of other students. This collaborative work involved struggling over, disagreement about, and problematizing of what constituted oppressive and antioppressive discourses within the texts. This in turn facilitated the negotiation of discourses within the classroom, an educational space in which these discourses (already ever-present) were opened up and re-imagined through dialogue. Thus, as envisioned, the course employed a (post)critical feminist project in which participants and researcher co-read the word and the world (Freire, 2000) through their own narrations of their experiences and then reworked these readings without the expectation that (re)readings would be coherent, unanimous, or liberatory (Lather, 1992).

Up to this point, this chapter has detailed my political stance as a feminist researcher and teacher and how this influenced my methodological choices and determined the research design. The discussion has been oriented to the classroom as the primary site of data generation through self-authored narratives. However, not all students decided to participate in the full research study. That is, while all students understood that classroom observation would be included as part of the study, not all students chose to participate in the full study—only some students gave their consent to have all of their classroom assignments included in the data and agreed to a postsemester

interview. In the following sections, I detail first how students were recruited for and enrolled in the class. Then, I detail the process through which participants were given the option to participate in and were subsequently chosen for the study, and how their self-authorings were analyzed as data.

Recruiting students for the class

As previously mentioned, the research data were generated within a university classroom. The course was an Introduction to Gender Studies course, which took place during the spring semester of 2012. Students were recruited to the class through flyers and by word of mouth. These flyers were distributed throughout the Gender Studies Department, the College of Education, the Ethnic Studies Department and student services offices by the primary instructor and me. Additionally, both the primary instructor of the class and I made an announcement about the course in the other classes we were teaching. We also told students and professors about the course and asked them to refer students who they thought might be interested. The course was not listed in the university catalog and required a permission code from the primary instructor in order for students to register. The primary instructor screened students to ensure that they were comfortable in a class where sharing personal stories was embedded in the curriculum and that students were aware that the content of the course centered on gender and sexuality in relation to education. Students were informed during the screening process that a graduate student researcher would be co-facilitating the class and that students would have the opportunity to participate in the research study, but that it was not a requirement. My primary interest was in speaking to students who were willing to engage in discussions around identity in relation to education and who would be comfortable

narrating their experiences and putting them into conversation with critical texts about gender and education.

Ultimately, the class, though small, had the most diverse makeup of any class of which I have ever been a part. For example, the 10 students who enrolled in the class consisted of three cisgender males and seven cisgender females who ranged in age from 18- 48 years old, with 6 being traditional-aged students under the age of 20 and 4 nontraditional students over the age of 30. They identified racially and ethnically as Native American, Salvadoran, Fijian and African American, Vietnamese American, Latino, Samoan and African American, Puerto Rican, Tongan and White, and two students identified exclusively as White. Two identified as Catholic, two continued to have loose ties to the LDS Church, two were former Mormons and one of these now identifies as agnostic, one was pagan, one had ties to the Native American Church and two students did not disclose religious/ spiritual affiliations. One identified as gay, one as lesbian, and one identified as queer/questioning. One said that the language available to describe sexuality was inadequate to express the way he thought about it, and 6 identified as heterosexual.³ The range of student identities and identifications was astounding, particularly given that the campus on which the study was conducted consists of predominantly White, traditional-aged students.

Students were informed during the first class that in a few weeks they would have

³ These descriptors, while reflecting the words students used to describe themselves, do not fully reflect the shifting and variable nature of their identities and identifications. Students shifted between more and less specific identifiers; for example one student identified as P.I. (Pacific Islander) in one moment and Samoan in another and Black in yet another. Another student identified as Native American in one moment and listed specific tribal communities in another moment.

the opportunity to opt into the research study, but that their participation in the study would be unknown to the primary instructor or me, the researcher, until all assignments had been submitted for the semester. Further, students would be able to withdraw consent until January 31, 2013. Finally, it was made clear that my primary role would be as researcher: Though I would be co-facilitating class discussions I would not be part of the grading of any assignments. During the semester, I participated in each of the activities that the students had completed. This included writing an education autobiography, to which they all had access. This was meant to signal to them both that I did not expect them to share information about themselves that I was not willing to share about myself and as a way for them to know something of who I am and why education is important to me. Through the sharing of my educational autobiography and my participation in class discussions, I developed various degrees of connection with each of the students.

Case study participants

During the 3rd week of class, two proctors met with all of the students for the last 10-15 minutes of the class. They distributed and collected the research study consent forms. They emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. They also sealed the consent forms in an envelope in front of the class and assured them that neither I, nor the primary instructor, would know who had chosen to participate until all assignments were completed for the semester. Only then would I know who had chosen to participate and would contact participants for interviews. The primary instructor, who did all of the grading, would not have information about who participated.

Six students agreed to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to choose three of the participants' narratives for case studies. This was done by eliminating

incomplete data sets and then by choosing cases that were information rich and provided the most detail in relation to the research questions (Riessman, 2008). The 3 participants in this study were Women of Color undergraduate students at various stages of their degree program. They varied greatly demographically in age (ranging from 19-38 years of age), race and ethnicity, religion, partnered status, current and childhood socioeconomic status, and years in school. Each of the participants identified as cisgender women. Two of the women identified as exclusively heterosexual and one identified as queer/questioning.

Table 2 offers a brief glimpse at the demographic characteristics of the 3 participants whose case studies are included in this study. More detail is provided about each of the participants in the corresponding data chapter connected to her case study.

Data generation

Narratives were produced by all students in the class. The narratives produced by the 3 participants, their postsemester interviews, and the participant observations from the larger classroom constituted the primary data of this research. Data were collected during the academic semester of Spring 2012. The research questions were explored through participants' written narratives of the following:

- 1) Educational trajectories up to the time of writing through an education autobiography
- 2) Educational experiences during the semester at the university through a reflective journal
- 3) Analysis/ re-authoring of their original autobiography in which they (re)considered their initial narrative in relation to discourses that they identified as circulating within their narratives and in their sociocultural contexts

Table 2: Participants' Demographic Information⁴

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Primary Identifications	Roles	Languages Spoken	Univ. Year
October	38	Puerto Rican, Latino/a, Hispanic, Cisgender female, woman, heterosexual, Catholic, lower-middle class	Wife, mother, student, employee and co-worker, daughter, sister	Spanish English	2 nd
Crimson Butterfly	19	Vietnamese, Asian American, Asian, Cisgender female, woman, queer/questioning, Catholic, working-middle class	daughter, partner, sister, godsister, student, employee, co-worker	Vietnamese English	1 st
OMITTED	35	Tongan, White, Cisgender female, woman, heterosexual, Agnostic, poor	Mother, co-parent, student, daughter, sister	English	4 th

⁴ The descriptors used are the words participants chose to describe themselves.

- 4) Class assignments including visual data such as photographs and photocopies of participants' in-class work

Early in the semester, before the content of the class focused on definitions and identification of discourses, all students in the class were asked to author an educational autobiography in which they discussed how they established and met educational goals and how they developed their senses of self in relation to school (see Appendix B). Students were also asked to keep a reflective journal (see Appendix C), in which they were required to make an entry a minimum of six times per semester (about every 2 weeks), reflecting on how what we were discussing in class relates to their own views about their educational trajectory and their educational experiences. The final assignment was an analysis of their autobiography in which participants reviewed and re-authored their original autobiographies to identify the discourses that were circulating within their own narratives (see Appendix D).

Photocopies were made of the assignments of all students during the semester. At the end of the semester, after determining which students had agreed to participate in the study, nonparticipants' assignments were discarded. Participants' names on assignments were replaced with the pseudonyms they had chosen. These pseudonyms also replaced student names in computerized data and hard copies. The confidentiality of computerized data was maintained in my password-protected computers at my home or office.

In addition to narrative texts created by students, data collected through participant observation included the following:

- 1) Field notes taken during class discussions and mental notes taken when written notes were not prudent. Mental notes or jotted notes were expanded

after class. Notes included information on the setting and students' everyday behavior and interactions with one another;

- 2) A research journal in which I recorded my behavior and reflections throughout the research. I focused particularly on my dual role as an instructor and researcher noting tensions and conflicts and assumptions that I made as an instructor.

Glesne (2011) suggests that participant observation be thought of along a continuum from mostly observation to mostly participation. As a co-instructor in the classroom in which this research was carried out, I could not but be firmly on the participant end of the continuum. Indeed, I was a *full participant* in that I was “simultaneously a functioning member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator” (Glesne, 2011, p. 65). For example, I also shared stories about my own upbringing and education, including growing up one of eight children in a low-income family in an almost exclusively White and very rural area. I contrasted my k-8 school experiences in a local Catholic school to my experiences living at a Catholic boarding high school, where I did janitorial duties to help pay for my schooling. The high school, located about an hour from my home in rural North Dakota served students from the local community, as well as very wealthy students, including Students of Color. Students were from the United States, and from other countries such as Mexico, Honduras, Ethiopia, United Arab Emirates, Japan, and China, among others. My unique high school experience contributed to my early understandings of the complexities of race, class, and gender and the multiple ways power is wielded through these identities and identifications in various spaces.

Telling my story to the students gave them a sense of me that they could have never had, but through the sharing of my own narratives. It positioned me as a participant in the community we developed in the classroom. It also was important to the relationships that I developed with them. While our experiences were incredibly different, there were, as I suggested above, points of connection that were shared through our stories. With some students this related to being parts of large families, with others there was a connection of growing up Catholic and going to Catholic schools, for still others there were stories shared about growing up with few material belongings, or navigating the path to college as first-generation college students. These, and other, points of connection strengthened my relationships with the students and, I have no doubt, the research presented in this dissertation. At the same time, there was continual awareness of the multiple ways that I held power: as White, as middle class, as a researcher, and as a teacher. Thus, while clearly a participant in the class, I was also an observer.

As participant observer, my goals were to collect information related to the classroom setting and students' interactions within this setting. In data gathering, I took care to notice how particular discourses, those related to education especially when they related to identities and identifications, played out in class. Rather than relying solely on the collection (and subsequent analysis) of a particular set of texts, my collection methods and field notes from on-going participant observation were intended to contextualize students' texts through the added analysis of students' discussions and interactions with me and their classmates about their work. I was especially interested in how participants authored their personal experiences through dialogue and how these experiences

intersected with the discourses that they identified as circulating in their lives. In this way, the observations were meant to add an additional layer to students' narratives, enriching my analysis by observing the ways in which they verbally narrated their experiences in dialogue with their classmates. Interactions and discussion with participants was natural in this discussion-based classroom setting and also allowed me to clarify information about the students by asking questions for clarification of their ideas in real time. Dialogues in the classroom also helped me to gain familiarity and comfort with the students and them with me.

At the end of the semester, after all course-related work had been submitted, the students who had agreed to participate in the full study were asked to schedule an individual interview. Each interview lasted between 70 and 90 minutes. During the semester, I had taken careful notes on each student, particularly around questions I had about their narratives, themes I was hearing in their multiple accounts (written and verbal) of their experiences with education, and stories about which I wanted to know more information or clarification. These questions and interests informed my interview process with each participant. Specifically, I conducted semistructured interviews, using the questions I had developed over the semester in order to orient the conversation while enabling the participants to discuss their experiences in-depth through open-ended questions (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

During the interview, I asked participants if I could email them with follow up questions if necessary and did so with 2 of the participants for simple clarifications. I also informed students that I would be sending them a copy of the transcribed interview, which they could review for accuracy. I sent students transcription copies in June of

2012, approximately 3 weeks after all interviews were complete. I was in close contact with each of the participants by email at that point, and each indicated that the transcripts accurately reflected the conversations we had had.

All physical data—photocopies of student assignments, field notes, my research journal, and visual and audio data—were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. I was solely responsible for transcribing audio taped data. All original recordings of the interviews were stored as electronic files on my computer, with the original taped recordings deleted. Transcriptions were also stored on my computer. The confidentiality of computerized data was maintained by being stored in my password-protected computers at my office and/or at my home.

Data analysis

All of the relevant textual data that was generated by participants including self portraits, education autobiographies, journals, and class assignments as well as my field notes, researcher journal, and interviews were analyzed using narrative analysis. Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) writes that “Narrative study relies on (and sometimes has to excavate) extended accounts that are preserved and treated analytically as units, rather than fragmented into thematic categories as is customary in other forms of qualitative analysis, such as grounded theory” (p. 12). Using narrative analysis allowed me to keep participants’ self-authorings as cohesive units, presented as cases in Chapters 4 through 6. My coding and analysis of the many authorings of participants (including interview transcripts) drew from Riesman’s framework of analyzing narrative data.

I utilized different types of narrative analysis with the data in order to create a multilayered approach to my narrative analysis. Specifically, I chose to analyze

participants' narratives by first employing a within-case thematic analysis across the data for each participant, looking for themes that arose within the case. A thematic narrative analysis is exclusively concerned with the content that a narrative communicates.

Thematic approaches do not attend to how a narrative is structured in order to make a point or to draw the audience in, as in a structural analysis. Nor is a thematic narrative analysis attuned to the performative aspects of a narrative, that is, how it is produced in dialogue with others.

Thematic narrative analysis is similar to qualitative methods such as grounded theory, but has important differences: While a grounded theory analysis refuses guiding theory in the early stages of a study, thematic analysis of narrative is guided by theory from the beginning, at the same time that the investigator explores the data for new theoretical insights. A second important difference is that in grounded theory segments are thematically coded, taking data apart and coding them in pieces in order to extract abstract ideas. Narrative analyses maintain sequence in thematic coding. "In narrative analysis, we attempt to keep the 'story' intact for interpretive purposes" (Riessman, 2008 p. 74). A third difference is that narrative investigators pay attention to historical factors and context with narrative accounts. A final difference is while grounded theory works to discover themes that can be used to theorize across data, narrative analysis is committed to case-centered analysis (Riessman, 2008).

Next I considered the data through a dialogical approach. After looking for themes in each participant's data, I reanalyzed the self-portraits, which students had presented to the class, their interviews with me, and selected field observations from class discussions. These particular narratives were generated for a "live" audience, and a

dialogical analysis focused my attention to how the stories were told, considering the performative aspects such as for whom the story was being told, how the participants presented themselves, and how they were hoping to be seen.

Finally, I reread all of the data for each participant through a structural lens of narrative analysis. Structural narrative analysis attends to how the participant authors their story and the ruptures or turning points in the stories. Given my theoretical grounding in poststructural feminism, this aspect of the analysis was particularly important to me. It allowed me to identify shifts in participants' self-authorings and also highlighted incongruences or conflicts in the narratives. Through each layer of analysis, I paid attention to how the different readings supported, disrupted, countered, and/or complexified the themes that I had developed. The multiple readings with shifts in my focus of attention allowed me to develop richer understandings of the women and highlighted the complexities of their experiences, how they authored and re-authored their experiences and how they saw themselves as students, and my understanding of them. I believe this reflects the generative capacity of narrative research, which in turn reflects and produces a multifaceted subject in the research. As Riessman (2008) articulates:

Narratives do not mirror, they refract the past. Imagination and strategic interests influence how storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others. Narratives are useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was. The "truths" of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future. They offer storytellers a way to re-imagine lives (as narratives do for nations, organisations, ethnic/racial and other groups forming collective identities)... Narrative analysis can forge connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and the political. (p. 6)

Importantly, participants' opportunities to author and re-author their narratives and my analysis of the multiple authorings allowed for a re-imagining of themselves as students as they reflected on their past experiences in education, but also in their current experiences at the university and their desires for the future. Thus self-authoring and re-authoring served as both pedagogical tools.

After creating participants' data chapters, I emailed each of them to request that they read their chapter to complete a member check. My primary concern was that the participants felt that the chapter reflected their stories and did not misrepresent them or their words. At the same time, my understanding of co-constructed and interpretive nature made me aware that there can never be assurance of "getting it right." Only one of the three participants responded to the request to read her chapter. At the time of this writing, she has not responded to a follow-up email asking for her comments and suggestions. Having detailed the importance of narrative analysis to the study, I turn to my role in the generation of data, my complex role as teacher, researcher, and student.

Struggling with power: getting lost

Reflecting on my choice of a university classroom as the site of the study reveals complex assumptions and desires that weren't evident to me at the time I chose the classroom as my research site. My motivation was to develop relationships, gather data in a layered manner and over time, and implement a feminist pedagogy in which students authored their own experiences. While these goals were central to my decision to conduct research in the classroom, I was less aware of what I now see as two key underlying motivations for conducting research in a classroom.

First, I was, and continue to be, very uncomfortable with many aspects of the research relationship. Specifically, I have difficulty with entering into a site as an outsider, both because of my own discomfort with the unfamiliarity and vulnerability of such a situation and because of the very unequal relationship in which the researcher (almost) always benefits much more than participants. In my teaching capacity, I know that I am actively working to contribute to my students. That I could tangibly be providing a benefit to my participants by doing research in the classroom, through a pedagogy I believed to be serving them well, eased this discomfort.

Relatedly, my role as a teacher is a more comfortable assertion of my authority in the pursuit of more just education practices. I am not suggesting that the comfort of this assertion is unproblematic, but this role reflects my continual striving to develop pedagogical praxis that resonates with students and reflects my feminist commitments for a more equitable and just world. In my roles of researcher and teacher, I held both passive and active power. For example my roles as co-instructor and researcher were positions of assumed knowledge and competence within an academic institution. As students in such an institution, being in the classroom in which I was positioned in these two roles meant that students were necessarily subjected to my authority in guiding conversations, making judgments about how much time we spent on topics and, for those who participated in the study, how they would be represented. These are examples of active power that I held.

However, my positionality as a White person in these roles also gave me a less visible power that I struggled much harder to keep in my consciousness. My Whiteness serves as a position of privilege that is *so* naturalized, particularly in university settings, that it is easy to take for granted. Or, more pointedly, it is difficult keep at the forefront of

my awareness. For example, my comfort level as a teacher has to do with a centeredness of White bodies that has become commonplace. Thus, even while trying to maintain awareness of this and keep it at the fore, I know that there is a sort of invisibility or unspokenness surrounding this privilege. I am uncomfortable with this fact and, I know that this entered into the way the study was framed both in that students would choose to be in the course and choose to be in the study. In these choices, I hoped to escape recruiting “Others” for my study. It is only upon reflection that I see how actively I tried to get around this issue and the impossibility of trying to escape it, particularly because I was very interested in having a diverse group of participants in the study.

Even though I may have escaped the problematic of *recruiting* students who reflected identities and identifications in some ways different from my own, I could not escape the fact that I would still be conducting research with the participants. While I could set this aside during the semester because I did not know who was participating in the study, it surfaced again as I interviewed participants after the course had ended. My tensions around this were ameliorated, to some degree, by my sense that by the time I interviewed them the participants had come to know something about me, and my commitments to education and to them as students. I also saw the centering of student voices as an important aspect of the study, which worked to disrupt the traditional powers of both teachers and researchers. Yet I am aware that there is no exoneration for a researcher. The power of research authorship always means that the relationship is an unequal one.

Here I highlight two main points that are essential in my working through power relations in the classroom. First, I recognize the importance of making explicit the active

and passive power that I held as both research and teacher. Secondly just as my overarching question about how students negotiate discourses in relation to themselves as students is ultimately about my interests and investments in higher education, conducting research in a classroom is about getting at the root of how I, as a teacher, can engage in relationships that facilitate, rather than hinder, student success, while also working to decolonize the classroom. I attempted to do so by, as Lather (1992) suggests, by opening up the academic space of the classroom to bring multiple knowledges and perspectives into conversation for the explicit purpose of knowledge production. The use of narrative inquiry to center student voices and draw upon their stories as texts in the classroom was part of this attempt. Yet undoing power within a classroom and university is not simple. As the following discussion illustrates, my desire to utilize pedagogical tools also came into tension in the classroom.

There were several ways in which I struggled with power and the sense that I was imposing it as a researcher. As mentioned earlier, though I sought ways around it, power is inherent in research that involves humans. For me this was complicated by my many privileges. In addition to holding power as a researcher, in rereading my research journal, I saw multiple times and places where I slipped into a “teacherly” mode. My role in the class was muddled from the beginning. I had co-designed the class, chosen many of the readings, done much of the formulation of the assignments—things that a teacher does. I led and guided some of the discussions; yet, it was agreed upon that for ethical reasons and to avoid a conflict of interest that I would not grade the students’ work. Further, I would not know which students had agreed to participate in the study until after our final class meeting of the semester. I use the words “teacher” to refer to the role and

“teacherly” to point to institutional expectations related to taking authority, assessing knowledge, and grading. Specifically, by using “teacher” I am referring to the teacher as a person. In using teacherly, I am describing the ways I performed my role as teacher in ways that are sanctioned by the university. These meanings are, to some degree, contrary to the ways we performed in class. What we had envisioned and the way we conducted the class was as a co-facilitation by the primary instructor and me. In co-facilitation of the class, I clearly took a guiding and leadership-type role. Yet the students understood from the beginning that I was conducting research in and through the class, and reinforced this when I introduced myself as a researcher and participant first, and secondarily as a facilitator of discussions and activities. My co-facilitator was positioned as the instructor, though we never used those words to describe ourselves. The students almost always referred to us by our first names.

I was definitely a highly participatory participant observer. In many ways, I had the luxury of feeling very much like a fellow student in the class. Yet I also posed questions to students about the readings acting as a facilitator in the class. And, due to the amount of class prep that I did and because I read and commented on (without grading) students’ assignments, I saw myself and was also seen by students as something of a teaching assistant. I met with students outside of class if they had questions on assignments or about school-related issues in general. I did not think of those particular meetings as research. Thus, I did not take field notes at those meetings or include them in my data. Though, of course, to suggest that they can be fully excluded from the research is to suggest that one can compartmentalize or fracture one’s identity into discrete roles or parts in an instant, which I could not. In my mind these meetings were connected to

my responsibility to the students as someone who was performing a teacherly role in the class, though I also saw this as some way of providing reciprocity for their participation in the study. In fact, while I was in the class, I was teacher, student, researcher, and assistant all at once. I was comfortable with the students and they seemed comfortable with me. Because the primary instructor was also quite casual in her teaching style, and because students were encouraged to speak and question openly and conversationally (we never raised hands, for example) teacher/student roles were definitely blurred. With my roles in flux throughout the semester, it became increasingly difficult both logistically, and cognitively, to manage the tensions. A note from the 3rd week of the semester illustrates the tension between my roles as researcher, participant, and co-facilitator.

I am feeling like my field notes are far less accurate and detailed as I move to trying to take less notes in class. It has become really difficult for me as we get into more academic discussions—only in the most formal of ways, really the discussions have always been very complex and engaged with the readings. As our readings become more intense and we try to negotiate understandings of ‘discourse’ through them, it seems more like ‘academic performances’ are going on even with me as co-facilitator. I feel the need to help out with discussions more and play the role of co-facilitator more and I am struggling to find balance and both think through our discussions for the purposes of class in the moment and try to attend to/remember the details of the interactions in class for my field notes. (Research Journal, 1/31/ 2012)

By the time of a journal entry a few weeks later, in mid-February, I had moved much more toward being oriented as a teacher. It is clear that my roles were intertwined and that I was attending to all of them, yet the language I used in my notes and the kinds of questions I asked about student engagement signal to me that I was tuning in to myself as a teacher in these reflections more than I had in the first weeks of class. For example, I saw in my notes concern about a couple of students who had missed class more

frequently. In addition, I noted when we were “starting” class later and documenting students’ late assignments. Emails between my co-instructor and me during this time revealed that we were focused on how we could fill in gaps that we had missed, catch up on previous readings, and make connections between ideas. I was spending considerable time involved in teacherly activities.

As I reflected back on these notes in my researcher journal, I was struck by the ways I moved around my different roles and the tension between and unintelligibility of my own experiences. I remained excited about the levels of conversation we were having throughout and indeed saw in my notes that I was engaging in conversations with the class as a participant in the class, as a student, and as a co-facilitator. Yet, I increasingly had concerns about whether the students were engaging enough with the readings we had chosen and how to make sure we had reinforced the content that we meant to convey through the readings. Even though these concerns were also in some ways clearly related to my role as a researcher with specific goals for collecting data, in my own sense-making of these experiences, they were much more clearly related to my sense of responsibility as a teacher. I was worried about what students were learning and what they would tangibly take from the class.

I detail these shifts in my thinking about and engagement with the class to highlight the messiness of my intertwined roles. The complexity of navigating these intertwined roles and what that navigation means for research and for the praxis that takes place in classrooms (or other highly participatory research projects) is under-discussed both in the field of education and in methodological debates. But for the purpose of this chapter, the more important reason for this telling is the insight that it provides in

illustrating the difficulties and tensions in implementing a feminist (post)critical pedagogy within a formal institution of education. Here a teacherly mode, embroiled with expectations and responsibilities of the formal institutional role of being a teacher, as well as my personal sense of what it meant to be a “good” teacher, came into direct contradiction with the possibility of recognizing students’ full engagement with and participation in feminist (post)critical aimed at decolonizing the classroom.

In hindsight, I am fascinated by the way I held my excitement about the depth and content of our conversations in class and my concerns as a teacher in tandem with one another. What I am suggesting here is that as a researcher who designed a study and a class specifically to implement a feminist (post)critical pedagogy—with the intent of engaging students in rich and exciting discussions around race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, their multiple roles, student subjectivities, and education—I was open to the many possibilities that could unfold before me, and I was not disappointed. Yet when I began to orient myself to my real and perceived responsibilities as an educator within a university, my vision became blurred and my sense of possibility was obscured by an apprehension that I was failing to convey the kinds of knowledge with which students would be expected to leave my classroom—sanctioned knowledge. In this way, my concerns about being an “effective” teacher in helping students build the skills necessary to be successful in higher education came into contradiction with my feminist epistemology and what I believe to be a rich feminist (post)critical pedagogy. It is not that I doubted that students were learning or engaged, but I worried whether this kind of learning failed to prepare them to be the kind of students that would be successful in other, more traditional classes.

There were several ways that I came to see students as exceeding the expectations we had set for the class. These realizations often came in hindsight, for in the moment, I was often focused on what we were or were not “achieving” based on our planned topic of discussion and the assigned readings that went along with them. Yet in retrospect, I am able to see the many ways that students took up the proffer of a curriculum that centered their experiences as texts against which to read other texts about education. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of the regional and local sociocultural context in which the study took place.

Contextualizing the Study: Location and Space

In this part of the chapter, I describe the micro- and macro-level contexts in which the research took place. In doing so, I underscore the significance of regional culture in terms of normalized gender roles and the historic homogeneity of the population. These cultural influences carry over into schools and classrooms throughout the education pipeline. They also carried over into the university classroom in which the data for this study were generated. Situating the site of this study within its geopolitical positions of the state of Utah and a flagship university campus as well in a very specific and intentional space of our atypical classroom highlights the significance of sociocultural context to the stories of the participants, and provides the reader with a deeper understanding of the discursive limitations within which students authored their experiences. This is important because, as St. Pierre (2000) argues:

Discourse illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others... Even more important, the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects.

Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse... organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (p. 485).

Student subjectivities of the participants in this study were greatly influenced by the discursive limitations of the sociocultural contexts of their schools. In an inquiry interested in students understanding of themselves in relation to education, it is important to draw attention to the political orientation, the changing racial and ethnic landscape, and normalized gender roles in Utah, a state whose history is rooted in the religious values of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, hereafter referred to the LDS Church. I begin by describing the classroom space and then move to a discussion of the influence of the LDS Church on the local and regional space, and its intersections with higher education.

The Classroom Space

Entering building #44, I think that it’s ironic that the building where the Gender Studies Department is doesn’t have a special name. It’s a number. It almost symbolizes that the Gender Studies Department or what used to be called Women’s Studies is still not given much recognition. It’s not like the football team at the U or the dance center or the library. Gender studies is still a small group of people trying to give recognition to a large group of people who have been ignored in the history of education. (Diane, journal entry)

To introduce this study of students’ negotiations of discourses in relation to themselves as students, I invite you into the Gender Studies’ Lounge, or simply “the lounge” as we all came to call it. It is the space in which I came to know the students who were part of a class that I co-designed for the purposes of conducting research. It was in this quaint room in an old nondescript building—literally, officially named Building #44— that my thinking about my research topic necessarily broadened to reflect the reality of students’ lives and the project we undertook through the class. My thinking

about what it meant to be a student and about the very nature of narrative, ethnographic research, and my roles, were confused, troubled, affirmed, reworked and undone there.

I invite you into this space, because it is the research site, but also because of the heightened importance the space itself came to hold as a site of contradiction. Exploring questions of how students made sense of competing racialized, gendered, sexualized and classed discourses in relation to themselves as students was enriched and complicated by the fact that we were trying to identify and untangle these discourses from within a university classroom. Thus we were always performing one or multiple roles that we were trying to unpack and complicate, questioning what we thought we knew. In our attempts to trace shifting power by unraveling discourses of studenthood through our own experiences, our class was not only very pedagogically different from most of the classes the students and I had experienced, it was, in many ways, unintelligible as a university class and classroom at all. The physical space of the classroom was significant to this, as students remarked throughout the semester. “The lounge” could not have been more different from the plain, rectangular, unmarked building in which it was nestled, nor from the other classrooms that students talked about.

The lounge had an old, cozy feeling to it. This 16 X 20 foot space is a small room, for a classroom. The barely pink-colored wall just opposite of the door had three evenly spaced long windows that ran from the top of the wall about three quarters of the way down, providing natural light in the room for a fair portion of the day. Just beneath the windows, the heat radiator grunted and groaned when put to use to combat the cold that seeped in. The two adjacent walls were light olive green. Bookshelves lined the room, overflowing with gender studies books and magazines of all variety and giving the room the faint smell of a used bookstore.

The old, well-worn furniture included a mauve love seat and a grey and white-specked couch supported by a brick where the frame had broken. Retro 1970s padded chairs covered in turquoise vinyl and plastic brown and green stackable chairs contrasted against the thin, dark blue carpet.

While the mishmash of furniture and books gave the room a homey feel, it never fully escaped its institutional roots. The 12X12 inch ceiling tiles surrounded evenly spaced rectangular fluorescent lights, and a smoke alarm in the center of the ceiling was marked with a visible serial number. It reminded me of the ceilings in my elementary school classrooms. The lounge was equipped with industrial phone jacks and outlets, with painted over cord casings common in university classrooms and buildings. But it was the long chalkboard covering most of one wall that was the most forceful indicator that we were in a place built for formal teaching and learning. (Researcher Journal, 1/19/2012)

Having brought you to the threshold of this classroom space, I draw upon Massey's (1994) conceptualizations of space and place to explicate the multiple layers of meaning the space of the lounge had in the context of this research. Utilizing these conceptualizations of space, I show how it was important in this particular class and illustrate students' awareness of the spatial difference and what it meant to our learning. However, I first begin by talking about the importance of space and place as a sight of the study of culture.

Space and Place

Central to contextualizing ethnographic research is understanding a culture or social setting in which research takes place. While culture is a contested term and social setting can certainly replace the term culture in thinking about the classroom, I argue that there is indeed a sense that universities have their own cultures. Some traditionally definitive aspects of culture include shared behaviors and signifiers, patterns of socialization, and cultural groups are distinguishable from one another. Considering these elements, one can see how universities, which often define themselves in distinction to other universities, have mascots, trademarked logos, fight song, and different academic offerings and standings in relation to other universities, could be understood as having

distinctive “cultures.” Key to the culture that develops around each university is the sense of its physicality in terms of location and structure, as well as the social interactions between groups and individuals on campus.

Here it is important to draw some distinction between place and space, and how they will be used in talking about the classroom culture that developed over the course of the semester. Feminist Geographer Doreen Massey (1994) theorizes space and place against the desire to define place as local, bounded, and fixed and space as distant and chaotic. She argues that in an era when economic globalization has impelled the discussion of local and global in binary terms, the corresponding conceptualization of opposing notions of place and space has political implications. Arguing instead that both space and place are constructed through social relations, she points out that places are porous and always changing as people move in and out of them. Thus she warns against the colonizing sense of place as marked territories (nationalist, regionalist, localist) that have fixed identities and are distinct from other places beyond its boundaries. Her articulation of space insists that space be “conceptualized integrally with time” (p. 3). Space is constituted of social relations that are never still but rather stretched out, alive, and dynamic. “Moreover, since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification” (p. 3). Space can refer to spatial scales ranging from social interactions globally to social interactions in a small group setting.

I am drawn to Massey’s (1994) theorizations of place and space for several reasons. First, she explicitly attends to issues of gender and class in addition to other relations of power such as race, sexuality, nation, and economy, noting that historically

space and place have been imagined in gendered, and often binary, ways. One example is the gendering of home as the realm of women and public places as the dominion of men. Secondly, Massey discusses “the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (p. 223) that attends to the ways that spaces are experienced and interpreted differently. Finally, her opposition to the counterpoising of space and place helps to work against binary oppositions (such as global/local, insider/outsider) and thus offers possibilities for thinking beyond such binaries. This is particularly useful for an analysis of the moving back and forth of students across various spaces within the university setting and in the larger community and region. Yet her articulation of space and place allows for reading the ways that sociocultural context continues to move within and between spaces and places, as was the case with the strong LDS culture that both moved between and was contested in the spaces of importance in this study: the classroom, the university, and the local and regional communities.

I note, however, that I take up her conceptions of place and space in particular ways for my own purposes in this chapter. Most pointedly, in referring to the University as a place, my use of the word is aligned with her sense of place as porous and with movements in and out and as constructed through social relations. Highlighting the web-like configurations of spaces within places that occur within formal institutions, I mark the classroom specifically as a space within the place that is identified as the university, and the university as a site within the larger community and region. While Massey (1994) would not likely take issue of this sense of spaces within places, particularly because I note the porous nature and mutual dependence of them, she might contest my sense of the space of the classroom being marked as distinct from the building, the university, and the

region beyond the classroom's imagined boundaries. Part of Massey's concern with the marking of territories comes from the identification of place often resulting in overly romantic notions of certain locations and fixed identities within places. However, I mark the university and the building within which the class was held not to invoke romantic notions, but rather to locate spaces within and in relation to each other, rather than in opposition to, places. This space facilitated, I argue, the possibilities for social relations that are not always possible in the larger place of the university that surrounds it. Thus, while my marking of place and space does serve to highlight some distinction, this is done in order to illuminate, rather than conceal relations of power. Further, it allows for an examination of relations of power both beyond and within the space of the classroom. Accordingly, in my discussions of the lounge and the happenings within it, I refer to it specifically as a space. By space, then, I am referring to the gender studies lounge as a room, but also to the social relations that took place over the temporally limited semester that the class was in session.

Using Massey's (1994) conceptualizations of space and place, I want to argue for the value of the permeability of classroom spaces. Specifically, using insights from the research, I illustrate how thinking of classrooms as permeable, both as spaces that are created through social interaction in a bounded way and as spaces that are simultaneously always a part of the larger university and the communities that surround it, allows for the undoing of dichotomies that have become taken for granted in traditional ethnography and in educational studies. A sense of permeability also allows for poststructural moments that become particularly useful to this study. Specifically, theorizing the permeability of the classroom space allows for disruptions to the intelligibility of

university classrooms. In the next section, I illustrate how students actively worked to co-construct the classroom space, taking the initiative to make our classroom community more fluid by bringing others into the lounge, thereby disrupting the binary sense of insider/ outsider that is taken for granted in ethnography and in classrooms. At the same time, students used language that suggested there was some shared meaning and understanding in the classroom that, in ways or at times, was distinct from what they experienced in other spaces at the university.

Students carefully chose who they brought into the space, and did so for specific purposes. This becomes particularly important in students' negotiations of subjectivities *as students* in real time and at the particular university they attended. While not without its problems, the students took advantage of the possibilities opened up by the classroom space to organize it, and the discussions within it, for their own purposes. They utilized the classroom space to re-conceptualize and to materialize notions of *insider* and *outsider*, rethinking, reworking, and reifying discourses to which we had been subjected.

Constructing a safe space

Fairly early in the semester, it became clear that the lounge as a space was taking on importance to the conversations we were having. When my co-instructor and I found out that the class would be small, she arranged for it to be moved to the gender studies lounge, a room that was more convenient for both of us, more comfortable generally, and suitable for a small class. Students noted the physical differences almost immediately, pointing to both the marginalized space to which the Gender Studies Program offices were relegated (as the student quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests) and the unique and inviting space of the lounge. While the class was structured to bring in

students' lived experiences and to privilege them as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), the physicality of the space allowed for and facilitated an opening up of possibilities in terms of the kinds of knowledge that could be brought into the class.

In a discussion about educational spaces, the students were quick to note the ways that space is connected to what is knowable and allowable in classrooms:

OMITTED⁵: And the nature of the room already changes the discourse, just like this place. What you are able to explore and how you are able to think about things is completely different when you're in the walls of this room.

Student: And *look* at the walls of this room they have different colors

(Field note 3/22/2012).

It also seemed to invoke a sense of comfort, relaxation, and ownership of the space that is not typical of university classrooms:

I just wish more classes would be like this one, in a lounge, [where people could] talk about what's important to them, have it feel like 2 hours you don't want it to end. I feel like that's how class should be and not like something where you're like: 'oh my hell, get me outta here right now.'
(Crimson Butterfly Interview, 4/30/2012)

Indeed, it became clear that students were excited to utilize the class to talk about things that were important to them and that they could not, or did not feel they could talk about in other classrooms spaces. Interestingly, it was shortly after a discussion troubling the discourse of "safe space" (Hackford-Peer, 2010) that students began taking up this very language to describe the lounge, the class, and the discussions that we were having.

⁵ All names are pseudonyms chosen by participants

Our class discussion that day helped me realize how important our gender studies classroom is. We have a place that is really special. It's not a typical classroom. It's a safe space. We've had some great conversations with candor and honesty. (Student, Field note 3/22/2012). Students mentioned the class being "safe" a "safe space" or a "safe zone" at least 33 times during class, in assignments, or in interviews.

Yet it is important to note that not all students referred to class as a safe space. In fact, several of the students who did not mention the class being a safe space were also those who spoke the least. My co-instructor and I initially contested the notion of "safe space." We highlighted that this was yet another discourse that we were taking up as we attempted to work against overly romanticized notions of our classroom. We emphasized, as did the article we had read for class (Hackford-Peer, 2010), that the notion of safe space has been utilized to promote a sense of students as innocents who need protecting, particularly in the case of LGBTQ students. While this sort of framing has at times been useful for political purposes, for example by activist educators and LGBTQ advocates to establish LGBTQ centers at schools, it is reliant upon a normalizing of the marginality of queer-identified students and the need for protection.

Similarly, we tried to convince students that constructing the class as a "safe space" worked to normalize and reinforce aspects of other campus spaces and educational discourses that made a "safe space" necessary for students. Despite, or perhaps partially in response to, our attempts to trouble the discourse of the class as a safe space, students not only persisted in the use of the term, but made it clear why they saw the classroom as such a space. Simply put, students defined the class as a "safe space" in the openness to speak freely about subjects typically considered taboo and off limits, as well as in the

privileging of their speaking from their lived experiences. As education scholar Deborah Britzman notes:

Most students have been educated in contexts that do not address how social difference is fashioned by relations of power and how relations of power govern the self. Most have not had sanctioned opportunities to discuss subjects like feminism, gay and lesbian rights, anti-racist conduct, or what it means to construct one's own racial, gendered, and sexual identity." (Britzman as cited in McKoy, 2000, p. 252)

Here I want to emphasize the claiming of the space by students who actively worked to construct the classroom as a space where we respectfully and boisterously dialogued with one another about issues that were important to them. This was not a seamless process, and this did not mean that we didn't disagree. Indeed, there were times when we all relied upon behaviors and discourses very typical of traditional classrooms in order to discipline one another. Thus my goal here is not to romanticize the classroom as an idyllic space, but rather to suggest that the space itself both facilitated something different *and* at times relied upon traditional notions of classroom spaces. I also illustrate the various ways that students engaged the space to claim it for their own. Relying on our interactions, we lived the space; we (re)constructed the space as we went along. I shift between the use of they (meaning students in the class) and we (in which I obviously include myself) because there were ways that my co-instructor and I organized and structured the class that students then moved in distinctly different directions from what we had planned. Yet, the class was also designed to be flexible and to be open to move in directions that students took us. In focusing on the importance of "constructing it as we went along," I want to move away from spatial fetishism toward an emphasis on the construction of the spatial in terms of social relations (Massey, 1994). The emphasis on

social interaction is particularly helpful in thinking about the ways that the space was variously constructed in different moments.

Despite the shifts in the construction of the space, the notion of “safe space” was salient for many of the students. Not only did they use such terminology throughout the semester, they also indicated that it was a place where they felt comfortable sharing experiences and critiques that they could not share in other classes or in other spaces on campus, and which were unmentionable in the community beyond the university as well. One way that this was expressed was by inviting other students into class. This first happened during the 4th week of class when one of the students brought a friend of his. “I told her how cool the class was and about the awesome discussions we have. I wanted her to come check it out” (Naesed, Field note, 2/7/2012). He had emailed prior to the class to ask permission. The other students in class welcomed his friend Lee without any visible hesitation.

The topic of the day was “Discourses in Practice in Higher Education.” This happened to be a day when there was much conversation about our local and regional space. One of the assigned readings took up the issue of gender in higher education through the Utah Valley University Study (Madsen, 2010), a study that students astutely noted lacked any substantive discussion of Women of Color. However, before we got to the readings, a discussion ensued about local campus happenings. This began with an announcement about conversations that were scheduled across campus regarding the drum and feather logo used by the university and attempts to change the logo. The contentiousness of the issue was noted, with comments about how heated conversations often got surrounding the issue. One student, commented on not being on campus when

she didn't have to, stating: "That's why I'm glad I'm at work, I just stay away from that" (October, Field note, 2/7/2012).

This was followed by a brief discussion in which one of the students brought up the racial tensions on campus. They specifically discussed a conference that had taken place over the weekend. There had been a panel discussion regarding student body elections the prior year and the defacing of campaign posters of Candidates of Color with racial slurs and derogatory comments and drawings. The students critiqued the very limited coverage of the panel by the student newspaper.

From the discussion, we moved into a planned activity in which the students interviewed one another about their experiences coming to college. They asked one another the following questions

1. How did you make the decision to come to college? Who or what was involved in that decision-making process? (Support, finances, responsibilities, etc.)
- 2: What does getting your college degree mean to you?
- 3: What are you getting out of your college experience?

After they interviewed one another, they introduced their partners to the class. Part of the exercise was to pay attention to how their partners introduced them. Students paired up with whoever was sitting next to them. This meant that Naesed and his guest, Lee, were partners. When it came time to report to the class, Naesed volunteered them to go first and turned to the class to introduce Lee. He spent a few minutes telling the class about Lee's encouragement from her sisters to go to college and her hopes and fears about what her education means for her future. He finished by reporting her response to

the third question: “What she is getting out of school is the atmosphere, she’s getting knowledge from ethnic and gender studies that’s curing her ignorance and knowledge from marketing that’s offering her ignorance and dominant ideologies of White students” (Field note 2/7/2012). Lee’s eyes widened and she looked horrified. She vehemently protested Naesed’s use of the word “white,” seemingly embarrassed. Several students quickly jumped in to assure her it was ok. OMITTED noted that this was a “safe space” and Crimson Butterfly said, “no seriously, you can say that in here” (Field note 2/7/2012).

I detail the happenings of this particular class because it illustrates at least three interconnected aspects of the classroom space that I wish to highlight. First, it provides a sense of what students constructed as “safe space.” I increasingly came to understand their use of such terminology to indicate that they could talk about subjects that were contested or forbidden in other spaces on campus, and beyond campus, but were extremely important to them. A second aspect of the classroom space that is highlighted is its multilayered relationship to the larger campus, and the surrounding region. Rather than juxtaposing the classroom as simply a counter space to all outside of it, I suggest that the classroom space also reflects the interactions within it. We brought to this space, and our interactions, our experiences from the larger campus community, and the city, region and state within which the classroom was situated. This means that we brought in gendered, racialized, classed, sexed and religious/spiritual selves and experiences that situated us differently within the class and in the ways that they/we as students, experienced the campus.

Oftentimes, discussions highlighted inequities and tensions experienced or

witnessed surrounding issues of racial tensions and microaggressions, and class, gender and sexuality discriminations and inequalities. In order to disentangle discourses to which we were subjected as students, and to which we subjected one another and ourselves, we necessarily talked about our complex identities and identifications. This was particularly important in the recognition of being situated very differently and having disparate experiences, yet constructing the class as a “safe space.” This construction seemed to provide moments when we could bring experiences into conversation with one another and attempt to disentangle the experiences from sexed, gendered, classed, and racialized discourses we were discussing in relation to education. As one student suggested,

It’s [the class is] definitely a different experience. Especially how everyone in the class is, it’s a safe zone for us. We’ve all had our tough times. We’ve all had our different experiences that we’ve loathed or that we’ve grieved for a really long time. It’s just, it’s, you know finally a realization that there’s somebody out there that’s similar to you, who wants the same thing, but in a different way. (Crimson Butterfly Interview, 4/30/2012)

A third way in which space was important was through the disruption of who was allowed into the classroom. As noted above, Naesed brought Lee to the class to experience discussions that he found exciting. In doing so, he disrupted the sense that the space was closed off. This reflects another way in which the classroom was a permeable space, with a more flexible sense of insider and outsider. In some ways, this inviting in might also seem to disrupt the notion of a safe space. After all, the students were not asked how they felt about someone coming into the class. At the same time, there seemed to be an implicit understanding that Naesed would not invite in someone who would jeopardize the ability to speak openly. By the time Lee visited, students had begun to create something of a culture within the classroom, their own unspoken rules. It seemed

that by the time of Lee's visit, a sense of freedom to speak candidly had developed that any outsider was unlikely to disrupt. Indeed, in two other instances in which my co-instructor and I had scheduled speakers come to visits to the class, the students indicated that they had no intention of censoring themselves, even showcasing their "unruliness" to assert their claim to the space and schooling to these "outsiders" of the norms of the class.

In this section, I have detailed the importance of the classroom space and the way that it mattered in both reflecting and interrogating the sociocultural context in which students were educated. First, the students constructed the classroom as a safe space in which they could bring their lived experiences into conversation with those of other students in the class. The classroom was a safe space in that they could talk about subjects that were taboo or forbidden in other spaces within the university and in the local and regional communities beyond the university. This was the second way that space mattered, as students used the safe space of the classroom to also talk about how power circulated on campus in racialized and gendered ways. Finally, the space of the classroom was disrupted as students brought or welcomed others into the classroom for specific purposes and refused to censor themselves in front of those who were brought into the space. This discussion of the micro-context of the classroom interconnects with the larger context of the university and the metropolitan and regional areas beyond it. To provide the reader a sense of the regional context beyond the university, I provide a discussion of the state of Utah and its religious founding and the ways this permeates the region, local communities, and sites of learning.

The Lay of the Land

At the time of Mormon settlement, the geographic area that is now the state of Utah was part of the Mexican Territory and was populated by more than 20,000 Indigenous peoples, primarily Shoshone and Ute. Mormon settlement has had a significant impact on the racial and ethnic demographics of the state from presettlement majority of Indigenous peoples, to the time of settlement in the mid-19th century, when the population was over 95% White. Today, the population, reflecting the resettlement of the land by White Mormons, remains majority (86%) White non-Hispanic/ Latino/a. The general makeup of the remainder of the population is: Black or African American—1.1%; American Indian or Alaskan Native—1.2%; Asian—2% (including Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Other Asian); Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (including Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, and Other Pacific Islanders)—.9%; Some Other Race—6%; and 2.7%. two or more races. The Census further delineates that Hispanic or Latinos of any race make up 13% of the population, including Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Other Hispanic Or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

The religious demographics have changed somewhat more dramatically. While 79.11% of the people in Utah affiliate with religion, as opposed to 48.78 % in the United States as a whole, the religious affiliation has become more diverse than settlement-era affiliations of 97.6% Mormon (Gibb-Watcher, 2001). Most recent figures show 69.14% of the population as LDS; 6.01% Catholic; .83% other Christian; .69% Baptist; .66% Pentecostal; less than .5 % each of the following: Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Islamic, and Jewish (Sperling, 2014).

Despite changes in religious, racial, and ethnic demographics, the homogeneity in the founding and formation of the state of Utah had allowed religion to create a distinct culture that continues to permeate every facet of society and every institution. The early LDS Church rulers also governed the Utah Territory, with Brigham Young as its first governor. Though the people later elected governors, they were invariably church leaders, guiding the people in the religious and cultural matters. “Mormon practice of central direction, cooperation, and consensus formed a framework for government” (Stewart, nd, para. 6). The homogeneity of the population in conjunction with the dominance of LDS belief system propagated through Mormon male leadership in both church and government affairs, deeply embedded the religious values of the LDS church in government and law and in local and regional institutions, including schools and colleges.

The religious values of the LDS Church include a deep entrenchment of patriarchal values that influence gender roles in Utah. The distinct roles of men and women, with men leading the church, greatly influences Mormon values and culture in the state. In a study of Mormon women, Beaman (2001) writes:

To Mormons, gender is theologically important. One is gendered not only in one’s early life, but in the afterlife as well. Gender prescribes roles and responsibilities, acting as a map to salvation but also as a basis for distinction and hierarchy. LDS women are enjoined by church leaders to give their domestic roles top priority in order to promote the stability of the family. (p. 69)

Indeed, women’s most important roles and their most important service to the church comes first through their dedication to their homes and families. The Mormon culture teaches that one of the women’s fundamental responsibilities is to bear and raise children. According to Beaman (2001), the ideal life situation for an adult woman has always included heterosexual marriage, several children, and a husband who earns

enough money that the woman need not work. “Church leaders have not abandoned their traditional ideal of the non-working mother, caring fulltime for her family. Only her husband, children, and God can release a woman from her obligations to them” (Iannaccone & Miles, 1990, p. 1245). The LDS church is aware that if membership is to continue to grow the church doctrines must work carefully to accommodate social change occurring around it. Thus, “The Church’s statements about women have evolved in such a way that the traditional ideal is reaffirmed even as new roles and behaviors are accommodated” (Iannaccone & Miles, 1990, p. 1246).

The LDS Church’s strong central role in the state and its influence on gender roles are presented to help provide an understanding of the cultural norms within which this study is conducted. Not all of Utah’s population is LDS. Indeed it is increasingly more religiously diverse, yet the strong and dominant presence of the LDS Church has undeniable cultural influences to which even those who are not Mormon are subjected. This was voiced by participants in the study in relation to their views about education and is reflected in Madsen’s (2010) findings in her research on the underrepresentation of women students in Utah. This will be discussed further in relation to the data. For now, it serves to highlight the centrality that the LDS Church has had in local cultural values.

The demographic information provided above is meant to illustrate the way that Utah is changing racially and ethnically. These changes impact the homogeneity of the LDS Church, as it sees demographic changes in its Utah membership. They also impact the Church itself, as it is challenged by the beliefs and cultures of those who are marginalized by it.

Finally, demographic changes influence the once racially and religiously

homogenous state of Utah as comes to terms with these changes.⁶ The tensions as the local population and culture become more diverse while the Church struggles to maintain influence over regional culture frequently manifest in civil rights complaints and litigations.

While federal laws over the years have mediated this to some degree, there are many signs that suggest that challenges to this homogeneity, whether in regard to issues on women's rights, gay and lesbian marriage, increases in racial and ethnic diversity (including religion) are causing discomfort and a sense of the need to assimilate "others" into LDS culture. This stance on diversity as a problem to be solved is evident in the media representation of minoritized groups, in bills proposing legislation, and in classrooms and on college campuses. Despite efforts to promote inclusion of diverse groups and viewpoints and to illustrate separation of church and state in institutions, such as schools and universities, the cultural domination of the LDS Church regularly comes into tension with these efforts.⁷ These matters played out in the lives of the participants of this study as they negotiated regional, local, and campus discourses related to their

⁶ For examples of the way that demographic changes in the state are framed in the media and a discussion of "what challenges lie ahead" see Cortez, M. (2012, June 23). The changing face of Utah: Are we ready to embrace the future? *Deseret News*.

⁷ An incident that took place at the time of this writing provides an apt example. While the University of Utah has made efforts to promote the campus as LGBTQ friendly, it recently chose Lynette Nielsen Gay, a local philanthropist, to receive an honorary degree. When it was discovered that Ms. Gay serves on the Board of Directors for two groups, which the Southern Poverty Law Center defines as LGBTQ hate groups, the University removed her leadership roles with and mention of the groups on the university's website and added her LDS missionary service to her biography. Despite public outcry, the University conferred the degree, while simultaneously announcing: "Ms. Gay is affiliated with two organizations whose involvement in anti-LGBTQ campaigns around the world does not reflect the values of the University of Utah" (<http://www.sltrib.com/home/3827168-155/university-of-utah-removes-references-to>).

identities and identifications, their lives, and their educational choices. As illustrated through examples in the section on the classroom space, discrimination and marginalization of ethnic, racial, sex and gender minorities were issues that came up repeatedly in the classroom site in which the research study took place.

Chapter Summary

In the first part of this chapter, I detailed the methodological framework of narrative inquiry and the research design of the study. In doing so, I discussed the intentionality of using a feminist (post)critical pedagogy alongside narrative inquiry to center and generate students' self-authored narrative data within a classroom. I provided an account of how students were enrolled in the class and given the option to participate in the study. Finally, I described how the data were analyzed. I included throughout the chapter my hopes for the research along with points of tension surrounding the nature of research and my positionalities.

In the second section, I began with a discussion of the cultural context in which the state of Utah was founded. This contextualization was meant to foreground understandings of belonging in a geopolitical region in which race and ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality have and continue to be contested. Students were aware of the tensions around these issues and brought them to the fore in discussing their experiences with/in systems of education in the state including in their current experiences as college students. I ended the chapter with a discussion of classroom space, illustrating how it became important as a site within which students could dialogue about their experiences with/in education in the discursively limited context through which they had developed their student subjectivities.

In Chapters 4-6, I present the case studies of three undergraduate women students, highlighting their trajectories to higher education. In doing so, I draw connections between participants' personal narratives and their sociocultural contexts. Maintaining a narrative approach, and with the intention of centering their experiences through their own authorings, I draw lengthy excerpts from their narratives. First, I begin with a brief introduction to the case studies to familiarize the reader with the organization of the data chapters.

Introduction to the Case Studies

The following three chapters consist of the women participants' narratives of their education trajectories, highlighting their student subjectivities in relation to their complex identities and identifications and their decision-making about higher education. Each case study begins with a title that reflects the specific meaning or purpose that the participant assigned higher education in her life. This is followed by each participant's introduction of herself through a self-portrait assignment for the class in which the data were generated. Next, I offer an amalgamation of my initial impressions of and subsequent details about each participant through my lens as participant observer in the classroom throughout the semester in a section entitled "First Impressions From the Field."

I begin the case study chapters in this way as an attempt to both allow the reader to develop a sense of each woman first through her own words and the way that she chose to introduce herself. My impressions are meant to complexify the self-portraits, which were created by the women in the 1st week of the semester. The self-portraits were prepared during class time and thus were a brief snapshot, created in order to give the rest of the class and the instructors a sense of who each woman was and what she wanted the

class to know about her. Beginning with the assignment that was framed around each woman's agency to decide how the class members would initially know her, I attempt to retain that framing to allow the reader's first impression to develop around words the women chose for themselves. This introduction also serves the purpose of illustrating changes throughout the semester as certain aspects of each woman's story unfold and develop.

My impressions are meant, as mentioned above, to complexify and provide a layered picture, but also to make visible the interactive nature of telling or recounting another's story. While the women have many layers to their self-authoring, the meanings that are added by my piecing together their stories in particular ways for the scholarly interpretive work of this dissertation cannot and should not be ignored. Further, my attention to the physical presentations of the women is meant to both paint a physical picture of them, and highlight the ways that my own participant observer orientation paid attention to their physical presentations, as part of my interpretation of them. Their self-authoring and my words, adding interpretations and descriptions, provide layers of meaning and texture. Still, the representation presented here can point to, but never fully reflect, the complexity of their lives. Here, I am speaking to Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) assertion that text can never fully represent the complexity of lived experience. I highlight this point to bring some transparency to the co-constructedness of the narratives.

Following the introductory section, the case study moves to the self-authoring components in which students' words are excerpted at length. This provides a more holistic view of the women's storytelling and allows their words to be read in the larger

context within which they told particular stories. I draw most heavily from participants' education autobiographies, journals, and reflections back on their original autobiographies. While some participants wrote their stories in great detail in the education autobiography, others really opened up in more detail during the interview through the verbal telling of their stories. The second section, which makes up the bulk of each chapter, provides rich detail about each woman's experience with education by drawing from each of the data sources.

The analysis follows the self-authorings through several sections that speak to the research questions. Specifically, participants' self-authorings are analyzed through sections that highlight: 1) their view of the purpose of education; 2) their experiences with/in the education system and how those experiences worked to reinforce or disrupt student subjectivities in relation to their educational goals and decision-making for higher education; and 3) self-authoring as an act of agency that positions students to pursue higher education. Each chapter closes with a brief discussion, highlighting the findings of the case. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a cross-case consideration of the case studies in order to discuss themes that were present across or insights drawn through readings across the cases, as well as the implications for policy and future research in education and implications for feminist theory and research.

CHAPTER 4

OCTOBER: EDUCATION AS OPPORTUNITY

As discussed in the previous chapter, each of the case studies begins with an extended introduction of the participant, in her own words through her self-introduction. The 2nd week of the semester, students were asked to introduce themselves to the class by describing the portrait that had created in week 1. October volunteered to describe hers first. Below (see Figure 2) is the self-portrait that she showed the class followed by the narrative account of her description as summarized in my field notes from class.

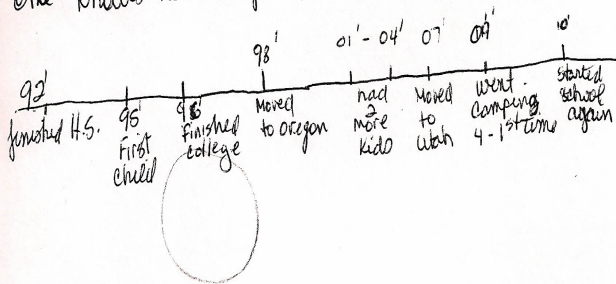
October described her self-portrait by saying that she is not much of an artist, but that hers symbolizes “some crazy girl walking down the pathway,” telling us about how as a child she’d walked far to and from school each day, “maybe five miles” from one side of town to the other. Her mom always told her “look straight ahead and don’t talk to anyone.” And she said that along the way guys would call out to her and tell her to “loosen up and not be so mean and so hard.” At the end of her introduction, looking around the room at her classmates, October said:

Some people think I know where I’m going, but I don’t. I just walk the path and jump the hurdles. Some people have it all figured out and school is easy for them, but it isn’t for me. I have four kids—three girls and a little boy. I have to set a good example. Don’t be like mom, going back to school at 38. (Field note, 1/19/12)

Create a portrait of yourself - the student.

The rules are simple - find a way to represent yourself as a student. This can be how you see yourself as a student, how others see you as a student, how you want to be seen as a student... You can draw an actual portrait of yourself, you can create a word cloud, you can draw a timeline, you can make a map, you can draw a cartoon, you can... (You get the idea - do it however it makes sense for you to do it!) Once you're done take a few minutes to journal about what you did and why you did it that way. We'll use these drawings to introduce ourselves to one another - so you'll need to be prepared to share at least some of what you draw with your classmates.

I feel that other people see as me a confused person walking around campus trying to get to her next class. I say this because this is the way I see myself. I rather be seen as someone who knows where she is going, ~~and~~ and is not confused. Being a student is very hard for me. ~~Sometimes~~ Sometimes I feel I'm at a bottomless pit w/out a shovel to dig myself out. I'm in my own bubble and no one knows how I feel.



Myself
 opened mind
 I like to say random thing

Figure 2: October's Self-Portrait

First Impressions From the Field

At the time of the study, October was a 38-year-old New York native. She identified, in her own words, as Latina and Puerto Rican. This was a shift from the 1st week of class, when she identified herself as Hispanic. She had shoulder length slightly wavy black hair with bangs. At about 5 feet 2 inches tall, she had a petite but strong build. She came off as tough and opinionated. She dressed casually, in jeans, sweaters or long sleeved t-shirts, and boots —outdoorsy, sometimes athletic, and functional usually dark or neutral colored clothing. October said early on in class that she didn't know if she had ever been discriminated against. Yet she talked about the stereotypes of Latinos, to which she had been subjected, and the racial ignorance and racism in the U.S. generally. For example, she was frustrated, as she told the class, that whenever she received calls from her children's school they always had a student call and speak to her in Spanish. They did so assuming, because of her Spanish surname, that she didn't speak English. October talked about her children often. She had a daughter who was turning 18 in a few months. She also had two younger daughters in middle and elementary school and a 3-year-old son. She mentioned that with her husband's job they had always been able to have what they wanted, taking vacations to Hawaii and other desirable vacation destinations.

Her family lived in a local mountain community. It is known for its world-class skiing, its artsy residents, and lofty real estate prices. October was proud to live there, particularly because of the reputation of the schools. Her living situation reflected hard work and willingness to relocate from her home state of New York. October talked about growing up poor. "Poor" was the word she used to describe her social class growing up,

but she did not use it often, and she did not like to linger on that aspect of her history. October put up a tough façade in class and was feisty. She was not shy about sharing her opinions. She sometimes made jokingly sarcastic remarks or challenged people in class when they contradicted themselves or had a conflicting opinion to her own. This seemed to change a bit as time went on, with her softening towards others and becoming a bit more vulnerable. She was also open to new ideas and was thoughtful about points her peers made. And she was very supportive when a classmate made a comment to which she personally related.

My first impressions of October, summarized above from the first several weeks of my field notes, were informed by her actions and her words about herself. As her self-introduction illustrates, she was open about her sense of vulnerability, particularly as a student. She made it clear that, despite any appearances to the contrary, she didn't have it all figured out. Her description of herself as some crazy girl walking down the path would come up repeatedly throughout the semester in different forms. October saw her education as a journey with unexpected twists and turns along the way, but education was also a path she was determined to take and which she expected to lead to a successful career.

The following section presents an excerpt of October's education narrative.⁸ It provides further introduction and adds contextual details about her life and educational trajectory, in her words. In the remainder of the chapter, I engage with the research questions through the various aspects of her narratives, including the introduction above

⁸ Small sections of the narrative have been omitted. The break in the narrative is noted by ellipses.

and her education autobiography, and also through journal entries that she wrote throughout the semester and my interview with her after the course was finished. Specifically, through the analysis of her narratives, I highlight the way that she employed a discourse of “education as opportunity” to describe her aspirations for higher education. I show how education was of great importance to October, in relation to the prospects it opened up for her and her family. As a part of this discussion, I include her multiple identities and identifications, as a Catholic Puerto Rican student from a low-income family and how her raced, gendered, classed experiences mattered to her previous experiences with/in school and the development of her student subjectivity, and her future decisions about education. I further discuss how her identifications at the time of the study, as a Catholic Puerto Rican nontraditional student, mother, wife, and worker, influenced her recent decision to return to college, and in everyday decisions as she navigated the university, and now and guides her children through the education system both drawing from and cultivating her own pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and utilizing aspirational and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of October’s self-authoring and re-authorings as acts of agency. Specifically, I argue that through her self-authoring October positions herself as an agent of her education trajectory by authoring herself as a subject who interrupts the way that power circulates in her life, to speak rather than be spoken. In doing so, she “organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485) within the sociocultural context of her lived experiences. The summary of October’s self-authoring in relation to the primary research questions I set out to ask, alongside the contradictions in her narrative, offer insights into the multiple factors that

considered in education decision-making and along the path to higher education.

October's narrative also provides a deeper understanding of positioning oneself as an agent within an inequitable system. I expand on these connections in the final section.

What Was I Thinking!⁹

My education began in 1979 at Hanover Elementary School¹⁰ in the Head Start Program. I can remember is a lot of smock wearing and painting. I would have to assume I had great time because what is better than painting for a kid. After my Hanover experience I went to Precious Cross School. It was one of the Catholic Schools in town. Plus this is the school my older brother attended. A place I always dreamed of going.

I attended Precious Cross Catholic School from Kindergarten thru 8th. Girls had to wear a blue and white plaid uniform boys white top and blue pants. I still have my uniform: I do not have the nerves to throw it away. The sisters at the school made a large impact, in my life. That I carry with me till this day. I spent so much time at school when I was old enough. I joined the Marian Club; it's like girl scouts but for catholic girls. There were different outing to spiritual functions that I remember till day. The school was made up of working class parents who were married or single, plus families who were on public assistance. Also, families were either of Italian decent [sic] or Latino. We had a couple of black families but not many.

My year in kindergarten was O.K. I liked my teacher, got along with my

⁹ In the data chapters (Chapters 4-6), participants' education autobiographies are italicized to mark the uninterrupted narrative voice of the participant.

¹⁰ Names including those of people, cities, schools, and businesses have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participant and her family.

classmates, except a boy named Sal. He always teased me, and I have no idea why. I would describe myself as a skinny little girl, which made me vulnerable...

Seventh grade was cool. Mr. Albert was one of my favorite teachers in my middle school years. He was the disciplinarian of the school. He understood me and showed me he cared about my academic life. My last year at Precious Cross was good. Eighth grade year was the year our class would make a mark in school history. And we did, only 6 out of 15 were graduating and I was one of the 6. I was so happy and shocked at the same time.

When it came to high school I had a choice to attend the local public school or follow friends to a Catholic Prep School in Conn. I won a scholarship to pay for the school, but never asked how was the rest of the tuition was going to be paid. What was I thinking! I knew all the kids at the school were privileged. Except, my friends and me. I did not know what to expect from my classmates, but was never judged for coming from Port Townsend. I stayed at the prep school for two years and left junior year. Being at the prep school let me experience a different way of life, which is something I treasure. I asked my mother years later why did she let me attend this school if we could not pay and she said, 'She wanted to make me happy.'

Port Townsend High School was where I went for junior and senior year. I had to repeat some classes because I did not do so well in the prep school. The teachers were good, but I was never pushed to achieve any potential. I was not encouraged to attend college, it was as if I was on my own. I attended all my classes and did my best. My senior year almost did not happen. My mother never paid the remaining balance of the prep school so they did not send my transcripts. But, my best brother, without me

knowing paid the balance, and I was able to graduate. Graduating from High School was so exciting. If I hadn't graduated I do not know what would have become of me. Since, I worked during high school I thought of still working because I knew I was not cut out for school.

I worked all through high school for the extra things I needed. My mother was a housekeeper and we lived off her social security check, which was not much. I needed do something with my life instead of working at Pizza House and JoJos' for the rest of my life. I knew I needed to learn a trade. I thought of being a hairstylist, but my brother said, 'NO.' He is in the business and knew it was not for me. Then I thought of a court reporter, but I told myself, 'No.' I am a bad speller. I was pretty limited in my career choices. I knew I did not want to stay working at Pizza House and JoJos' all my life. So I took a loan from my job and my brother. I registered at Westland Community College (WCC) with the thought of becoming a Legal Secretary. I was excited. I went to school did the necessary classes. Worked at my part-time jobs. Two semesters into school I decided to change majors. I switched to Communication/Media Arts so I can work in radio. It felt good knowing I picked a career I wanted to do.

A year before I finished college I found out I was pregnant. I continued on with school and was only working at Pizza House at this point. She arrived in spring semester of '95' the semester went, and I passed all the classes. I finished WCC in summer of 1996 with a lot of help from my husband and mother. They watched Allie while I attended school and a completed an internship in NYC. Where I ended up working for 2 years until I moved to Oregon.

Now I find myself back in school with more challenges to become a Nurse. Each

day I try to not fall into my bad study habit. What was I thinking as a teenager? I can say I never thought of a round 2 with school. My childhood has created into the person whom you see today, and she continues to evolve. I am learning from my experiences, which are still teaching me new things. I try to leave my past where it belongs in the past and just remember it, and not relive [relive] it.

October's education autobiography situates her in place and time. She provides considerable contextual information about her schooling experience in New York and Connecticut. She attended mostly Catholic Schools, which in her elementary school, were comprised primarily of students like her who came from low-income and working-class families of Latino or of Italian descent. Her high school years began in a Catholic prep school, which she described as privileged. Through the rest of her education autobiography October indicates that she saw education as a source of opportunity for a better life. Whatever promises education had not fulfilled for her, she was quick to attribute to herself.

Yet within the autobiography and in her other writings and conversations throughout the semester, there was a critical subnarrative that illustrates that October was well aware of the aspects of her schooling that made obtaining and benefitting from education challenging for her. These factors included institutionalized racism and discrimination. At times, October had difficulty reconciling the promises of education with the multitude of factors, those in and out of her control, that have posed challenges to her pursuit of higher education. Determined to be an agent of her own destiny, she held herself to a high, and often impossible, level of accountability in self-authoring her educational trajectory. The following section demonstrates how October viewed

education as an opportunity for a different kind of life that would include better paying jobs and a career as well as opportunities for personal fulfillment.

**Education’s Promises: “Just Working My Little Jobs,
I Wasn’t Going to Achieve Anything”**

In October’s education autobiography, she connects schooling with a better future, or rather; she connects a lack of postsecondary education with limited opportunities, writing:

Graduating from High School was so exciting. If I hadn’t graduated I do not know what would have become of me. Since I worked all during high school I thought of still working because I knew I was not cut out for school. I worked all through high school for things I needed. My mother was a housekeeper and we lived off her social security check, which was not much. I needed to do something with my life instead of working at Pizza House and JoJos for the rest of my life. I knew I needed to learn a trade. (Education Autobiography, p. 3)

This section of her autobiography includes several details that help to understand October’s impetus for searching out higher education, as well as the limitations she felt in doing so. Education was primarily for the purpose of obtaining better employment and bettering her economic circumstances. She repeated this during my interview with her “How did I decide to go to school? I decided to go because I knew that just working my little jobs...wasn’t going to achieve anything” (Interview, 5/3/12, p. 4). Here, October takes up the widely circulated popular discourses that distinguish education as “the necessary admission ticket to a good job and a middle-class lifestyle” (Foleno & Immerwahr, 2000, p. 2).

October grew up with few material goods. She and her mother worked hard for the things that she needed. While she never expressed regret about this, she saw how hard her mom worked and knew, at an early age, that she wanted something different for

herself. While she knew that education was the key, she had not been directed toward higher education at her high school. She was tentative about her pathway, believing, as noted above, that she wasn't cut out for school. Indeed, as her education autobiography points out, she saw herself pursuing a trade, seeing this as the option available to her.

While she saw higher education as a source of better opportunities, October had limited guidance about higher education and how to access it. Referring to her high school experience in her education autobiography she said, "I was never pushed to achieve any potential. I was not encouraged to attend college, it was as if I was on my own" (p. 3). She also noted that her mother, with limited formal education, knew little about how to guide October in her educational endeavors. Yet October did navigate her way through an elementary school that less than half of her peers completed, through high school and to community college. Her relationship with her mother and her sense of her mother's struggles and vulnerabilities were formative to her own ideas about education and, specifically, higher education as a means of increased opportunity. There were many understandings gained through family and community teachings and experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2001) that October employed in her navigation of the education system (Yosso, 2005) and in her engagement with community college.

In a writing exercise students wrote about their families and how they came to understand education through family teachings. October wrote:

Education was not emphasized at the dinner table like my husband and I do. My mother wanted me to have everything she can give me, but never emphasized in order to have more you need higher education. See my mother never finished grade school. She was illiterate and was embarrassed to the fact. I was embarrassed too. She never checked my homework. Always assumed I got it done. If I had learning issues at school, it was never discovered since she never went to parent teachers meetings. Like my husband and I make sure to do. (Free write, 4/5/12)

October's narrative reflects what Villenas and Moreno (2001) call "interruptive spaces of possibility... [where] daughters are subversively taught to dream possibilities beyond their mothers' lives" (p. 675). Though October's mother had little formal education herself, she wanted October to have all that she could give her. This is discussed in detail later in the chapter. Here, I point to the link that October makes between her own eventual understanding of education as the means to possibilities beyond her mother's life, even as she indicates she did not have access to specific information about higher education from her mother. Having navigated her way to and in higher education, she makes the declaration both at the beginning and end of her statement that she and her husband guide their children purposefully with the knowledge they have gained through their own experiences with/in education.

This sense of coming to understand the necessity of postsecondary education without much formal guidance, but through her experiences working and witnessing her mother work hard for the things they needed displays a transmission of educación, or a knowledge that springs from everyday living (Villenas, 2006) and draws upon what Yosso (2005) terms aspirational capital. "Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Aspirational capital also speaks strongly to the way that October persisted in her own education to model its importance to her children, "allowing [herself] and [her] children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p.78). October's aspirations for her own education, however, continually came into conflict with her uncertainty about herself as a student. These were rooted in her beliefs that she was not cut out for school. Her aspirations for higher education and

her student subjectivity were in constant tension, and continually being reworked, even as she was determined to take navigate institutions of learning to access of the opportunities education could offer her for a career and financial stability.

She talked more about her early understandings of herself as a student and how they influenced her current decisions about education when, during my interview with her, I asked specifically about what she saw when she thought about her future during her middle or high school years:

October: It was very bleak. I didn't see...umm...I didn't see much. I...I saw myself getting out of the now, what I was in then, growing up. The environment, getting out of that. But I didn't see myself maybe...you know, kids dream 'I want to be president.' I didn't see myself there. I just saw myself progressing, out of the environment I was in, 'because I didn't like it.

Barbara: Did you have any idea how you would do that?

October: Umm, no. And now I know education is the only way. Ummm, but if I, I didn't have a mentor to say you know 'this is what you should do' and you know things like that. So no, I didn't have, like I would see family members who struggled and that's what I learned from. And I knew that I didn't want to be there. (Interview, 5/3/2012. p. 8)

Despite not having a mentor and being underserved by the school system, October had a sense that education would provide her with opportunities for a career rather than the tedious, minimum wage jobs that she had been doing from a young age. It was her aspirational capital, and navigational capital—"maneuvering through social institutions...not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)—through initiative, investigation of options, and persistence that she went to community college after high school. While her older brother was influential, paying her tuition balance at the private school so that she could graduate from high school and providing advice regarding a career, she felt, she said, mostly alone in this endeavor.

October still felt alone in navigating higher education as she returned to school to obtain her bachelor's degree. At the time this study was conducted, October was in her 2nd year at the university. As her introduction to her peers indicated, she felt alone in her own bubble and found being a student very difficult. At the same time, she was determined to finish. Though it had not been easy for her, she reentered school in the hopes of better career opportunities. The first time that October used the word "opportunity" as a reason for returning to school to pursue a bachelor's degree was in an exercise during the 5th week of class. Students were paired up and given a list of questions to ask one another, which closely paralleled the research questions: why they came to the university, how they made that decision, and who was involved in that process. Additionally, they were asked what getting a college degree means to them and what they are getting out of the experience thus far. After the students interviewed one another, they reported to the class what their interviewee had said about themselves during the interview.

Her partner reported that for October, the decision to come to college was made by the family, but more specifically by October and her husband. He had recently lost his job, and they thought that furthering her education was the best option for supporting their family, believing that education would lead to a secure and well-paying job in nursing. October interrupted during her classmate's reporting, asserting her primacy in the decision to return to school, stating: "It was my decision, see you even wrote it there." Indeed, on the notes that they turned in from the exercise, her partner had written: "1. October's decision 2. Family decision." She also wrote October's stated reason for coming back to school was for "more opportunities" and "financial independence"

(Student notes, p. 1). As her partner continued to talk about October, she said, “she also had the urge to be more than a mom” and that she was experiencing the benefit of meeting new people as a result of the experience.

As this was one of the few times that I heard of October speaking about the opportunities provided by higher education beyond its potential to advance career options, I pursued this later during my interview with her. When I reminded her of the activity in class and asked her about personal fulfillment in returning to school, she replied:

The personal fulfillment part is coming back. Going back to school is something I've always wanted to do but just talked about. A friend of mine and myself would always talk about going back to school. Like she went to the service so she's like “I'm going to go back on my GI Bill” and stuff like that. And I'm just like “I want to go back, and I want to do nursing.” (Interview, 5/3/2012, p. 19)

She went on to explain that her job duties, including travel as well as having young children, made it too hard for her to consider going back to school during a period of time about 12 years prior when she had especially wanted to do so. When I asked her about why it had appealed to her then, she said:

October: It was a yearning I always...wanted to be more. I always...like I always felt inadequate regarding, like being a mom was great, but I always felt something was missing, in that education there was a whole other thing.

Barbara: And other friendships?

October: Yeah, I'm making...and I'm making a lot more different friendships.

Barbara: Yeah and that must be interesting, so...

October: Mmmhmm...Like a whole kind of different world opens up. (Interview, 5/3/2012, p. 19-20)

Though she spoke less about them as motives for returning to school, there were clearly other benefits to being at the university. October came to the university as a nontraditional first-generation Latina student who was also the family breadwinner, a wife, and a mother. None of these aspects of her life and experiences can be disentangled from one another. October prized her role as a mom and took it very seriously; she discussed her children and family in most of our conversations during and outside of class. But being at the university provided fulfillment in other aspects of her life, including friendships with people she would not have otherwise met, and it gave her a sense of doing and being something more than a mother.

Being a student provided her with possibilities and opportunities, beyond economic and practical, to move into a space in which she practiced an identity other than, though always in relationship to, her roles as wife, mother, or worker. It was a place to form identifications of alliance across difference with her classmates (Weir, 2013) and to take the risk of identifying with others very different from herself, by getting to know others. Lugones (1987) discusses a similar notion in terms of traveling to other worlds, which I find apt for describing the possibilities October found at the university and especially in the classroom. “In attempting to take hold of oneself and one’s relation to others in a particular ‘world,’ one may study, examine, and come to understand oneself” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). This process was important to October’s student subjectivity in the ways that she came to see some of her previous experiences with/in education as part of a systemic problem rather than as her own deficiencies as a student.

October took advantage of the possibilities that class offered to socialize and develop friendships. Shifting between home, work, and the university, sometimes in the

same day, she was often physically tired during class, but she was also engaged and often vibrant. After the first few class meetings, she was very talkative with classmates and “friended” several to play the game Words with Friends© outside of class. She also participated enthusiastically in discussions with peers before and after class and befriended a younger classmate who had similar challenges with balancing work, commuting, family obligations, and school and offered advice to another mother in the class on how to potty train her son. October came to see and author herself as able to contribute to her peers through the wisdom of her experiences. Her interactions with her peers and her participation demonstrated “knowledge production, resilience, and struggles for dignity and wholeness” (Villenas, 2006, p.143). In these ways, higher education offered up other important opportunities for October in providing her places to employ her multiple knowledges.

Despite opportunities for personal fulfillment that education brought, October’s most tangible reason for returning to school was to prepare her for a new career in nursing, about which she was optimistic and exited. This practical goal, driven by economic security for her and her family, was continually on her mind. She was also looking forward to the stresses of managing school, work, and family being alleviated, to some degree, when she completed the nursing program. At the end of the semester, as students revisited their education autobiographies, she talked about looking to the light at the end of the tunnel when she would finally be finished with school and would no longer be a student. “I’m not an artist so I had my daughter draw this for me and in the end she has put “woo hoo! The end is passing my NCLX [nursing board tests] and graduating. That’s the end” (Field note, 4/26/2012).

Troubling Opportunity Narratives

“The school had a cultural assumption that most Latinos in Port Townsend would not pursue a 4-year degree” (October, Final Reflection, p. 1).

While October’s autobiography begins with happy schoolgirl memories of preschool painting and a favorite middle school teacher, there are also details that get at her specific school environment and experiences that influenced her sense of self as a student, or student subjectivity. For example, she tells of the Catholic school uniform that she had to wear and notes that the families of her schoolmates were low-income and working class families, mostly Latino and Italian American, emphasizing her awareness of both social class and ethnic backgrounds of the students at her school.

October’s words were expressive, she discussed Precious Cross School, a place she had “always dreamed of going” because her big brother went there, and which continues to influence her life to this day. We learn that she felt vulnerable, which she attributed in part to being a skinny little girl and which reinforced the necessity of having to walk to school with her head down, and talk to no one, as her mother told her to do. Her sense of vulnerability was apparent throughout her narratives of her educational experiences. She also said that by her eighth-grade year, only 6 of 15 children were graduating and moving on to high school, a deplorable statistic that is not elaborated on beyond October’s sense of happiness and shock at being one of the students to graduate. Her remembrance of this moment marks it as a point of realization that, even as early as eighth grade, not everyone succeeds in school.

October expressed a sense of belonging in her elementary school as she described being part of the Marian Club for girls and spending as much time as she could at the

school. She also pointed to a teacher, Mr. Albert, who was the disciplinarian. October described herself as quiet and shy. She conformed to the rules, practices, and expectation of the school, and was rewarded for doing so. October was not a “low-achieving” student in elementary school, yet she expressed her shock at graduating, noting how few of her classmates did. The low achievement rates in schools like October’s—those serving low-income racial and ethnic minority students—have been linked by education researchers to subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). Deficit thinking explains low academic achievement of racial and ethnic minority students, especially as measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates, as a function of perceived deficiencies relating to minority students, their families, and their cultures. Such theorizing focuses attention on students and families as the problem rather than holding schools responsible for the educational success of students. Further, there is no consideration of the multiple knowledges and skills that students bring to school (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gonzáles, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hogg, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sleeter, 2005).

Even as a young student, October seemed to be aware that education would provider her opportunities and she took advantage of every one of the few that were offered to her. She found the people and spaces within her K-12 school where she was affirmed. Chosen to receive a scholarship to a private Catholic High School, she valued what it might offer her and took advantage of that, too. Discussing her time at a private preparatory school, she says that she was never judged for where she came from and expressed gratitude for being able to experience a different way of life, which she treasures. Still, because her family could not pay for the tuition, she only attended 2 years at the school. It isn’t until she discusses the challenges to graduating: having to repeat

some classes and nearly being prevented from graduating because the prep school would not release her transcripts, that we get a more conflicted account of her experiences there. For example, she says, “The teachers were good, but I was never pushed to achieve any potential. I was not encouraged to attend college it was as if I was on my own” (Education Autobiography, p. 3). These few sentences are particularly revealing. While she states that the school had good teachers, her not being pushed academically or encouraged to attend college belie the characterization of a good school, particularly a college preparatory school. Further, not being pushed academically and not being encouraged to attend or given information about college while attending a college prep school were part of the way October came to understand that she was “not cut out for school” (Education autobiography, p. 3).

October’s experiences align with research that shows Latino/a students are subjected to negative racial and ethnic stereotypes by school administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors who have low expectations of and for them (Valenzuela, 1999). She spoke of not being pushed academically and feeling like there were gaps between what she learned in her K-8 school and high school. For example, she said, “I was in classes and trying to keep up, but everyone else seemed to know how to do it [math] already” Interview, 4/30/12). Jehangir (2010a) reports similar findings among low-income high school Students of Color in her research, arguing “For some LI [low-income], FG [first-generation] students, these gaps translate into anxieties and lack of confidence about their ability to manage academic content in college” (p. 20). Indeed, as October mentioned, her experiences in the private prep school put her at risk for not graduating, as she had to retake several classes when she transferred to the local public high school.

Though she did not believe she was cut out for school, with the realization that her low-paying jobs were leading nowhere, October forged through community college obtaining an associate's degree in Communication. She was very proud of her degree, especially because she continued school throughout her pregnancy and the birth of her first child. Yet she questioned whether that degree was best for her and if she might have done more with additional guidance, and she was disappointed to find herself back in school:

As I reflect back on my education I wonder what if I was more voicetress in my needs of a better education. Would it have made a difference? Or, could have I been like Miguel (my best friend) and do what was best for me. Go on to a 4 yr school to become more than what was expected of me. Or, did I hold myself back because I never trusted that I could be more than October Ramirez.

I did hold myself back and I cannot blame it on the school system, my mother or my brother. My family always supported me in what I wanted to do. Yes, I could have spoken to my school counselor, but never felt supported. I really never gave myself the chance to fail so I can learn. And pick myself up and use my voice as the women before me.

I did eventually go to a community college and earned a degree. Yet, years later I find myself back in school getting a second degree. It's that voice again but this time I will be heard. (Journal, 3/13/2012)

Here October moves back and forth, first suggesting that things might have been different now if she had done more than was expected of her by pursuing a 4-year rather than 2-year degree from the beginning. She locates the blame within herself, noting that she always had family support for her choices. Yet like so many other Latino/a students who persist to higher education, her story reflects: "The majority of Latina/o undergraduates [who] are first-generation college students, many of whom have overcome inadequate K-12 academic preparation, economic hardship, and other institutional barriers" (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009, p. 561-562) and who

have been tracked into community colleges, substantially reducing their chances of ever earning a 4-year degree (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Jehangir, 2010a; Villalpando, 2010). It becomes clear in her next sentence, in her musing that she could have spoken to a school counselor, that she didn't feel supported in accessing that resource or in her counselor's advice to her. October points directly to the counselor and this school in their lack of support for considering her a candidate for a 4-year degree.

Shifting the assignment of responsibility for what she views, in hindsight, as uninformed or inadequate decisions regarding higher education, October attempts to pinpoint the specific power relations that kept her from the education she desired. She locates institutional racism of a school system that positioned her as deficient, tracking her toward community college. In writing that she gave in to these low expectations for her future, she indicates that her student subjectivity and her sense of her possibilities for higher education were significantly informed by her interactions with teachers and guidance counselors, particularly in high school through their deficit views of her.

October's "histories of participation [came] to bear on each new act or moment of participating" (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 16). Facing her fears about not being able to complete a 4-year degree, October had to remind herself often of the promises of a good-paying job that she hoped would come as a result of returning to school for a degree in nursing. As the semester neared its end, she struggled to meet all of her work, school, and family obligations. In her last journal entry her frustration and exhaustion were apparent.

I wonder if I had educational guidance or the drive to become more in life would I be in school now? Would it had a made a difference? Well I would never know and I should continue on with school.

I was part of the female workforce before having my second daughter. My husband and I decided I should stay since it was cheaper for me to stay

home than work for childcare. Even though staying [home] helped me bond with my daughters and watch them grow part of me missed working. When I decided to return back to school nine years later it was to rejoin the workforce and make more money for the family. Return to school is a different world, which is very difficult to move through. I have many challenges from Anatomy class, family and work. People ask, 'How do I do it.' I respond, by just forging through it. But I really want to give up because it is becoming very hard. And, it's not going to get any easier. Part of me knows I can finish, but the light at the end of the tunnel is very dim. (Journal, 4/19/2012)

This was one of the few times during the semester that October did not end her narrative optimistically. The multiple responsibilities on her were taking their toll. While she expressed many times through the semester that juggling all that she had to do every day was a challenge, such statements were usually met with equal determination. She increasingly expressed doubt about whether the promises of opportunity that education was meant to offer her were worth the sacrifices she was making.

By the last week of classes, October was optimistic once again. In her project for class, she provides insight into the never-ending process of reconciling the promises of education with both the substandard education that she received in the past and the challenges and sacrifices that she makes as she pursues her current goal of becoming a nurse.

As I was figuring out what to do for this assignment, I thought of [the game] Candy Land and I thought of a timeline. In reality it doesn't go straight because first I was a little kid and things are supposed to go straightforward, but as I grew it started curving around. And there were sometimes there were shortcuts I took and sometimes I went back to the beginning like now where I've landed back at the beginning of going back to school. And each step is a step in my life which makes changes and turns and sometimes in these turns, I miss things or I gain things. Like I'm learning languages here, learning words and the meaning of what it is to be a feminist and about hegemony and discourse. And while I'm doing that I'm missing out on the kids playing soccer and softball and things like that or I'm missing out on Allie's prom and getting dressed and all of that fun stuff. But if I have to take the ladder back now from the beginning, I

can reflect back on my experiences to teach others—anyone who wants to hear me regarding all of the curves I’ve been taking in my life. I’m not an artist so I had my daughter draw this for me and in the end she has put ‘woo hoo!’... The end is passing my NCLX [nursing board tests] and graduating. That’s the end... and a whole new beginning. Basically learning how to be a nurse and rebalancing the full time career and family and juggling as one [of the children] goes off to college and the others at home. So that’s me. And I have a song. Every time I hear this song, it makes me jump. (Field Note, 4/24/2012, p. 8)

Then October played for the class the song “You are the universe” by the Brand New Heavies, partially excerpted below (Levy & Garrett, 1997).

You're the future, and you've come for what is yours
 The hidden treasure, locked behind the hidden doors
 And the promise of a day that's shiny new
 Only a dreamer, could afford this point of view
 But you're a driver, not a passenger in life
 And if you're ready, you won't have to try 'cause

You are the Universe
 And there ain't nothin' you can't do
 If you conceive it, you can achieve it
 That's why, I believe in you, yes I do

You're a winner, so do what you came here for
 The secret weapon, isn't secret anymore
 You're a driver, never passenger in life
 And when you're ready, you won't have to try 'cause
 You are the Universe
 And there ain't nothin' you can't do
 If you conceive it, you can achieve it
 That's why, I believe in you, yes I do (Chorus Repeats).

As October did her last presentation for the semester, she continued her metaphor of education as a journey. She talked about the twists and turns, and her experience not being linear, the way she had envisioned as a young girl. Education’s promises for more opportunities in her life were not without their challenges. Indeed, in October’s experience a 4-year degree *was* like “The hidden treasure, locked behind the hidden doors” (Levy & Garrett, 1997). October remained determined to get the treasure and used what

she'd learned from past experiences in that journey. In taking stock of her experiences, she noted that she was missing things in her children's life at the same that she was learning new things as a college student. Importantly, she situates herself as someone who has learned from her multiple experiences and positions herself as wise and able to teach others. As she says, "I can reflect back on my experiences to teach others—anyone who wants to hear me regarding all of the curves I've been taking in my life." (Field note, 4/20/2012).

Drawing from her lived experience, particularly in terms of her education was an important part of her self-authoring her student subjectivity—her ability to use her past to inform her future as a way to move through the university, to guide her own children in their path to higher education, to give advice to younger students in the class, and "to teach anyone who wants to hear me." In this way, she places her marginalized experiences at the center of analysis (Collins, 2009) as a valuable tool for understanding the multiple oppressions that she has experienced with/in education. These experiences, which include being considered in deficit terms and tracked toward community college, while disrupting the discursive power of higher education as opportunity, also became a tool for learning and she continually re-authored her experiences in a way that positioned her as a knowledgeable agent, better situated to determine her future. As she ended her presentation with the song, *You are the Universe*, she drew upon its optimistic messages: "You're the future and you've come for what is yours...you're a driver and not a passenger in life" (Levy & Garrett, 1997, Track 1).

October was keenly aware of the injustices around her. Paulo Freire (2000) developed the term critical consciousness to explain the perception of social, political,

and economic contradictions especially between one's reality in relation to that of an oppressor or an institution through which individuals act as oppressors. In the following section, I highlight the ways in which October demonstrated a critical consciousness of structural inequalities present in her schooling. I argue that she underplayed aspects of discrimination present in her experiences to position herself as an agent of her own educational trajectory. By "leaving the past in the past," she actively worked to utilize the information and understandings that she has gained from her experiences, particularly from her experiences of not being encouraged to reach her potential or to pursue higher education, to move forward. Through her continual authoring and re-authoring of herself, she is positioned as an agent of her experiences. In her current self-authoring, now as a university student, she was determined to get what she came for. Equally important is her determination to employ lessons learned to navigate her children through the education system and to set a good example for them by completing her bachelor's degree.

Self-Authoring as Agency: I Am the Driver

Not the Passenger in Life

The mediations performed by individuals in process of self-interpretation, the mediations by which individual experience comes to have specific meanings, are produced through a foreknowledge or historical a priori that is cultural, historical, politically situated, and collective... Moreover, one's relation to this foreknowledge is not primarily one of negation; it makes possible the articulation of meanings and formulations of judgment and action. One's relation is better characterized precisely as absorption, generation, and expansion, a building from rather than an imposition that curtails preferred possibilities. (Alcoff, 2006, p. 45)

October's education autobiography, written early in the semester, aligned with the narrative that she presented throughout the semester: School, although not easy or uncomplicated, was worth the hard work that she put into it and that she was largely

responsible for how it turned out, no matter who might let her down along the way. She expressed a consciousness that others should have provided more along the way, but ultimately took ownership of how her life and education have turned out. As she revisited her education autobiography in light of discussions and readings that she participated in throughout the course, she identified her own discourse as what drove her. In other words, rather than identifying an external popular discourse surrounding education in order to explain her educational choices, she insisted that she took up her own discourse. Near the end of the semester, students reflected back on their original education autobiographies. Her reflection is excerpted below.

Where my life started as a teenager is not what I expected it to be today. Finishing high school was good enough for me, but soon it was not enough. I had to find this information on my own because going to college was not a topic at the dinner table. Going to college was not encouraged by my high school either. I had to make my own discoveries regarding college. While these decisions may have been right or wrong they were mine.

I've been making decisions for a long time and as I said before they were either right or wrong, but they were my own. During gender class we had many discussions on education. My classmates would discuss their oppression from their Utah high schools. Even though I grew up on the opposite side of the country and went to high school in a different time I had similar experiences regarding my schooling. I compare high school to a grocery store check out. Students come in get what they need. They may have a teacher directs them to where they need to be. At the same time it is up to that student to ask that teacher for further assistance. Now, its time to check out and that is all you want to do since you were not made aware of the great deals after you leave high school. On the same token I cannot put all the blame on the school. The school had a cultural assumption that most Latinos in Port Townsend would not persue a 4-year degree. I was one of those students to give into that hegemony of power from the faculty and administration.

As stated before college was not a topic at my dinner table. I knew I wanted to accomplish more than my mother's middle school education. I understood she wanted more for me because she always said it. She worked hard cleaning someone else's house to give my brothers and me

what we needed. I also cannot entirely blame her for the lack of furthering my education. I will put the blame on both family and the educational system. Due to the lack of encouragement I felt I would never succeed in a 4-year-school.

Currently I have returned to school in order to better myself and obtain a better career. This choice was made out of necessity since my husband has been out of work. I consider my life as my personal discourse. With all my past experiences my old schooling habits are resurfacing plus the feeling of not being able to compete in a 4-year school. I can say I was never told I could not compete.

I am taking these past schooling experiences into account in order to avoid the same mistakes. Since school was not my best subject. I am learning to ask for the help in order to have a successful college experience. Otherwise, I will give into my self-esteem of not being able to accomplish competing in a 4-year university. Furthermore, I'm not competing against other students, but the discourses, which surround my current situation.

My current life situation is being able to balance my family, work and school. I cannot afford to let any piece of my discourse fall. I've worked hard for the past year in order to achieve my current position as a student. I have to work twice as hard to balance all three aspects of my life. This is part of my story that creates the person in front of you. As my story evolves and continues to add more pieces I am becoming a more confident person. This confident person will show her children to appreciate the educational system and always ask for the better deal before leaving. I am the driver and not the passenger in life. (Final Reflection, 4/26/2012).

Even though October expressed a more critical consciousness through her narratives as the semester progressed, naming, in her final reflection, the cultural assumption by high school teachers and administration that Latinos in her hometown would not pursue a 4-year degree, she remained insistent that she is the one who has made the decisions regarding her education. Throughout the semester she expressed awareness of low expectations and lack of support, indicating that they negatively affected her formal schooling. Still, she refused to fully place blame or count herself as a victim of ethnic and socioeconomic discrimination that was surely present. Instead, as

Alcoff (2006) argues in the quote at the beginning of this section, October mediated her personal experiences to give them very specific meanings.

The culturally, historically, politically, and collectively situated meanings that October gave to her experiences exhibit a strong sense of agency. Specifically, they positioned her, as Alcoff says, to formulate judgment and action. In a place of generation and expansion, a place from which she can build rather than be imposed upon, October created her own definition of discourse and reframed it to mean her own principles for navigating the university and her life while she attended the university, insisting that she was in control of her future and that she had learned important life lessons through her experiences. Further, she was determined to utilize her own experiences in order to help her children make good decisions, particularly when it comes to education and formal schooling.

By turning to her own discourse of life, she liberates herself, to the degree possible, from external authority. Bakhtin (1981) describes it in this way: “One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.347). October’s most recent authoring of herself drew upon her life as her personal discourse. She insisted that no longer would she consider others’ expectations of her possibilities or limitations in regard to education above her own student subjectivity or above her own discourse. This time, she was going to use her voice, ask for help and get what she came for. She would speak rather than be spoken for (St. Pierre, 2000). She would author herself rather than being authored. In doing so, she breaks free from the cultural assumptions that Latino students do not pursue 4-year

degrees. She instead re-authors herself as a holder and producer of knowledge gleaned from her experiences with/in education and from her larger life experiences across identities and identifications (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Shifting Identities and Identifications

October's identification of herself as Hispanic, during the 1st week of the semester, shifted through critical conversations in which peers contested the political context of that identification and its roots in colonization. Identifying herself as Latino/a and Puerto Rican cisgender woman, a student, a wife and mother, an employee and co-worker, she considered her education trajectory in relation to her social, cultural, and historical context. This included disappointments at being underserved or disserved by the education system, in part because of deficit assumptions made by those entrusted to educate her. In her final authorings, she began to place some of her understanding of this in terms of a history of discrimination within the U.S. education system. She came to this knowing in conversation with her peers, who also told of having been underserved or disserved in their schooling. She was able to see similarities in the stories of racism, sexism, marginalization, and tracking they experienced in their schools.

She also reconciled her mother and brother's desires for her and the situated context within which she grew up. She had been embarrassed by her mother's inability to read and write in English, and that she did not know more about the education system, and she strongly disliked feeling afraid walking to and from her neighborhood. Yet she understood her mother wanted more and her mother and brother provided her with the resources they could in helping her to pursue higher education. October made it clear that her family's socioeconomic position brought challenges, including not being able to

afford college and influencing her decision to go to community college after high school. Limited financial resources meant that she never really considered a 4-year degree *and* was a primary reason she pursued postsecondary education at all. She did not want to struggle as her mother had. Her raced, gendered, and classed identities were evident in experiences with education and her aspirations for higher education.

Increased income, financial security, and access to a better life were also strong factors in her return to college to pursue a 4-year degree. October did not like to talk about the financial vulnerabilities in life, though it did pervade her discussions in relation to schooling. In attending prep school, she was exposed daily to students who came from much wealthier means. Though she says she never felt judged, she stuck mostly to her group of friends that she followed to the prep school from her K-8 years. She became aware of disparities in financial wealth and that some students were positioned or set up to move on to 4-year colleges—that this was simply the expectation in some families. This motivated her to pursue a different life and she came to understand education as part of the pathway to a life with fewer of the struggles that came with hard work for low pay. After high school, she shifted from working long hours at fast food jobs to working long hours both at schooling in community college and part time jobs in order to get the best education accessible to her and to obtain a sense of financial security. And years later, when she saw that her associate's degree was not enough, she returned to school, still seeing it as key to better opportunities.

October also understood the role of gender in her experiences and she embodied a feminist awareness, though she never used the word feminist to describe herself. This is likely a reflection of the failure of the mainstream feminist movement to capture the

complex experiences and concerns of Women of Color (Collins, 2009; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Walker, 1983). For many women, feminism that fails to recognize the complex issues of women (in contrast to feminist theories such as Third World Feminism, Critical Race Feminisms, postcolonial feminism, multicultural feminisms, and Queer theory to name some) continues the legacy of “failing to acknowledge the specificity of oppression...[and] attempting to deal with oppression from a theoretical base” (Moraga, 1983a, p. 29).

Yet October was firm in her understandings of the ways that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class are implicated in relations of power, and the ways that gender mattered in specific ways for her and her daughters. She expressed her recognition, largely through class discussions of gender discrimination and identifying exclusionary sexist practices in the schools she grew up in and in some of her university classes, of situations where women were excluded or women’s voices were ignored. She also discussed sexual harassment in her K-12 schooling and the ways that this inhibited her schooling and made her fearful and vulnerable. As she discussed these experiences in dialogue with her classmates, she came to see some previously unquestioned experiences as unfair and problematic. There were other ways that she deeply felt the vulnerabilities of a raced, sexed, and classed identity (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989). The gender implications related to schooling were present throughout her narratives.

In her early schooling, she recounted sexual harassment that she faced on the way to school and feeling vulnerable as a “skinny little girl.” As she and her brother discussed opportunities at community colleges, the choices were in highly feminized fields such as hairstylist, flight attendant, and secretary. The mother of three daughters and a son,

October was very alert to issues impacting her daughters' safety. For example, during my interview with her as we were discussing the many things she was juggling she said:

October: Just the obstacles that I'm confronting right now...you know being able to finish school and getting into a nursing program, being able to get Allie into a college, you know, and her ummm trying to figure out who she is you know...

Barbara: ...and what she wants.

October: and what she wants...you know. Ummm even if it's here in Utah or away, you know? Making sure that she's safe. That's like one of my priorities. My husband thinks that that's ridiculous that I was, the other day we, we wanted to figure out what she wants to do. Or even if she doesn't know what she wants to do, what college does she want to go to? I'm like, 'well you need to figure out, look at these colleges and see what they're, the statistics for security is for females.' He was like "well that's silly." I was like "no it's not!"(laughs). How many girls go missing, or get hurt.

Barbara: or get...

Barbara and October simultaneously: ...raped. (Interview, 4/30/2012)

October declined to name gender as an aspect of identity that poses a challenge to education, either for herself or her children, choosing to not disentangle them from the other oppressions she experienced. (Collins, 2009; Moraga, 1983a, 1983b). Cherrie Moraga (1983b) names a theory in the flesh as one in which "the physical realities of our lived—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (p. 23) and which attempt to bridge race, sexism and heterosexism. "We do this by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words" (p. 23) and refusing easy explanations. Similarly, in *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2009) discusses knowledges that are expressed differently by African Americans. These knowledges and are either hidden from or suppressed by Whites and are necessary to resist negative images of Black women. These knowledges constitute distinctively

Black and women-centered worldviews. Moraga (1983a, 1983b) and Collins (2009) speak, though differently so, to a refusal to fragment and name separately what is lived in whole, embodied experiences as Women of Color. Reflecting the multiple ways that power circulates in the lives of Women of Color, these experiences are fused or constituted to form a place from which to survive, resist, and create solidarity. For October, her gender was never lived only as gender, it was lived as part of her whole raced, gendered, classed self (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989).

Chapter Discussion

In exploring the research questions in this study—the development of October’s student subjectivity, its relationship to her complex identities and identifications, and how it mattered to her choices about higher education—it was evident that her history of participation in her K-12 schools was very important and that her identities and identifications were of high significance to her experiences within schools. In this discussion I bring together feminist race theories and poststructural feminist theories to illustrate how she utilized her agency to author herself as a speaking subject (St. Pierre, 2000). October did so by creating her own discourse in which she bridged the realities of her raced, gendered, classed life by naming herself through her own stories and her own words (Collins, 2009; Moraga, 1983b). Drawing upon pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), that is, she utilized informal and formal lessons from her family. She specifically employed aspirational and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). October authored her own life, positioning herself as an agent of her own education trajectory.

In her final reflection October took a strong epistemological stance declaring that it is her own discourses to which she is subjected, and that she is the driver, not the

passenger in life. This epistemological stance was deeply grounded in her lived experiences including her raced/classed/gendered experiences, the historical moments in which she was operating, personal context, and the multiple roles that she played as daughter, sister, mother, wife, worker and student. October illustrated critical recognition of hierarchical structures in which she was placed. Yet through her authoring and re-authoring, she engaged in a process of recognizing relations of power that mattered to her schooling and repositioning herself to find the cracks and fissures of possibility. As Weir (2013) argues, “once I realize that I am in a relation of power with you, I need to re-identify—re-cognize—myself to accommodate that recognition” (p. 79). In her re-authorings of herself she claimed herself as a subject, not subjected as one who speaks rather than being spoken of.

Through her authorings and re-authoring, and re-imagining herself in relation to her situated contexts, she continually re-positioned herself to take advantage of education’s possibilities while also attending to the tensions that came with pursuing education. Throughout the semester, October was coming to terms with how she had ended up where she had in her education journey. She began her introduction with a discussion of how “Some people think I know where I’m going, but I don’t. I just walk the path and jump the hurdles” (Field note 1/19/2012). In her final presentation she described her life like the game Candy Land as having many twists and turns, shortcuts and “start overs.” And in her final reflection, she asserts that she is the driver and not the passenger in life. In each of these authorings of herself, the metaphor of the journey resonated with her. It reflected her sense of movement and destination, though not with a clear, linear, or unobstructed path.

The twists and turns in her path reflected the ways that relations of power played out in her life, October came from a family of origin that both supported her in the ways they were able and that was constrained by lack of access to and information about education. They did not have resources necessary to facilitate a fully successful engagement with higher education. In terms of the statistics on which students do not make it to college—those from low-income families, those whose parents did not attend or graduate from college, and those from racial or ethnic minority groups (Jehangir, 2010b)—October was not predicted to make it to college. October's family reflects the educational debt that has accrued for low-income Families of Color in the United States (Ladson Billings, 2006). This relation of power made her path to college more difficult. Yet her family also offered other resources and forms of capital that facilitated her enrollment in community college. Recognizing her limited prospects and with lessons about life and survival from her family (Delgado Bernal, 2001), October gathered her resources, focused her aspirations, and navigated her way to community college (Yosso, 2005).

October's experiences with/in schools also played an important role in her education trajectory. While she enjoyed being at and had a sense of belonging in her K-12 schools, October attended schools that dis-served the predominantly low-income racial and ethnic minority students in the community. This occurred through tracking, assumptions that students were more likely to fail than succeed in school, disconnection from students' families and communities, and abysmally low graduation rates. As a young girl, October had to make sense of herself and her schooling in relation to what she

learned and did at school alongside what she knew from home and her family (Delgado Bernal, 2001). In her final reflection, the tensions are apparent:

As stated before college was not a topic at my dinner table. I knew I wanted to accomplish more than my mother's middle school education. I understood she wanted more for me because she always said it. She worked hard cleaning someone else's house to give my brothers and me what we needed. I also cannot entirely blame her for the lack of furthering my education. I will put the blame on both family and the educational system. Due to the lack of encouragement I felt I would never succeed in a 4-year-school. (4/26/2012)

Reflecting back on her education trajectory, she makes this statement in the context of trying to determine who or what was responsible for her not pursuing a 4-year degree after high school, and why community college was not enough. Earlier in the semester, she had expressed frustration that her mother didn't attend meetings at the school and experienced shame at her mother having a sixth-grade education and being, in her words, "illiterate." The school reinforced this shame through explicit and implicit assimilationist messages. For example, October could not remember the school ever calling to speak to her mother, positioning her mother as inconsequential in her daughter's education. Spanish was not spoken at her school, and while October never said that it was forbidden, she did note that although Spanish is her first language she was not comfortable speaking it at school. October spent considerable time at school and participated in Marian Club, which she described as Girl Scouts for Catholic girls, where she learned how to be a good, obedient girl. There were multiple ways that the school was able to assimilate her to American ways that distanced her from her home life and discursively participated in her raced, gendered, and classed sense of herself, all of which were connected to her student subjectivity.

October's mother was positioned as subordinate in many ways. She was a working-poor single Mother of Color and a language minority. She represented everything that was detestable in the discursive practices of the Reagan-era politics of the 1980s, where her single-mother status was a threat to the family and her low-income status made her a likely "welfare queen,"¹¹ (Collins, 2009). October was the first generation of her family to be born in the United States mainland. Her mother's circumstances must be understood in the sociopolitical context of the simultaneous forced citizenship and sociopolitical disenfranchisement of Puerto Rican people (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997; Negrón-Muntaner, 2004), as well as the economic depression that challenged much of the United States, and particularly large cities like New York, during the 1980s when October was growing up there.

October was left to reconcile the tension between seeing a mother she loved work hard and who was challenged to meet her family's material needs, alongside a school in which her home language and culture were devalued and a larger society in which single mothers, particularly those of Color, were demonized. In this context, education offered great promise. In order to see education as a possibility for a better future, then, October had to engage with an education system that had asked her to deny her home culture, her language, and her mother. October, to some degree, took up assimilationist discourses in pursuit of an education that held the promise of escape: from a neighborhood she was

¹¹ This pejorative term "describes economic dependency—the lack of a job and/or income...the presence of a child without a father and/or husband (moral deviance); and finally, a charge of the U. S. Treasury—human debit... The welfare queen represents moral aberration and a economic drain, but the figure's problematic status becomes all the more threatening once the responsibility for the destruction of the American way of life is attributed to it" (Lubiano, 1992 as cited in Collins, 2009, p. 88).

afraid to walk in, from having too little money and too few resources, from the stigma of poverty, and little formal education.

Within this situated context in which October's lived experiences as a raced, classed, gendered young woman desiring something better for herself, October recognized the interruptive spaces of possibilities for a better future (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). That is, she saw, in part through her mother's belief in her abilities and desires for education that her mother imagined possibilities beyond her own for October (Flores Carmona, 2010; Villenas, 2006). While October may not have been guided to higher education by her mother, her mother encouraged the initiative that October took regarding school. She pursued community college, the only option she saw available to her, knowing that she had her mother's full support and belief in her abilities. Further, October utilized what she had learned through the process of moving through the education system to guide her children on what she hoped would be an easier path to higher education, to realize possibilities beyond hers. The promises of education reflected October's aspirational capital to have a better more secure life for herself and to make life even better and more secure for her children "even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). October maintained strong aspirations for higher education, even after being disappointed when her associate's degree proved insufficient for getting the kind of jobs she sought. For October, then, her relationships, mother/daughter/mother relationships, permeated her education and her sense of possibility about herself as a student in both of her experiences with higher education. Further, she drew from her experiences to enact her own teachings in the home to ensure her children a better future than her own (Collins, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Despite her agency in seeking out and taking advantage of the moments of possibility for herself, October was deeply marked by her history of participation in the discourse communities of her schools. The devaluing of her culture, language, and knowledges left marks on her; residue beyond the actual moments of learning that made her question herself in relation to higher education, coming to bear on her future acts of learning (Moje & Lewis, 2007). This included her fears that she would fall back into her bad study habits (Education autobiography, p. 2). Her vulnerability as a student was a continual agitation against her attempts to define herself. And when she had challenges in school, whether they related to difficulties in certain subjects or managing her multiple responsibilities, she responded by continually repositioning herself as a knower, drawing from her lived experience as a tool of learning and strength. October believed that she had much to share with anyone who wanted to hear about her challenges in higher education but especially with her children who, though in very different circumstances than hers geographically and socioeconomically, walk in a world in which race, class, and gender remain significant to how society, institutions—like schools, churches, law enforcement—media, and various public and private spaces are organized.

In authoring her own raced/classed/gendered epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002), October returned to her own power, to the place that she had control, her experience, her memories, her fortitude, and her resilience. After being subjected, by her K-12 schools, to various definitions of her and who she could be in relation to education, she always returned to her own desires to fight the marks that education had left on her. She returned to her own definitions and understandings, her own discourses, she positioned herself as the speaker, the subject, the driver, not the passenger in life.

CHAPTER 5

CRIMSON BUTTERFLY: EDUCATION AS

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

In preparing her introduction for the class, Crimson Butterfly focused intently on hers, quickly making the choice to do a drawing. She sat on the floor and spread herself out so that she had ample room on the coffee table. Using a pencil and working quickly, she drew her introduction of herself as a student for the class. Crimson Butterfly's drawing is depicted below (See Figure 3).

Crimson Butterfly introduced her student self by explaining her drawing of her bedroom in her parents' home. Initially viewing the drawing from across the room, the most prominent feature I saw was a desk. She explained that she spent a lot of time in her room. That it was a "closed space" and that she was a "workaholic." She pointed to books in the drawing and said that she didn't really read a lot but that the books were symbolic: "you can't judge a book by its cover." She mentioned that she had felt judged a lot and was sick of it (Field note, 1/19/2012).

She then pointed to the desk and said, "I am always there." She said that she never gives up; she always works harder and harder. She then noted that she had drawn a boom box and laughed saying that she didn't even remember drawing that, but that music was a big part of her life. She mentioned listening to the music group Lincoln Park and

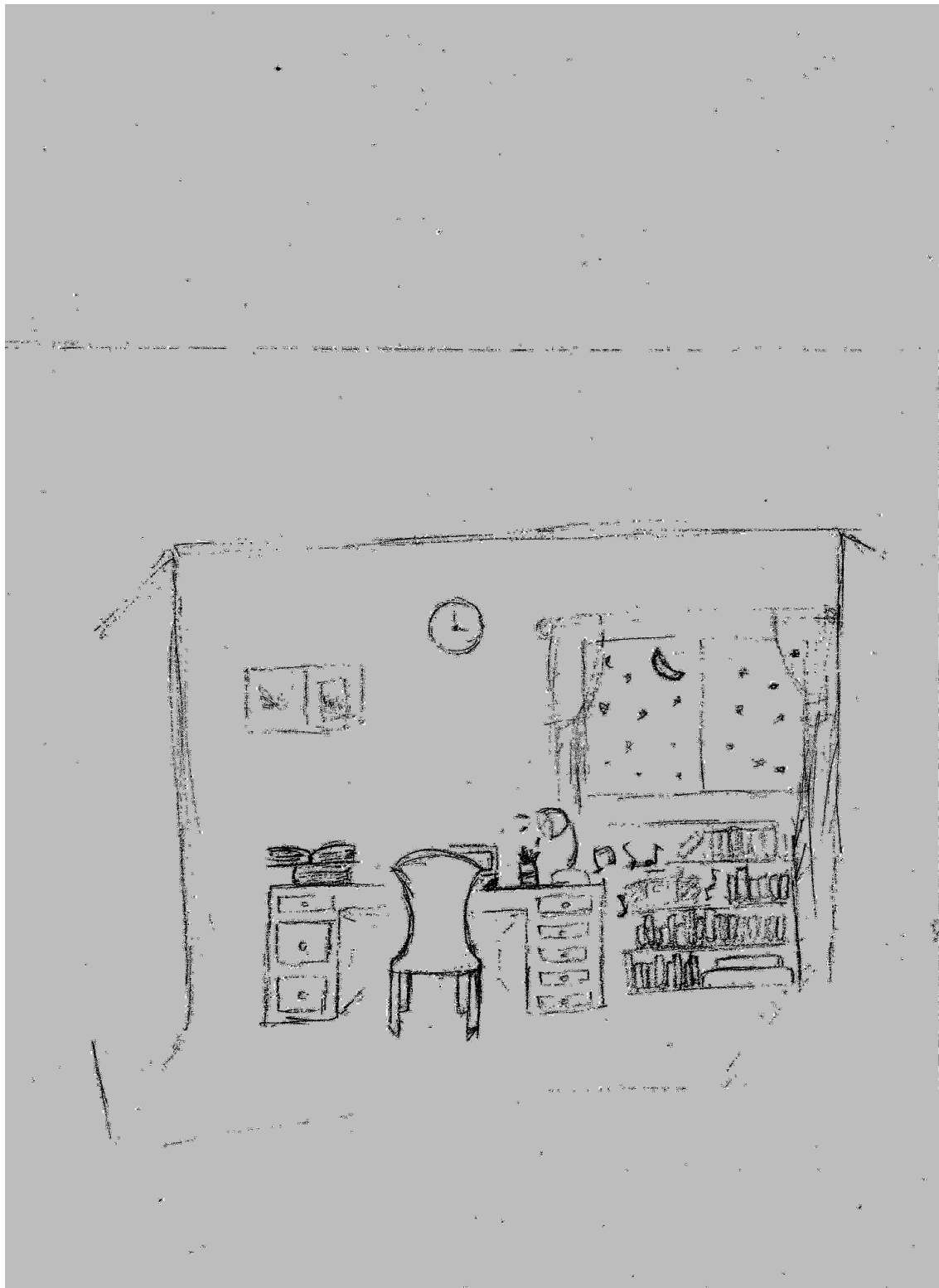


Figure 3: Crimson Butterfly's Self-Portrait.

later she mentioned listening to Christian rock. At that point, another student interrupted and said that that didn't make any sense to her.

Crimson Butterfly tried to explain, saying that she was very Catholic and she taught First Communion classes, but that she listened to Christian rock because she likes the messages in Christian rock music better than those she got from a Catholic priest. She suggested that some people find conflict between Christian and Catholic, but that religion is a choice and that she basically made it work for her. The other student clarified that it was strange to her that Crimson Butterfly listened to both Christian music and the group Lincoln Park. Crimson Butterfly replied that religion was very important to her and she did not see conflict between listening to Christian rock and Lincoln Park and being religious. Several of the students chided her making fun of the music group Lincoln Park, mimicking a sort of unintelligible screaming/ moaning (associated with scream rock). Crimson Butterfly seemed a little upset (furrowed brows, something of a frown on her face) and said, "you guys are funny" (Field note, 1/19/2012).

First Impressions From the Field

Crimson Butterfly's choice of a drawing and her introduction of herself were reflective of the determined young woman that I came to know over the course of the semester. When I walked into class on the 1st day, there was no missing Crimson Butterfly. She immediately drew my attention with her boisterous laughter. She was animated and fidgety as students introduced themselves, later telling us that she was waiting for a callback regarding an audition she'd had for a commercial. Crimson Butterfly was a 19-year-old 1st-year college student. She identified alternately as Vietnamese American, Vietnamese, and American. She was Catholic and she also

identified as gay and also as queer and questioning, but she was quick to qualify this with the statement that she believes that everyone is gay.

She went to a local high school last year and was very involved with an organization that provides resources to women on campus. Crimson Butterfly had long straight dark brown hair. She was about 5 ft 4 in and had a lean build. She often dressed in athletic or hip-hop style clothing: black sweat pants, tennis shoes, a black nylon jacket, and sometimes a flat ball cap that she wore backward. She talked about modeling, acting and dancing as activities she was engaged in. She also enjoyed photography and did some photography as part of her job.

Crimson Butterfly generally brought a high level of energy to class discussions in which she was interested. She was highly engaged in discussions around media and representation of gender, sexual, and racial and ethnic minorities. She was particularly critically aware of the way that Asian Americans are stereotyped in the media and discriminated against in society, noting the underrepresentation of Asian characters in films and television. She talked about this in relation to her own experiences with being stereotyped and in having difficulty in finding acting roles even though she was represented by a local agency. She had a youthful resistance to her. Her speaking style was informal and slipped in and out of slang, particularly when were talking about music or pop culture media. She was friendly to her peers, and often said that she “loved” the class and her classmates. She was, at times, self-conscious, watching her classmates for their reactions to what she said. When I joked with her, she would become suddenly serious. She was friends with another classmate (Naesed) whom she knew from high school and with October, whom she knew from another class. She was sometimes

hesitant to verbalize her thoughts, and seemed a bit nervous about performing verbally, stumbling over her words and losing her train of thought. When it came to media analysis, however, she was extremely engaged. She also excelled at activities where we were more creative, such as drawing or engaging with music or the arts (Field note 5, 2/20/2012)

Crimson Butterfly's introduction of herself and the notes I took during the first weeks of the semester to reflect my first impressions of her were both reinforced and disrupted throughout the semester. As in her drawing, Crimson Butterfly crafted her surroundings carefully and with great detail. She put considerable effort into accessing spaces in which she could feel comfortable and at ease. Crimson Butterfly was in her element in any artistic endeavor that was put before her. When we did free writes in class, she would move to the floor or near a window to find the best lighting and space in which to work. When we did a group collage of artifacts we had collected from campus, she had gathered many artifacts. She enhanced them by drawing to add details to them and cutting them in interesting shapes. She paid attention to color and composition, choosing carefully how to arrange the items.

When it came to class discussions, Crimson Butterfly thought carefully before putting her ideas into words, which didn't seem to come easy. She often paused in the middle of sentences, and stumbled over her words. Yet she was very savvy with media analysis and connecting popular culture to ideas that we discussed in class. Indeed, she brought in examples from comedians, talk shows, reality shows, movies and music as concrete examples of social injustices related to gender, sexuality, social class, religion, race and ethnicity. For example, one of her favorite comedians was Margaret Cho and she

showed a clip of Cho's stand-up comedy illustrating how she draws attention to stereotypes of Asian Americans and women in her performances. Additionally, Crimson Butterfly posted videos, like Jane Elliott's "The Angry eye" (Elliott, Golenbock, Talmadge, & PBS Video, 2001), and articles on our class's Canvas page¹² reinforcing ideas and discussions from class. Through her narratives over the semester, Crimson Butterfly detailed her drive to access and create spaces in which she could be comfortable and find belonging with others or where she could just be alone. Developing her own space and her narrations of herself as a hardworking workaholic, partially in pursuit of a space of her own, came up repeatedly throughout the semester.

In her education autobiography, excerpted below, Crimson Butterfly told the story of precollege education that was often painful and of learning in spaces in which she was marginalized. I follow up her education autobiography with a discussion of her visions of education's purpose in her life. I then turn to her experiences with/in education to highlight her search for belonging and the authoring of a hardworking self, determined to maintain her complex identities and identifications while utilizing higher education to pursue her goals.

Me, Myself, and I

Starting off as an Asian child in a public year-round school, I had no idea why the other kids would always laugh at me. Ever since pre-school, my teacher, fellow students and employees would always put me aside and not have a care in the world for me. I was alone and asked myself, "what is wrong with me that nobody likes me?" Until the day my

¹² Canvas is a learning management system used to support instruction by providing a web space to share documents, participate in discussion boards and turn in assignments.

parents picked me up from school, [and] another parent had told their child to stay away from me. That I am evil and being associated with me will only bring trouble. I never understood why a parent would say that to their child who just so happened to be in my class. He was the top student in my class and I was just as smart as he was. My mother whispered something under her breath in Vietnamese [that] I could not catch. “As it was in the beginning, shall also be in the end,” being bullied and harassed since the beginning of my education. It resulted from racism, prejudice, sexism and many others that make it similar to a family tree – it will continue until the end of time, its time.

*As the phases start from left to right and right to left, I was forced to be the best, the top student with no bad grades. [I was] Restricted from sitting at the front and never asked for help, if I did need something it would always be with my mom. During third grade, I was the best. I made it to the top, my teacher acknowledged that, but by the time that year ended, I was taken in to test for the Extended Learning Program (ELP), which I made in, but I went from top to bottom, fast. The other students were always: “you **have** to be smart if you’re in here.” From then on, I hated going to school, I missed the ghettoness of my old class. The association with my fellow students made me isolated more than it should have. Picked on again, I did not talk, did not do homework, did not do anything and yet here I am looking back asking why, why didn’t I stand up for myself? Why didn’t I do anything?*

Fourth grade was the time I just stopped. My parents expectations were not to be waived with, and I tried. I didn’t do homework, and my teacher asked me to stay until my parents came to pick me up. She talked to them indicating I didn’t do my homework several times. My mother was so furious she just started yelling at me in public to the car

and all the way home. I didn't know what to think at the time. Granted I cried, but school was so hard for me. I hated being put on the spot to present the "knowledge" I had with others. I was different from them, not the same, how would you be able to expect a child whose parents are maniacs about being the top if they have no idea what to do? Simply put, this child right here was indeed lost without any hope left to hope for. I spent more of my time later, on the computer and learning things on my own where I had friends online and received the help I needed.

As I progressed through grade school, my interest to stay started to end after moving from my hometown to [Linton]. I agreed to move with my family because my father's job was located [there]. I refused to transfer high schools because I knew moving would destroy my career choices and connections to the university. Which resulted to a realization at the back of my head that, I do care for my education, something I didn't want to lose after making it so far since grade school.

My parents are refugees from Vietnam making it harder for them to go to school regularly like my siblings and I. Which makes the expectations for us extremely harsh compared to others because my mother didn't get the chance to fulfill her college career and my father only received his associate's degree. We have always been told that our success we make will depend on the future of our family. Money to send home to our parents, a steady career, and a good life overall. What came to my mind was why? Why does it matter so much to make so much money and not be happy with your life. Money is hegemonic indeed but it's not going to always make us happy. It's a must to have money in order to live the life you need to survive, but where's the happiness to help you through the hard times?

The harsh influence and environment I have experienced throughout made me think to myself to just drop everything and start working. Grab a GED and be okay with working for the rest of my life, a “drop-out” title was something I was okay with. Until my senior year of high school made me do a 180 to accomplish high school and fulfill my high school diploma. An accomplishment I have always wanted in my life to prove to myself I did it. I did something I thought wasn’t possible because I didn’t have support from my family or friends. The events I have been going through is inevitable but here I am still, making the life I have. As far as my life goes, my education is what puts me through the tough but the best times in my life. (Crimson Butterfly, Education Autobiography, 2012)

Crimson Butterfly’s education autobiography narrated her persistence through her precollege education despite feeling lost and, at times, hopeless. Yet there was much left unsaid in her educational autobiography. Her story pointed to the complexity of finding belonging and crafting a sense of herself as a persona and as a student in racist and exclusionary spaces of the schools she attended at the same time that she worked hard to meet the expectations that her parents had regarding education. These tensions continued to be important as she navigated college. Her narratives throughout the semester pointed to shifts in her thinking about higher education, particularly as it related to different aspects of her life. They related her attempts to bring together her multiple positionalities, as well as her sense of responsibility to others and her own needs, and to make education fit with her desires for her future. As Crimson Butterfly told me in her interview, the written assignments were her least favorite way to express herself. She much preferred artistic expressions, media analysis, and conversations to writing, and the multimodal

pedagogy¹³ of the class was very comfortable for her. Crimson Butterfly's demonstration of multimodal literacy (Luke, 2003) meant that much of her story was told in other than written form. Most of the narrative in this chapter, for example, is drawn from my postsemester interview with her. In the next section, I highlight Crimson Butterfly's narratives to explore one of the primary questions of the research, the meaning of higher education in her life. In doing so, I point to the importance that higher education held for her as the daughter of Vietnamese refugees (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 2001) and as a queer/questioning young Woman of Color striving to self-author her independence through education (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Britzman, 1997; Noh, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 2001).

**Education for Future and Fulfillment: "I'm in College
so That I Figure Stuff out on My Own"**

As a 1st-year college student, Crimson Butterfly was still finding her place in college and was also figuring out exactly what it meant to her life. She was oriented toward college from a young age. Like many Vietnamese refugees, her parents held out high hopes for education as an avenue for upward mobility for their families in the United States (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 2001). They had aspirations for each of their children to pursue postsecondary education and started college savings plans to provide for them to do so. Yet, as her education autobiography reveals, Crimson Butterfly experienced school as harsh, and she considered dropping out of high school to

¹³ Multimodal pedagogy is instruction in and the practice of reading, viewing, interpreting and creating texts which combines two or more of the following semiotic systems: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial (Antsey & Bull, 2010).

get a GED. Her parents emphasized being successful and its importance to the family survival and also to a good life; they saw higher education as essential to those goals. Crimson Butterfly was very committed to her family and their aspirations for her, yet her negative experiences with/in schools and her desire and sense of responsibility for helping her family financially led her to consider quitting high school to work full time.

During the semester of data generation, in an assignment in which students interviewed one another about their college experiences, Crimson Butterfly told her partner that she first began to really think about college in the seventh grade. She was involved with a university-sponsored program that focused on early exposure to higher education for underserved female students. It was her continued involvement with this program, she would later tell me, which convinced her to finish high school and go on to college. This was the program to which she referred in her education autobiography when she wrote that changing high schools when her family moved would mean losing her connections to the university. When she was asked about what getting her college degree meant to her, she replied that it meant a career "being able to help others not struggle through school" and that she was motivated by wanting to have more options than her mother had had at her age (Student notes, p. 1). Her aspiration to help others not struggle through school was a reflection of her own K-12 experiences and her sense that education should not be so painful. But wanting more options than her mother had at her age was also an important part of her story.

Zhou and Bankston (2001), in studying the experiences of the daughters of Vietnamese refugees, found that "precisely because traditional gender roles lead families to exercise greater control over daughters, young women are pushed even more than

young men toward scholastic performance” (p. 133). This reflects a complicated relationship that should be seen as “the product of a dialectic of traditional normative patterns and contemporary socio-economic pressures” (p. 135). Specifically, Zhou and Bankston (2001) found that traditional gender roles were highly valued in Vietnamese refugee families, but that these roles took on a new twist in the context of the United States. For example, according to Zhou and Bankston, the women of Crimson’s mothers’s generation in Viet Nam had little formal education, but always participated in the household economy, usually through agriculture and domestic labor. In the context of the United States, they argue, most parents understand the necessity of education for their daughters so that they can contribute financially to the family and to be an appropriate match for a high-status husband. Indeed, Zhou and Bankston found that traditional gender roles continued to be highly emphasized for Vietnamese American women, if adapted to fit the U.S. economy and contexts.

Importantly, mothers interviewed in Zhou and Bankston’s (2001) study had additional reasons for wanting their daughters to obtain higher education. Higher earning potential would increase their daughters’ future status within her own family as she went on to marry and leave her parents home. This would allow her to have more power in making family decisions and not “have to put up with anything husband do, and he have to be good” (Zhou & Bankston, 2001, p. 141). While mothers did not seek full independence for their daughters, emphasizing their roles in the family as good Vietnamese mothers who pass on Vietnamese traditions, they wanted education for their daughters to ensure that their daughters would have more options than they had had, including being able to leave a marriage if necessary. Crimson’s educational aspirations

mirrored this understanding as she spoke of the desire to have more options than her mom had had at her age. That is, she knew of her mom's limited options in Viet Nam—that her parents' marriage had been arranged—and understood that as a reason for the intense emphasis her mom, in particular, placed on her education. She had high hopes that a college education could offer Crimson Butterfly more options in the United States, even as she expected her to become a mother and carry on Vietnamese traditions. This aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) convinced Crimson Butterfly of the importance of education to her life. At the same time, her mother “pass[ed] on the knowledge essential to survival” (Collins, 2009, p.112) and taught Crimson Butterfly cultural knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Several feminist race scholars have discussed the desire of mothers for a better future for their daughters and the tension that erupts between them as mothers try to guide their daughters toward better possibilities (Collins, 2009; Moreno & Villenas, 2001; Villenas, 2005, 2006). This dynamic played out with Crimson Butterfly as well. That is, she tried to find a way to negotiate all that her parents wanted for her, and how they expected her to achieve those goals, with her own desires for herself and her education. Crimson Butterfly's mom emphasized the importance of securing a good-paying job at the end of college, for all of the reasons discussed above. But for Crimson Butterfly, she couldn't imagine the kinds of jobs her mom had in mind for her. While she understood that college increased her career opportunities, she did not agree with her parents about a major. She talked about these tensions throughout the semester. In the interview I asked her about her parents' hopes for her education and her own desires about what to study:

Barbara: But about you, in terms of what you've decided to study or how you think about your education for your future? Is, like, is that a contradiction for you?

Crimson B: Yeah, because my mom always thought I was going to be in banking or pharmaceutical. And I thought about it, I mean like it's interesting to me, but it's not something I'd want to do for the rest of my life. I told her that I wanted to do photography on the side and do something else. I wanted to do something for compromise with my mom because my siblings didn't really compromise with her. So I wanted to make her happy by compromising with her, with at least a major that she would like for me to have. So when I said social work, it kind of goes well with both my mom and I because, you know, she's done social work plenty of times but you know she didn't really keep up with it much, she's more of the HR. Human resources, medical terms, that's her... But really in reality, she's artistic, but she doesn't admit it. (Interview, 4/30/12)

Crimson Butterfly had come to understand higher education as part of the way to a secure future, with “Money to send home to our parents, a steady career, and a good life overall” (Education Autobiography, p.3). In envisioning a future with more options than her mother had at her age, Crimson Butterfly also envisioned doing something about which she was passionate, a luxury her mother had not had. This came into tension with her parents' pleas for her to focus her studies on a STEM field or in the financial sector. She decided to compromise by majoring in social work, thinking that her mother would agree because her mom had done what Crimson Butterfly saw as similar kinds of work. Crimson also saw that her mother, like her, was artistic but had denied that part of herself because of her need to help support the family.

She makes her own clothes, she designs and makes them but it's only okay because she's making money off of it. She draws too, I've seen her old drawings, but she doesn't do it any more because she's so busy and it doesn't make money. So I'm just like ‘mom, really?’ (Interview, 4/30/2012)

Education was important to her family and also emphasized by her peers and by her mentors in the college-sponsored program. Crimson Butterfly saw choosing a major

that would please her parents as a necessary compromise. She especially wanted make her mom happy by compromising with her. Villenas and Moreno (2001) discuss these tensions and negotiations in relation to Latina/Chicana relationships between daughters and mothers. "As Latina/Chicana daughters of our mothers, we learn and see first hand how our mothers are often denied identities of creativity and intellect by the demands of their work and by cultural traditions that devalue the knowledge they possess" (p. 672). While Crimson Butterfly hoped to have a good career and to appease her parents, she also hoped to escape some of what she saw as the sacrifices her mother had made and to enjoy the passions her mother had denied including both the desire to further her education and, as Crimson said, her artistic talents.

Crimson understood that her choices about what to study had to be negotiated with her parents, and she understood their emphasis on its importance to her financial security in the future. Thus, she emphasized the importance of college as a space in which she would acquire the expertise for a profession. She had anticipated moving directly to career-related learning, and she was surprised at having to take general requirements. As she told me in her interview,

It's a little difficult because I'm not that sort of generals school material type girl. I'm in it for a career basically and I thought that's what college is, where you immediately start from a career and not doing generals all over again. So, I just, I don't get that part of college because I thought that was what high school was supposed to be where you do your generals and you go off to college and you start your career. You find something that you want. (Interview, 4/30/12).

In her navigation of the University, Crimson Butterfly, like most first-generation Students of Color, had to figure out the implicit and explicit rules of college (Jehangir, 2010a). This was a part of Crimson Butterfly's continual negotiation. She was frustrated

about having to take classes that she didn't see as directly related to her major. Between having to meet her parents' approval about her choice of major and having to take classes to meet university requirements, she felt that she was compromising a lot. But college was also a space that provided new freedoms and independence. Despite saying that she was "in it for a career," Crimson Butterfly also made clear that college provided her a space to engage with friends. She was also learning about herself and what interested her. She had a very long commute between home, work, and school. During one of our last classes, I realized that she commuted sometimes 4 hours a day. I asked her about this in the interview:

Barbara: I think I'd seen hints of it before or like you talked about being tired, but it really hit me in that last class how much time you spend commuting. That's such a huge commitment.

Crimson B: Yeah

Barbara: Um, and so I'm wondering is part of your...what keeps you that committed to school? And so you...

Crimson B: (interrupting) Getting out of the house.

Barbara: ... you've talked a little bit about your independence and... [now responding to what she said in the middle of my sentence] Yeah, so that's mostly it?

Crimson B: Yeah. And I like being in the city. I've always lived in the city and so my parents moved up to Linton for my dad's job...and I was just barely transferring from middle school to high school and I was like, no I want to stay in the city, I want to go to [high school here] like my siblings cause I wanted to follow their footprints, but that didn't last too long. But, I'm really happy that I fought for staying [at that school] because I wouldn't have gotten all of the community service, all of the volunteer, um, I would have lost my connection with the university if I would have moved.

Barbara: So you're really connected here and that's part of it too, it's not just umm, getting out of the house, but also like...

Crimson B: [interrupting] maintaining myself here... It's a major stress reliever no matter how long the drive is, no matter how long the commute; I will always find myself peace of mind here.

For Crimson Butterfly, college was not just about a career. College enabled her to establish new friendships and maintain connections that she had worked hard to build. College also allowed her some independence. She was negotiating much with her parents. As Zhou and Bankston (2001) found in their study, young Vietnamese women did not openly confront their parents, "but they were ready for—and indeed often embarked on—challenges of an indirect sort" (p. 144). For the young high school women in their study, this often meant, for example, thwarting their parents' disapproval of dating by leaving the house with girl friends and then going off alone with a boyfriend.

Dating was also an issue for Crimson Butterfly. In her case, as a college student who worked, she was able to keep her dating life somewhat private as they knew less of her whereabouts because of her busy schedule. Her work life too, however, also concerned her parents. They worried that both of these things distracted from her studies and kept her away from home too much. But she was intent on having each of these components of her life. Being in college and working gave her spaces of her own.

Crimson B: I just, I guess you can say college is my getaway from my family, from all the stress, to figure out what I want in my life... And you need to create your own space or modify your own space and organize it in a way where you feel most comfortable with your life and so... it's just, it's complicated with my family because they don't want me to drift away and I don't want to drift away in a way where I'm giving off a reflection that I'm disrespecting them [as though] I don't want my family anymore [and] I don't want to connect with them anymore [or] I want to be that rebellious type because really I just wanna be a hardworking workaholic out there like I usually am. Just space where I have, and I know that people aren't going to judge me for it... That's why I'm in college so that I can go out and figure stuff out on my own

Barbara: Well, and it sounds like, part of what I think I'm hearing you say is that college is a legitimate place for you to start developing some independence.

Crimson B: Yes.

Barbara: And when I say legitimate I mean it's something that your family can accept...

Crimson B: Yes.

Given this voicing of the importance of college in providing her a space of her own, I asked Crimson Butterfly near the end of our conversation if she saw college as being more about career and money or about personal fulfillment or some combination of both of these. She quickly replied, "personal fulfillment" (Interview, 4/30/12). Crimson Butterfly navigated college as a place of compromise through which she exerted agency and savvy in negotiating her responsibilities to her family and her own desires.

Virginia Woolf (1989) first famously wrote, in 1929, that a woman needs to have money and a room of her own if she is to write or pursue creative endeavors. While Woolf came from a background of racial, economic, educational, and class privilege, to which many women of the time and many women today do not have access, her sentiment aligns strongly with Crimson Butterfly's narrative. Indeed, it was a striking metaphor given Crimson's emphasis on working for discretionary income and in her introductory picture of her bedroom, which she described as a place she could go and lock the door and be alone. As Trinh Min-Ha (1989) writes,

Substantial creative achievement demands not necessarily genius, but acumen, bent, persistence and time. And time, in the framework of industrial development, means a wage that admits of leisure and living conditions that do not require that writing be incessantly interrupted, deferred, denied, at any rate subordinated to family responsibilities. (Min-Ha, 1989, p.7)

For Crimson Butterfly, space of her own meant that she could practice her artistic passions. It meant a spaces to be comfortable as she worked through her complex identities and identifications, those that aligned with her family and their desires for her—being Catholic and Vietnamese—and those that did not, like her fluid sense of her sexuality. Her complex identities and identifications and how they mattered to her student subjectivity and education decision-making are discussed later in the chapter. Here I emphasize the importance of higher education in her life in its granting of access to multiple spaces allowed her to escape the close watch and confining expectations of her parents. This was particularly important as she was determined to have some independence and wanted space to discover more about herself and her interests. She found these spaces through careful negotiation with parents whom she loved and respected. The university was one of those spaces. In the next section, I engage her narratives to better understand her experiences with/in education and their relationship to her sense of herself as a student.

Pushed to the Margins

“Ever since pre-school, my teacher, fellow students and employees would always put me aside and not have a care in the world for me” (Education autobiography, p. 1).

Early in her education autobiography, Crimson Butterfly established that she felt marginalized within the schools she attended. She told of feeling alone and put to the side, marked as “Other” in her elementary school classrooms. She recounted an early school memory: “Another parent had told their child to stay away from me. That I am evil and being associated with me will only bring trouble” (Education autobiography, p. 1). From her earliest experiences, she remembers being laughed at and wondering why no

one liked her. Yet, the day she heard the boy's mother call her evil and tell him to stay away from her, *Crimson Butterfly* sensed the racist and sexist nature of the remark. It was one of many experiences she would have with racism and sexism in the schools she attended. As she said, "being bullied and harassed since the beginning of my education...resulted from racism, prejudice, sexism and many others" (*Education autobiography*, p. 1).

In tracing the racist Orientalization of Asian women, Aki Uchida (1998) writes of "the stereotype of the Oriental Woman as exotic, submissive, and subservient, or sinister, treacherous and lecherous" (p. 167). She connects these stereotypes of Asian women to visual depictions of Asian women "as exotic, sexy, and determined to corrupt the morals of White American men," particularly in Christian America (p. 165). The prevalence of the sinister or evil Asian woman stereotype exists alongside the model minority myth, in which Asian Americans are idealized as hardworking, passive, and the image of the American success story and which, Ng, Lee, and Park (2007) argue, "is used to produce a heightened sense of fear, particularly in schools, where the Asian 'horde' will take over the classrooms to raise test scores and ruin the grading curve" (p. 95). Whether it was one or both of these raced and gendered tropes, or another entirely, that the mother of *Crimson Butterfly*'s White classmate took up in calling her "evil," the moment stuck in her memory, leaving a residue that became part of her history of participation (Moje & Lewis, 2007) or, more accurately, marginalization in schools

Crimson Butterfly also remembered not feeling like she could ask questions in class and making it to a gifted program only to have her classmates push her aside as though she didn't belong there telling her: "you *have* to be smart if you're in here"

(Education autobiography, p. 1). This experience left her missing the “ghettoness” of her old class, where, while she was lonely and ignored, she was not “put on the spot to present the ‘knowledge’ I had with others,” (Education autobiography, p. 2), which was even more difficult for her. Indeed Crimson Butterfly described feeling isolated by her peers and, “Picked on again, I did not talk, did not do homework, did not do anything” (Education autobiography, p. 1). The racial discrimination and marginalization that Crimson experienced left her isolated and pushed aside.

In addition to feeling alone and bullied in school, Crimson Butterfly also expressed feeling the weight of high expectations from her parents to do well. School was important to her family, seen as a gateway to an eventual career and the good life. She had a difficult time reconciling that she had to do very well in school at the same time that she didn’t feel a sense of belonging there. She did not ask for help or ask questions. Indeed, school was so painful for her that by high school she believed that dropping out was a better option. She was tempted, she said, to “grab a GED and be okay with working for the rest of my life, a “drop-out” title was something I was okay with. (Education autobiography, p.3). As several scholars have emphasized (Jehangir, 2010a; Koyoma, 2007) a sense of belonging is critical to academic engagement and success. Crimson Butterfly already had a job during high school. Feeling completely isolated at school meant that leaving school would considerably alleviate her school-related angst. Crimson Butterfly felt tensions related to both her experiences in school and her family’s expectations of her role and performance in school.

Indeed, because education was seen as so important to future success, her mom sought to find the best learning environment for Crimson Butterfly, and this meant

moving several times during her childhood. Though they found a school that satisfied her mom in terms of the education she was receiving, Crimson Butterfly still did not find a place of belonging. As she told me,

No matter how many times my family have moved because of you know, either racial[ly] bad communit[ies] or the educational system wasn't good enough, my mom wanted the best educational system for us...I mean, I remember going to 6 elementary schools when I was younger. And that's a lot. Once we finally settled down, I ended up getting the best program, but I was still racially judged for who I was. I was one out of two Vietnamese in the whole program and everyone else was either Korean, Chinese, you know that majority of the natural educational bubble that they have. (Interview, 4/30/12).

Crimson Butterfly related that the middle school that her parents determined to be the best was one that focused on math and science and which had a strong math, engineering, and science achievement (MESA) program. Crimson Butterfly noted that the school attracted many Asian American families, but few of the students were Vietnamese and she felt out of place and marginalized within this context. She stated that the Korean and Chinese students and their families placed high importance on math and science mastery and that her parents expected her to do well in the program, too. She referred to her Asian American classmates in terms of "the natural educational bubble that they have," recognizing and taking up the model minority myth of Asian student as overachievers in math and science, but only for Chinese American and Korean American peers; she clearly saw herself outside of this stereotype. But within her middle school classroom, she felt judged and marginalized as a Vietnamese student. She was further marginalized because she didn't like drawing attention to herself by asking questions in her classes. All of these factors also contributed to tensions with her parents, as they had chosen the program carefully and expected her to do well in it.

This example from Crimson Butterfly's education experience illustrates the hegemonic power of racialization at work. The model minority stereotype provided Crimson Butterfly a readily available explanation for her marginalization by her Asian American peers and what she perceived as her distinction from them. That is, she believed that her Korean American and Chinese American peers reflected the model minority stereotype and that they were consumed with educational achievement—a facet of the model minority myth that is often used against Asian American students. Whatever aspects of the model minority myth Crimson Butterfly and/or the students in class were taking up, rejecting, mapping onto each other, or using to exclude or include one another, they were subject to and engaging a stereotype which erased the “the various identities and intersections of identities that shape Asian American experiences include[ing] not only social class, ethnicity, and generation but also gender” (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007, p. 103). The model minority stereotype obscures the problematic history of race relations in the United States and works to pit racial and ethnic minorities against one another (Lee, 1996), leaving White privilege unexamined and erasing the experiences of Asian American students who do not fit the model minority stereotype (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007).

Her involvement in the university-sponsored program in seventh grade provided some sense of grounding for Crimson Butterfly. For example, she proudly told me that she had insisted upon going to the high school her siblings had gone to rather than the high school in the town to which her parents had moved, partly to maintain connection to the program. She also developed friendships later, in high school. When I asked if her friends influenced how she thought about herself as a student, she said:

My high school friends? A lot of them had a lot of big dreams and I didn't really have one and so when I talked to them about it and they asked what

school you going to? I was like, ummm, I don't know. You know, I was still unsure like there's [lists several local colleges and universities] and I just thought about like you know just not going to school and so... ummm... when I was in MESA [Math Engineering and Science] um a couple, well basically my high school friends were in the same clubs as I were, well the majority of them anyways and you know it all the engineering the computer technology you know their creativity, they got it, they got the physics and I was just kind of standing there like I don't really understand all of this. Like physics is just not my thing. I hate (strong emphasis here) physics. The only thing I like about science is cooking and that's chemistry (we both laugh) but other than that, no! (Interview, 4/30/12)

Many of her friends in school continued to be oriented toward math and the hard sciences, areas of study for which Crimson Butterfly had no affinity. She told me that she continued to struggle through some of those classes and that she sought help online rather than asking teachers or even her peers. In doing so, Crimson Butterfly exhibited a sense of agency over her circumstances. She put considerable effort into negotiating her experiences as a student. She labored through classes that she did not like to prove she could do it and to appease her parents. Understanding that there was no way to thwart their power and limited in her support at school, she found alternate means of support to succeed in school.

It was not until she engaged in online communities and learning that she found a space where she could ask questions and be fully accepted. She began to turn to online resources not only for help with schoolwork, but also to express herself about her experiences with racism, her challenges with school, and her tensions with her parents. It is not surprising then that Crimson Butterfly became highly engaged in online forums, blogging, and social media. This sharpened her critical focus, helped her to understand her experiences, and gave her a place to talk about them. It also became a strategy to figure things out without feeling so vulnerable or like an outsider.

Here, Crimson Butterfly moves outside of typical strategies to meet the demands of school, employing navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) in moving through an education system that was difficult to maneuver and, even more so, because she was marginalized as an ethnic minority. In describing navigational wealth, Yosso points to the movement through institutions that are particularly difficult for People of Color to navigate, because they do not reflect or employ the knowledges, experiences, and skills that People of Color bring to them. Crimson Butterfly also used navigational capital to mediate the tensions that met at the juncture of two very powerful institutions: family and school. While Yosso (2005) describes navigational capital primarily in terms of moving through institutions that are not designed with the knowledge of People of Color in mind, Crimson employs it in several ways. She certainly used navigational capital to move through school, where she had to circumvent both teachers and peers to avoid being shamed, bullied, and harassed. She also navigational capital in accessing online forums to help her understand class assignments and ask questions she couldn't ask in class. But Crimson employed navigational capital in a third way: to negotiate the tension caused by her parents' expectations of her performance in a school in which she was isolated and marginalized. She navigated this tension in finding a way to appease her parents by completing school assignments and in finding a space of belonging in online forums in which she discusses her challenges with her parents, her questioning of her sexual identity, and her marginalization as a young Woman of Color. Indeed, had her parents not been insistent about her participating in school and getting good grades, the "harsh" environment that Crimson experienced might have pushed her to leave school entirely, as she indicates. Crimson was aware of her difficult place in the web of power that included

the academic expectations of school and her parents alongside the social marginalization she was experiencing with peers. Crimson Butterfly continued to rely upon her navigational capital to move forward as a college student. She was negotiating how to be a student, maintain a job, and satisfy her parents all while also learning about herself and her own needs.

Crimson Butterfly experienced a strong interconnection between her sense of herself as a student and navigating her multiple responsibilities and desires. Being a college student allowed her to maintain a relationship with her parents and to begin to establish independence. It also allowed her to meet and connect with others across differences and similarities as she participated in activities sponsored by the Asian American student group and a smaller group of Vietnamese American students. She accessed resources for women and LGBTQ students at the university and to explore multiple aspects of her identity, and build solidarity with others. In college, she had found spaces of belonging that she had so longed for in her earlier schooling. At the same time, she was committed to working while she went to school. Her job was as important to her as being a student. Work was significant to her for several reasons. First, it allowed her some discretionary income. It also allowed her another legitimate reason to be away from home without disrespecting or creating too much distance from her family. Finally, it was evidence of her strong work ethic, an aspect of herself that she highlights. Crimson was operating in complex relations of power, several of which she was deeply attached to.

Weir (2013) writes,

All identities are effects of multiple and conflicting social, economic, historical, and political institutions and discourses. Moreover, identities are produced through various intersubjective affective relations and relations of meaning that interrelate with, and are not reducible to,

relations of subjugation. Thus, agency and resistance are enabled not only through turning power against itself, but through multiple kinds of relations and capacities. (Weir, 2013, p. 9)

Crimson Butterfly demonstrated considerable navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) as she accessed resources and used multiple strategies to succeed in school and in working part-time. Central to this was her agency and resistance as enabled through multiple kinds of relations and capacities, as Weir (2013) suggests above. Her determination to maintain a relationship with her family while working and going to school reinforced her image of herself as a hardworking workaholic. This conception pervaded her understanding of herself as a student and as a person. In the next section, I highlight how Crimson Butterfly authored herself as a hardworking workaholic. This authoring was central to her negotiation of her experiences with/in education as a queer/questioning Vietnamese American daughter, student and part-time employee.

**Self-Authoring Persistence: “Just Hardworking
Workaholic... for School, for Work, Myself
as a Person, Myself as a Woman”**

Crimson Butterfly took great pride in her hard work and persistence. She continually referred to herself as a “hardworking workaholic.” This began with her introduction of herself to the class and continued to the very last time I saw her, when I interviewed her after the semester was over:

BK: Okay, so what words would you use to describe yourself as a student?

J: (Immediately and very quickly) Hardworking workaholic. That’s just it. That’s my general everything for school, for work, for myself as a person, myself as a woman.

Barbara: And would they change if you were describing yourself to a professor?

Crimson Butterfly: No.

Barbara: Or a friend?

Crimson Butterfly: Just hardworking workaholic

Barbara: Ok, or your parents? So you're just like, you're really steady in that part of your identity as a student.

Crimson Butterfly: Definitely, I got it from my mom. She just kept going no matter how sick she was, no matter how tired she was, no matter how much pain she was in, no matter how much she missed her family. She just kept working. And my dad's close to the same thing, but my mom has more power, I think. (Interview, 4/30/12)

As indicated, the description of herself as a hardworking workaholic was consistent with her introduction of herself to the class during the 1st week of the semester. She introduced herself this way to the class. She said that when she was home, she was always in her room at her desk. Indeed, the clock in her drawing (pictured in Figure 3) was marked at 4:00, the time she typically got up each morning to get ready and commute to work. For Crimson Butterfly, this authoring of herself seemed, in part, a way for her to make sure that those around her, and especially her family, understand that she was trying her best to meet all of her responsibilities. She had seen her parents work hard and her mom had modeled continuing to work regardless of challenges she faced.

Crimson Butterfly modeled her parents' working hard, learning particularly from her mother's example to survive, using the tools she gave her. Crimson put her hard work to use in order to craft spaces for herself. Crimson Butterfly was indeed working very hard. She tried to satisfy her parents' expectations, meet the goals of the university program that she was a part of, and work part time. Financial aid and a scholarship

covered much of her schooling, yet a part-time job was important to Crimson Butterfly. This was a point of contention with her parents, as they encouraged her to focus solely on school. She expressed her frustration with this during my interview with her:

And from my perspective, I'm really not like, I feel like I thought I was doing the right thing because I thought they wanted me to be independent, I thought they wanted me to be working hard; I thought they wanted me to achieve my goals. (Interview, 4/30/12)

She wanted to earn money, in part, to move out of her parents' house to a place that was closer to campus, thus cutting down her commute time significantly. This was also important in establishing some independence and relieving some of the tension with her family. Crimson Butterfly talked about the separate spaces in which she functioned: her home space, her workspace, and her school space all as necessary to feel a sense of satisfaction. For her, it was worth the long commute and feeling exhausted in order to have a sense of command over her life. In authoring herself as a hardworking workaholic, she pointed to her parents' modeling of working hard to get all what they needed to survive. While they pushed back against her having a job, she was able to make the argument that she was working hard, as they always had. Her self-authoring as a hardworking workaholic was equally important as an act of agency and self-determination in that it offered her ways to meet the needs of multiple aspects of her life.

Crafting Spaces of Connection

Crimson Butterfly demonstrated a strong critical consciousness of inequalities through her critique of multiple stereotypes of Asian Americans, discrimination against LGBTQ people and communities, the objectification of women, and religious discrimination. She provided these critiques in our class discussions and in her

assignments over the semester. She suggested that she had honed much of this through her personal experiences and through her relationships online and with local friends, especially her LGBTQ¹⁴ friends. These communities of identification gave her particularly rich spaces to speak to the multiplicities of self that were important and essential to her. She found considerable support, a sense of belonging, and mutual understanding of family tensions. At the time of our interview, she hoped to alleviate some of the tension with her family and her long commute by moving nearer to campus with friends.

And I'm trying to find a house here with my friends, that I'm really close to, like I've known...and they're both LGBTQ. We've just talked about it cause you know the reason we connect so well is because our families are the exact same thing. So they also travel for work. Work is the only way out. So we just all decided together we've got to move out. We gotta find a place. We need to find our own safe zone. (Interview, 4/30/12)

Moving away from home was an attempt to negotiate tensions with her family and it was also about keeping her dating life private. Crimson Butterfly identified alternately as gay, queer, and queer/questioning. She viewed sexuality as much a part of her identity as race and ethnicity. In class discussions, she talked about the challenges of having a White boyfriend, of whom her parents disapproved. In discussing sexual identity during class, she said, "It's [sexual identity is] like this normed identity. It's important because it's part of who we are. Like it goes with race and ethnicity. I like both, but I choose men because my boyfriend is awesome" (Field note 1/24/12). She indicated that

¹⁴ I use LGBTQ here in keeping with how Crimson Butterfly identifies her friends and the community of which she considers herself a part. This is intentional for her and she uses the full acronym to suggest the diversity in the community and also as she says, not to put her friends in any particular box.

her sexuality shifted, but that at the moment she was happy in her relationship with a man.

Her parents knew about her interracial relationship, which was a source of conflict:

So, like I remember us getting into an argument about my partner and she [mom] thought I was breaking our [family] relationship because I'm bringing my partner in and it's hard for them [parents] to accept an interracial relationship. Which is understandable. I mean like if I could put myself in my mom's shoes that she would want me to marry a Vietnamese or an Asian American person. (Interview, 4/30/15)

While discussing her interracial relationship caused strain, she could not even broach the subject of her queer sexuality. As she said in a class discussion, "they have no idea about me being gay. Oh my hell, no. It would not be good" (Field note, 1/24/2012).

As Spivak says in her interview with Sneja Gunew (1990), "There are many subject positions which one must inhabit; one is not just one thing. That is where a political consciousness comes in" (p. 60). Crimson Butterfly had a strong sense of herself in terms of her identities and identifications, but this did not mean that negotiating them came easy or that she didn't experience contradictions. Indeed in inhabiting multiple subject positions, she continually experienced stress and expressed concern about these conflicts. Political consciousness and an understanding of where power was located helped her to negotiate these tensions and navigate through them. In terms of her sexual identity, she was not prepared to discuss this aspect of her life with her parents. Her connections to and alliances with others provided her spaces to negotiate these incongruities.

She had also developed a strong sense of the racial and ethnic injustices that exist in the United States. These played out differently in different spaces. In our small but very diverse classroom, she was the only student who identified as Asian American, and she was confident in her critiques of stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in the

media, including the ways that Asian features and accents are caricatured and mocked and of stereotypes of Asian women as exotic and sexually submissive. Crimson Butterfly brought to light the limited roles for Asian characters in film and television. And she contested the model minority stereotype, at least for herself, in arguing for a better understanding of the vast ethnic diversity in this large racial grouping, pointing to her own experiences of marginalization as an ethnic minority in the her Asian American majority MESA program in her middle school. While this was well received in our classroom, she lamented the poor understanding of multiplicity of Asian students' sociocultural and ethnic differences and their varied experiences on campus. For example, Crimson Butterfly pointed to the incredible wealth and privilege of some Asian international students who attended the university. While she did not identify or associate with these particular students, she was associated with them by others because, as she said, "you know, we all look the same to people in Utah" (Field note, 3/22/2012).

Crimson Butterfly identified differently in different moments, at times in solidarity with and educating the class about pan-Asian groups and movements such as the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANNA), but more often she distinguished herself as Vietnamese or Vietnamese American in our classroom space. Her ethnic identity, her fluid sense of sexuality, and her role as the daughter of Vietnamese refugees was complex as she navigated her parents' desires for a better future in part through the U. S. education system. This meant learning new strategies to navigate education, with all it could potentially offer and yet maintaining traditions, some of which she highly valued and found important, and some of which she experienced as contradictory to her own beliefs and practices. Her ability to negotiate the contradictions

in her life reflects what Anzaldúa (2002b) calls *conocimiento* or, in English, knowledge as awakening consciousness. She writes of the path of *conocimiento* as a moving toward wholeness. She describes the path of *conocimiento*:

You crave to be what and who you are. A spiritual hunger rumbles deep in your belly, the yearning to live up to your potential. You question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to live. These ways no longer accommodate the person you are, or the life you're living. They no longer help you with your central task—to determine what your life means, to catch a glimpse of the cosmic order and your part in that *cosmovisión*, and to translate these into artistic forms. (Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 540)

Crimson Butterfly questioned doctrines that suggested there was only one way to live. She hungered find meanings of her own, to integrate the knowledges from the many identities and identifications that mattered to her. In my interview with her, I asked Crimson Butterfly about the compromises she made with her parents around traditions. She spoke powerfully about her complex negotiations. I quote her at length here.

I feel really bad for my generation, the ones that are born here with parents that are refugees because it's that bridge where you don't really know what to do. You're always on the bridge. You can't go one way or another you have to stay on the bridge, no matter what's left of the bridge, like you just have to stay there. And then some day you'll just fall. Cause you don't know what's gonna happen. You can't just take one side, and you have to do your spiritual relations and your social relations and yourself. It's just boxes after boxes after boxes. And you have to sacrifice a lot if you want to quote unquote stick with your family. And it's so much pressure and I just sort of want leave it with my sister because (voice raises both in pitch in volume) she agrees with it. And I totally disagree with it. I'm like: 'I love you guys, but I have my own life. Just let me go.' I mean like I want to travel. I want to go out and see things other people don't see. I want to go out and do photography. I want to go out and help people. I don't want to stay in the state of Utah. I want to go out and do so much. I want to help people outside of Utah as well as help people here. And they think I'm too young. I have no idea what I'm talking about. I've never been through college before in my life. I haven't finished graduating college and you know, having a boyfriend—they call it boyfriend, I call it partner—that it's distracting, that I shouldn't be doing it, it's the wrong way to go. You're going to get yourself pregnant; you're going to get yourself raped. And it's....ahhh (sighs in frustration)...

My mom has just been telling me I have to keep our tradition because if something happens to our country, then we need to keep tradition somehow in our family. I should say, even if I was in an interracial relationship, I would teach my kids everything about my heritage. Traditions, things that I did, how I balanced it, things they should know. Vietnamese will be their first language, for sure. Granted. It's sealed. I mean Vietnamese was my first language. English, go for it. If you want to learn other languages, go for it, but Vietnamese is going to be something your going to have to learn because family, my side of the family, you're going to want to know Vietnamese. (Interview, 4/30/12)

Crimson Butterfly's words emphasized the interconnectedness and complexity of her identity and identifications. She pointed to her experience as the daughter of refugees and all of the hope for her future, the pressure, and the frustration of navigating her life that come with those hopes, leaning to juggle cultures, to abandon nothing, as Anzaldúa (2007) says. She recognized the importance of multiple aspects of her ethnicity including spirituality, language, social relations, traditions and connection to a homeland. She both valued and contested the pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) through which her parents taught her about her family's history and traditions. She also related her parents' fears of her walking through the world as a woman and as a young adult. She half joked about wanting to leave the responsibilities of carrying on tradition to her sister and breaking free to do things her parents couldn't quite imagine for her, such as traveling. Yet she also spoke with certitude about passing traditions and language on to her own children, recognizing the wealth of knowledge that came with them. It was unfathomable to break that connection to her family or to leave those knowledges behind. Not surprisingly, she insisted that she would tell her children everything she did and how she balanced it all.

Crimson Butterfly managed her multiple roles, responsibilities, identities, and identifications carefully. Having space was essential to this management and she

described, more than once, the importance of multiple spaces in her life. These included the home space where she could be close to her family but close the door and be alone. And a work space where she could earn money of her own and practice photography. And a space at college where she could make friendships, learn about herself and how the world works, and prepare for a career. This meant justifying a busy life, long commutes, and multiple spaces of being to her parents. She held up her mother as a powerful woman who kept going no matter what. Crimson Butterfly positioned herself similarly as a powerful agent of her own trajectory who forged forward despite the challenges. Her student subjectivity was part of her larger “hardworking workaholic” self, following the example of her mother. As she brought her multiple identities and identifications together, she stressed her pride in herself and her family. Near the end of our interview, She said confidently,

I’m proud to be Catholic, I’m proud to be Vietnamese American, not just American, not just Vietnamese, but both. I’m proud to be a woman especially. I’m proud to a hardworking workaholic. And I’m proud to come from a family—a frustrating very complex family. I, (sighs) I even told this to my mom: family is family. (Interview, 4/30/12)

Chapter Discussion

In this chapter I engaged with Crimson Butterfly’s narrations of her complex identities and identifications to explore the questions of student subjectivity and how it matters to decisions about pursuing higher education. Crimson Butterfly’s narratives suggest that higher education, though envisioned by her parents for her, was never a foregone conclusion. There were many challenges along the way. These included financial difficulties in in her family during the time she was making choices about college. Crimson Butterfly’s early experiences in school were often painful. She felt

uncared for by teachers and school personnel and pushed aside by peers. This was true both in her earliest years in a predominantly White school and later when she was in school with other Asian students among whom she was ethnically marginalized. Financial difficulties and negative experiences in school made finding full time work and dropping out of high school seem tempting, for a time. Yet, Crimson Butterfly cared about her education and in her senior year decided that she would find a way to go to school without financial help from her parents. Using navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) to find a path to and in college was important both to satisfy her parents' wishes for her as a means to a successful career and her own aspirations for a more fulfilling life through personal fulfillment and development.

Decisions about where and what to study were a negotiation like much of the rest of her life. She attended college in state because it was more affordable and because she had connections to the university. Several studies have found that first-generation low-income students make decisions about where to go to college based on costs (Bloom, 2007; Cabrera & Lanasa, 2000; Jehangir, 2010a). Jehangir also reports that low-income first-generation students are more likely to live off-campus and to work at least part time. In these ways, Crimson Butterfly' circumstances around her choices to attend the university reflect similar decisions made by low-income Students of Color. She was in the process of choosing her major and had decided to study social work because she knew she could convince her parents of its worth. At the same time, she planned to minor in gender studies. She had not told her parents about this, worried that they would not understand the choice.

Throughout the chapter, I highlighted how Crimson Butterfly spoke about herself in complicated ways, continually working to understand and validate her complex identities and identifications even when they were in tension. This was cohesive with her student subjectivity; she never spoke about herself as a student without also talking about other aspects of her identity or identifications with larger communities. Indeed, her authoring of herself as a hardworking workaholic was an act of agency as she integrated all aspects of herself through a characteristic that allowed her a way of as she said, “maintaining myself” (Interview, 4/30/12), as she said. Her words echo the sentiments of Alison Weir (2013) who argues that maintaining oneself or holding oneself together is not about sameness over time or conformity among group members. “Holding together requires the opposite: I cannot hold myself together without continual re-creation; the self has to be reconstructed and reenacted every day, through acts of self-making and self-identification” (p. 71). Maintaining oneself or holding oneself together is enacted through the agency of self-authoring. Crimson Butterfly authored herself as a hardworking workaholic who refused to separate herself out into various boxes, or identity categories. This was an essential part of her negotiations as college student.

Crimson Butterfly’s narrative suggests that understanding her college choices and her student subjectivity would be very difficult without an extensive inquiry into her complex identities and identifications. For example, her identification of herself in the broad category of Asian American would render her invisible as someone who might provide important information college decision-making. Indeed, as an Asian -identified woman, she is overrepresented among college students. At the same time, as a first-generation college student who is the daughter of refugees and whose family has lower

income status, her experiences are far more complex than broad identity categories indicate. Crimson Butterfly's narrative underscores the importance of studying students' nuanced circumstances and their situated contexts. Further, the intricate negotiations she must make in order to maintain a sense of connectedness to multiple communities and to preserve a sense of well being came to light only over time and in conversation in what she considered a "safe space" (Interview, 4/30/12). Crimson's narratives point to the ways that qualitative research is particularly important in studies attempting to get at students' decision-making around higher education. For example, her situated context as a first-generation Vietnamese student and daughter of low-income refugee parents disrupts understandings based on aggregate statistic of the overrepresentation of Asians and Asian American college students. Further, her complex negotiations with her parents, who strongly support her college education complicates the way that family support is discussed in the literature. Thus Crimson Butterfly's narrative further emphasizes the need for qualitative studies of students' situated contexts (Bergerson, 2010; Perna, 2006; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

CHAPTER 6

OMITTED: EDUCATION AS VOICE

As in the previous case studies, OMITTED is introduced, first, through her self-introduction to her peers and instructors in the class in which the data were generated. This is followed by an account of my first impressions of her as a student, as presented through field notes taken early in the semester. The chapter then moves to her education autobiography followed by an analysis of the autobiography and other narrative data. However, in introducing this participant, there is no better way to begin this chapter than with a brief discussion of the pseudonym chosen by her: OMITTED. It is unsettling, as she meant it to be. OMITTED deliberates carefully over her words. Her choice of this pseudonym and writing it in all capital letters is an insistence on being seen and heard. She is critically conscious and vigilant about the world around her. The pseudonym speaks to her experiences of being discounted and invalidated in formal institutions of learning. OMITTED's self-portrait (See Figure 4) and a summary of the description that she gave of it in class are presented below.

In describing her self-portrait to the class, OMITTED stated: "Mine's pretty much self-explanatory; I cannot draw!" Her introduction of herself was brief. She lamented that she felt her self-portrait was not particularly creative compared to others and then laughed as she said, "I even wrote that down! 'Not terribly creative.'" She went on to read the words on her list, skipping some and elaborating on others. In this introduction,

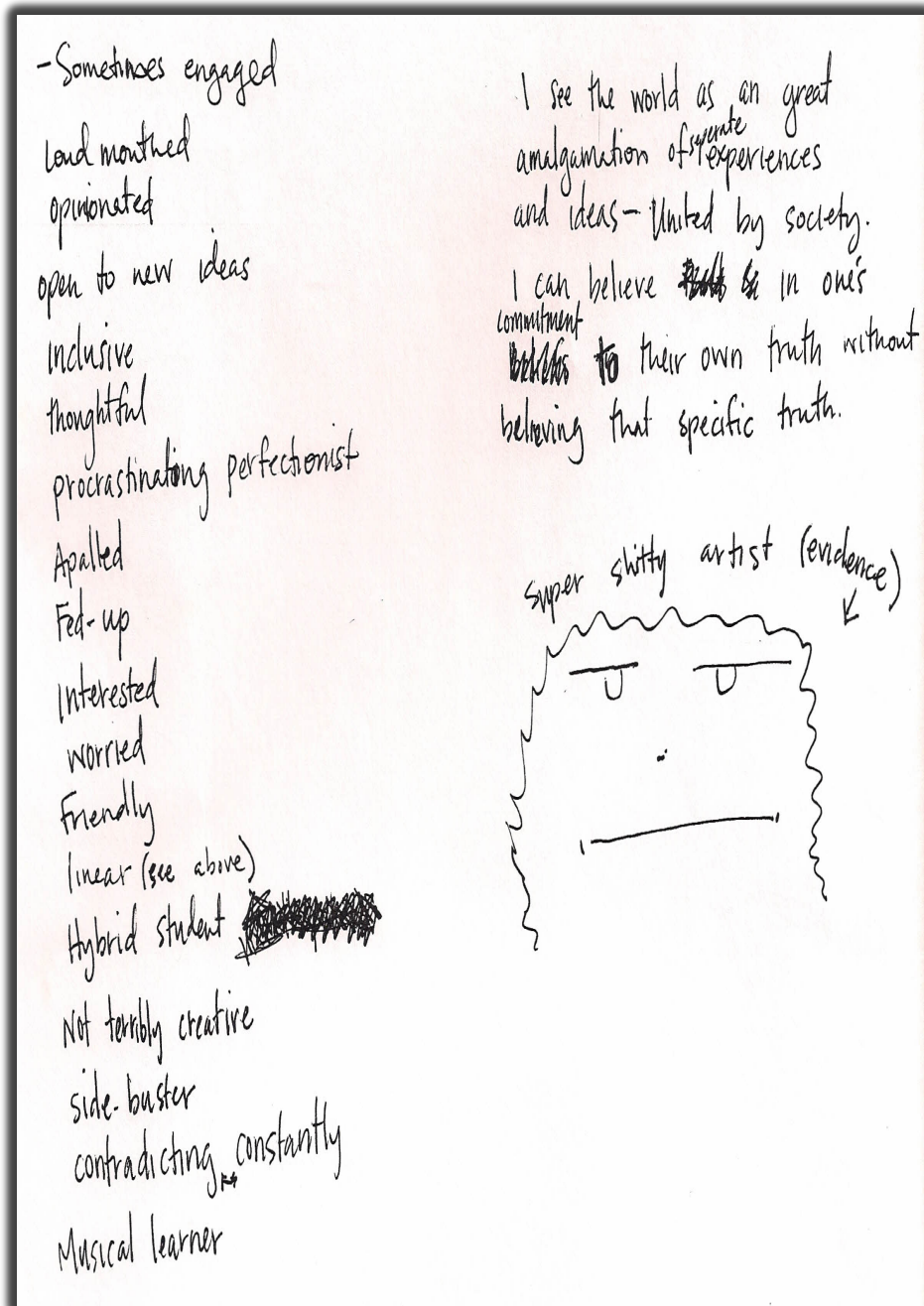


Figure 4: OMITTED's Self-Portrait

she drew attention to her love of words and the excitement she got from using words to craft stories. She also first referred to herself as a hybrid student. She would use the words hybrid and hybridity to describe herself throughout the semester.

First Impressions From the Field

OMITTED was 35 years old at the time of the study. She described herself as “half Tongan and half White.” She was fairly tall at about 5’ 6” and had large brown expressive eyes that lit up when she spoke. She wore casual clothes, jeans and cotton t-shirts or long-sleeved shirts. She was very expressive, and often entered the room boisterously. OMITTED was a senior at the university during the semester research was conducted. She was divorced and had a son in elementary school. OMITTED presented as very confident and outspoken.

In the class, she was very thorough in her analysis and discussions of the assigned readings and she was one of the most vocal students in the class. She had a strong grasp of theory and threw academic words around readily. She was confident in multiple ways. For example, she seemed undaunted by assignments. When conversations turned to physical appearance and beauty standards, she said loudly and unabashedly that she likes to eat, directly countering some of the comments in class that privilege thinness for women and a mainstream sort of beauty. She has said that she “is committed to her oppression,” a comment that generated much discussion in class. And she noted that her racial and ethnic ambiguity had resulted in acceptance into many groups of people and allowed her to cross borders—which she highly valued.

OMITTED identified as a cisgender heterosexual woman. She very openly discussed sexuality and often brought sexuality and sexual representation into

conversations in relation to our readings and to social oppressions of people and especially women. She seemed curious about her classmates and engaged in conversation with everyone, often being the only one to push the quieter students to speak (not all of the time or in aggressive ways). She focused intently when in conversation with others, always making direct eye contact and moving near to people when she spoke to them (Field note, 2/7/12).

The field note above reflects my first impressions of OMITTED as a student and participant in the class. It is drawn from my experiences with her and my observations of her interactions with classmates during the first weeks of the semester. OMITTED was very extroverted and sociable. She was engaging and personable. During the first class, we were seated in a circle, as would become the norm. Several times, I leaned forward in my seat to see OMITTED as she spoke. She also leaned forward a few times to see me when I spoke. About 10 minutes into the class, she changed her seat so that she was in a chair in a different part of the room. She said that she wanted to be able to see everyone. “After all that’s why we’re in a circle, right?” (Field note, 1/17/2012). This desire to fully engage, to see and be seen, and to take action to make herself visible in the class was characteristic of OMITTED and the way that she approached her experiences at the university. Having felt excluded from conversations and either invisible or unjustly critiqued during much of her education, OMITTED was determined to be part of the conversation in her university courses, to have her ideas and knowledges validated, and to use the voice that she had developed from her experiences.

OMITTED’s education autobiography is excerpted below. It provides considerable detail about her early education both in and out of schools. It includes her

choices about postsecondary schooling and illustrates her insight into schooling as part of her lived experience. In the remainder of the chapter I draw from her narratives throughout the semester to engage with the research questions, emphasizing the main theme that emerged in regard to higher education. In her education autobiography¹⁵ OMITTED emphasized “education as validation” or legitimation of her intelligence and her viewpoints and her use of her voice to make them known.

I highlight, through her narratives including written work for class, my field notes, and my interview with her, her expression and performance of herself as a “hybrid” student and person who crossed multiple borders. This includes her emphasis on the importance of lived experience to her understanding of herself as a knowledgeable person. OMITTED embraces a poststructural subjectivity, understanding her identities as multiple and shifting. At the same time, she recalls being marked as “other” and claims a space in the margins as a site of resistance. This self-authoring has been informed by and informs her education-related decisions. It includes both an understanding and critique of the ways she has been marginalized within the education system and her development of her student subjectivity as intelligent and engaged. Her narratives illustrate how OMITTED utilized her life experience to move forward and (re)engage with higher education. The chapter moves to a discussion of her complex identities and identifications, before concluding with a summary and implications of the research.

¹⁵ OMITTED’S education autobiography is condensed here. At nine pages, it was too long to include in its entirety. At the same time, OMITTED chooses her stories and words carefully, making it difficult to shorten. I reconciled this by cutting down some descriptions and excluding stories or details that I thought may compromise her anonymity. Ellipses mark the omissions in the original text.

OMITTED Education Autobiography¹⁶

I have never been a strong student. I have always struggled in the classroom: I am flighty, I procrastinate, and I have an issue with attendance. When I think of the story of my education, I remember specific stories wherein my eyes were widened. They rarely happened in school, but they all taught me in ways that have allowed me to have a unique perspective. This perspective is the ideology with which I presently tackle my collegiate education and with which I hope to inform future generations. This perspective is based in liminality. I have had the unique opportunity to learn from separate sides, to fluidly move between racial and socioeconomic boundaries. Being able to see these boundaries, I can address them, hold them, learn from them and disrupt them.

When I was quite young, perhaps three or four years old, I was at a grocery store waiting in the checkout line with my mother. I waited patiently, holding tightly to my mother's pant leg. I noticed other women in line ogling my mother and me...I was terrified; I could see my mother's blonde hair and kind blue eyes smile at me. I knew that I was marked differently. I matched my father, only lighter, and he wasn't around to explain my difference from mom. My naiveté at the time mistakenly placed the burden of blame onto my mother's light skin. I had no idea that in the minds of these judgy women perhaps I was the culprit; perhaps I was a mark of my mother's miscegenational shame... this mark of otherness on my skin was something I was forced to reckon with changed the way I would see the world, based on the way it saw me...

¹⁶ OMITTED did not title her education autobiography; thus, the heading simply reflects the assignment title.

In 1970, my mother, not fazed by “racial difference,” met and married my father in the LDS temple after only four months of knowing each other. In 1970, black men who were members of the LDS faith couldn’t hold the priesthood, and no black person could enter a sacred LDS temple. My father’s beautifully rich brown skin did not keep him from the temple, however. He was Tongan, not African, and therefore not subject to the racism that kept others with the same skin pigmentation out of the church. My father’s ethnic heritage somehow protected him, despite his skin-tone signifier.

I grew up the middle child of a gaggle of middle children. There were 6 of us at first, until my aunt died and we instantly grew to nine. I was raised in an ethnically diverse and socio-economically challenged area just west of downtown. I don’t remember learning to read. All I know is that I couldn’t read in kindergarten, but on the first day of first grade I could read everything put in front of me. I have a very specific memory of my first impressions of school. I was in kindergarten, sitting in a cloud, literally, watching my thoughts go by me in a hazy vision. Suddenly I heard Mrs. Simms...screeching my name through my cloud. I retreated from the dream and found I was sitting in a reading circle...I had no idea it was my turn to read. Nobody, including myself, thought I could read...[In] first grade my nice new teacher asked me sweetly to read for her and I did. She and I were both amazed. This began my love affair with reading. From that moment on, the only valid experiences (in my mind) I would have in school centered around reading and interpretation.

When I was in first grade, my class and I studied prominent African Americans to commemorate Black History month. A local newspaper covered the story and ran a photo. I was asked to be in the photo, along with two of my classmates: my best friend, the only

black girl in my class, and the only black boy. I was asked to be in the photo because, as I overheard, I “looked black.” This was not a traumatic experience for me. I was thrilled to be put into a category that I understood, because I could feel that others saw that I wasn’t white. However, no part of my ethnic background includes African, though it does include Anglican. Here I came to an ironic impasse: I was thrust into the racial binary system wherein I was identified as ‘black’ without fitting the racial background.

Simultaneously, I am half white, though my brown skin defies that fact. Silenced and bereft in the racial dichotomy, of course, was the source of my brown skin: my Tongan heritage.

Sheridan was a poor school...waived school lunch fees [were] at 95%. Because of the gross need, we were the recipients of progressive programs. In fourth grade I was very bad at math... I never did my homework so I was placed in a new program called Chapter 1. The program was held outside of my regular classroom. It was designed for students who needed a little extra help. I learned about eye contact in Chapter 1 and that a person ought to drink 64 ounces of water a day... She [the teacher] began each session by playing Whitney Houston’s “I Believe Children Are the Future” and tearing up while looking each of us in the eye. I hated the program. I found it insulting. I was an expert reader, writer and speller, who cared if I didn’t do my math homework. In Chapter 1 I was able to learn how to use exciting technology, such as microfiche readers. But the program was held on Fridays, which is when our class parties were held. Each week as a class we could earn tickets for jobs well done. The tickets would go into a mason jar and once the jar was full we’d have a party. I contributed plenty of tickets to that jar: I got a perfect score on every spelling test without even studying. Perfect tests were worth ten

tickets in the jar. I missed every Friday party because I was stuck learning about my potential. This message was undermined by my unrewarded good behavior.

I had bad luck with teachers. In my thirteen years of public school, I can only remember a handful of teachers that were interested in my success as a student. More often than not, I had teachers who were cruel: stuck in an age where my skin-tone signified failure. The worst of these was my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Johnson. My family and I had just acquired three new siblings...we needed more space. My parents purchased a grand new home in Oakville and the move was shocking. I was alienated almost immediately. My brown skin was a marker of difference and I was called "nigger" every day for the first two weeks. The worst of my tormentors was my teacher. She was in her last year of teaching, tall, old and mean. Once during a math lesson I had forgotten to pay attention. When it came time to do the exercises, I couldn't proceed because I didn't know how. [She] had asked if anyone needed assistance before taking her seat at her desk. I was too embarrassed to raise my hand so I approached her after she sat down. In the quietest voice I had I asked for help. [She] bellowed at me "why didn't you ask for help when I was at the chalkboard?" I was mortified. She then addressed the class, "Does anyone else need help?" She waited as the class stared at me motionless. "Everyone else understands this material. I don't know what your problem is." She left the issue at that and I returned to my desk in shame. Additionally, she refused to believe that I could possess the ability to read, let alone read well. At our weekly "book interviews" she would question book that I had finished during the previous weeks in a way that revealed her belief that I was a liar. It was impossible for me to convince her otherwise and she refused to give me credit for having read them.

To make matters worse, I started puberty when we reached Oakville. My hair went curly and I didn't know what to do with it so I spent that year with a nasty mullet nest on my head. I developed a gnarly case of acne. I became aware of name-brand clothing... when someone pointed out that I wore the same pair of dirty smelly purple corduroy pants everyday...[Moving] was excruciatingly traumatizing. I found solace in books and began to read even more voraciously than ever before.

By the time I hit sixth grade, however, I had begun to figure the place out. I realized that I would not fit in in that town and began to create and embrace my own counter-hegemonic identity. I began to get wild with my hand-me-down clothes. I found an old Levi jacket in a bag left on our doorstep by one of our altruistic neighbors. The first day I wore it to school, one of my snottiest neighbors saw it and informed me that it had been hers and she didn't want it anymore. That's why I had it and she didn't. I took the jacket home and drew a picture of the planet Earth on the back. Underneath I scrawled in ominous lettering the cynical words "wasted creation". I was mocked when I wore it after that, but I rocked that jacket. It was a shield, a statement that at the time I didn't understand. I was rejecting them before they could reject me. That jacket was my preemptive strike.

In 7th grade I began my lifetime of social consciousness when I began to listen to "rebel rock." Depeche Mode, INXS, George Michael and Bob Marley were standards in our house, but Midnight Oil was our favorite. A radical band from Australia, Midnight Oil sang songs about environmentalism, social justice (especially for Australian Aborigines), and lower-class issues. My older sister and I would sit next to our tape decks rewinding, pausing, transcribing and interpreting lyrics for hours, educating

ourselves about a world far from our own. We also began to explore poetry, poring over e.e. Cummings, Langston Hughes, and Carl Sandburg.

High school offered nothing that I was interested in. I rarely did my homework; I was more interested in dancing at raves and skateboarding. (I still have nightmares about being unprepared in high school). However, I had three wonderful teachers who saw potential in me despite my poor work ethic...

I had never planned on attending college. I always thought that I would get married and have babies with a man who would provide for our family. This was the model set up for me and I had no reason to believe I would do anything else. However, after the summer after graduation, all my friends were heading to college and I was at home unemployed with nobody to hang out with. In a rush, I applied to community college and began my first quarter in 1996. I took Botany 101 and some other inconsequential classes. I failed every class that semester except for Botany. I had met my future ex-husband in that class and I wouldn't miss it for anything.

After meeting my boyfriend I no longer had any interest in school; I should have abandoned the project. After approximately five more quarters of practically failing every class I attempted I finally did give up the ghost. I eventually married my boyfriend, became a mother, had my marriage fall horribly to pieces and lost faith in everything. No experience in my life schooled me greater than my divorce... In 2008, 12 years after my initial quarter at community college, I was thirty years old, making my glorious return to school. I was finally ready to invest the time and energy to creating a life for myself.

At community college I had a wonderful professor, who finally taught me in the style I learn best: discussion based on reading. After making this discovery I never

looked back. My major reflects this realization: English Teaching. My experience at the university has been completely opposite from my experience in the educational system before it. I found my voice in college and I use it often and with vigor. In the classroom I am a discussion-based learner, but in my life the greatest informer has been experience. In each of the instances related in this story I learned huge truths about the nature of people. (October, Education autobiography, 2012)

As OMITTED's narrative suggests, she was observant of and closely attuned to her sociocultural context. She was very perceptive and aware of power relations in society, particularly racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic discriminations. She honed her awareness of such issues through personal experiences and observations that began when she was very young. OMITTED began her education autobiography by establishing that life experiences have formed the bulk of her learning, and situates herself in liminal spaces. She told of her early years through a series of stories. These stories point to her consciousness of and the influence of race and ethnicity, religion, gender, and socioeconomic positioning on her experiences. Each story is a remembrance of an occasion, as she said, "wherein my eyes were widened" (Education Autobiography, p. 1). OMITTED was clear that these were formative experiences through which she developed a student subjectivity that she used to navigate her current movement through her university education.

Her education autobiography was part of OMITTED's positioning of higher education as a finding of her voice. Formal education was never secondary to personal experience; for OMITTED, they were intricately connected. She was committed to expressing herself and using her voice as she continued through her education. This

included giving voice to her experiences with racism, sexism, and classism and “with which [she] hope[d] to inform future generations” (Education Autobiography, p. 1). In the following sections, I unpack OMITTED’s education autobiography and her other narratives to explore her understanding of herself as a student, her experiences with/in education, and the ways that they influenced her decisions about higher education. I begin by exploring what higher education meant to her through the theme that developed through her narratives: higher education as a means of validation and using her voice.

Education to Bring Voice to Experience:

“I Found My Voice in College”

Though OMITTED pursued higher education immediately out of high school, her experiences with/in higher education were convoluted. She was in her senior year at the university during the semester in which the research was conducted. As she detailed in a class assignment, this was not her first attempt at college. She said to me during my interview with her, “depending on whether or not you count a brief break in this last stint, this is my third or fourth attempt at college” (Interview 5/1/12). In her education autobiography above, she detailed the first of these attempts, at community college. She talked more about this when I interviewed her:

OMITTED: Yeah, well they [friends] were all going to different colleges that they had been accepted into. They had done the whole, apply for colleges out of town, out of state, get accepted and move away. Umm, and it was like the end of the summer and they were all moving after we'd graduated, and I didn't have a job...and so I decided to go to school then. Then, it just wasn't working out for me... And so I just dropped out because I was dropping out all the time anyway, paying for these classes I wasn't taking anyway, getting bad grades. (Interview, 5/1/12)

Her first attempt at college was prompted by both the realization that all of her friends were going off to college and that she didn't have any good job opportunities. She quickly applied and was accepted to the local community college. But, as she noted in her autobiography, she had never really planned on attending college. Rather, at this point in her life, marriage and a family were what she saw in her future. In her words: "This was the model set up for me and I had no reason to believe I would do anything else" (Education autobiography, p. 8). Unsurprisingly, then, after meeting the man she would marry her first attempt at community college was abandoned.

OMITTED's second enrollment at college came after her husband completed his degree and, as they had agreed upon, it was her turn to go to school:

And then in 2005, my husband, at the time, had graduated from the university, and it was my turn to start going to school. And so I started in the summer semester at community college and then umm, got a 4.0 grade point average. And then my husband told me he wanted a divorce. And so, that again put my, umm, schooling on the back burner again. So it was just not something I could deal with. (Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED'S first two attempts at college must be understood, in part, through what she describes as the model that was set up for her and the importance of that model in her understanding of who she was and the purpose education had to her life. Specifically, OMITTED pointed to her family's involvement in the LDS Church and the cultural model that gives primacy to women's roles as wives and mothers. As Madsen's (2010) study of Utah women argues, because women's responsibilities in the home are emphasized by the Church, the women in her study who attended college or wanted to attend college saw it as something that came after their responsibilities to their husbands and children, or their plans to have children, and were content to complete a degree

someday or not at all. OMITTED's views regarding higher education were strongly linked to her identifications with the Church, until her marriage ended.

OMITTED expressed that, following her divorce and working for several years, she was ready to go back and invest in herself. She also recognized that getting a college degree would position her to get better jobs. Her second attempt at community college coincided with a crisis in her family—the dissolution of her marriage. So, while she was more prepared for and excited about college the second time and had a very successful first semester back, her efforts were thwarted by the change in her personal circumstances.

She returned to community college in 2008, taking classes, as she was able, and eventually transferring to the university. The economy at that time had much to do with her decision to return. During the interview she said:

OMITTED: But then my last time, coming back to school, I was working. And it was...August 2008 and the state of the economy, everything was bottoming out. It was a *terrible* time to be bad at sales. And, [her employer] they fire people all the time without, you know, notice... There wasn't a lot of job security. And I was terrified, you know my son had just, his insurance had just dropped because people were just dropping people's insurance all over the place at the time. And I knew I could get a job loading boxes in the morning, and then go to school during the day, which is what I did. And I would get full insurance for my son. And so I did that. That's why I decided to come back to school, because, you know it just sort of all opened up for me. (Interview 5/1/12)

The loss of insurance for her son and fear of losing her job prompted OMITTED's final return to college, which began part-time in 2008 and continued through the time of the research study. In order to manage a return to school, OMITTED found a job that would not only provide insurance, but also would pay for part of her education. It also worked with needs she had regarding childcare for her son. As she said, things opened up for her during that time; she finally had the opportunity to return to school to pursue a 4-

year degree.

While better jobs and job security were common themes another strong theme emerged throughout her narratives regarding her most recent return to school. OMITTED expressed that getting a degree meant, “as a first generation college student I can make it.” It also meant “validation, [to] prove to everyone else that I can do it” (Student notes, p. 1). As Jehangir (2010a) discusses, first-generation students, especially, are often strongly motivated to complete a degree to demonstrate to themselves and others that their hard work was worth it and to show that they are capable of earning a degree. Further, they strive to meet the hopes and expectations of their families “who want and need the college promise to translate into opportunities that will allow them to collectively cross the boundaries of class race and geography into a place of greater economic stability” (Jehangir, 2010a, p. 14). Finally, it was important to OMITTED to model to her son that he, too, can go to college.

Work and career opportunities were explicitly cited by OMITTED as a reason for initially going and returning to college. However, her narratives consistently point to the longing for validation of her ability to succeed in college, as well as her need to voice her opinions and be heard. In part, finding and using her voice was related to her realization that she is a discussion-based learner. OMITTED was an avid reader. She thrived on expression, carefully composing words. She ended her education autobiography saying:

My experience at the university has been completely opposite from my experience in the educational system before it. I found my voice in college and I use it often and with vigor. In the classroom I am a discussion-based learner, but in my life the greatest informer has been experience.
(Education autobiography, p. 9)

OMITTED's experience with education at the university this time was different from previous experiences with education. She was acknowledged for her intelligence and talents, and she was thriving as a student. Still, as she noted, her greatest source of knowledge had been life experience. As she re-engaged with college, she had a strong sense of the importance of higher education in using her voice "to inform future generations" (Education autobiography, p. 8). She spoke about this specifically in the interview:

I pride myself on my language, my use of language. I haven't perfected it, but I am pretty good.... And, I also feel like I have sort of this duty as this hybrid character to bring the voices out that aren't being heard, you know. And so, in that way I guess I also, that's where I get my umm, this social justice bone is because I can see, because my own life I've never had this space where I can be just who I am...

So I really want to work with people who, you know, like I'm not an anomaly. This class showed me that... there are more people who are like me- mixed ethnicities. There are more people like me and my son and my son's father... And I think that people need to have these tools of navigating these systems because it's not the same for you if you're mixed, you know. (Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED had referred to herself in multiple ways to reflect her mixed-ethnicity heritage. She used the word hybridity and talked about existing in the margins, most frequently. Though she also said she at the beginning of the semester that she was half Tongan and half White, until questioned by her classmates on "which half is talking now?" (Field note, 1/24/12). She then more often used the term "hybridity" or spoke of being a "hybrid character" or of mixed-ethnicity, as above, or as mixed race. While I return to the subject of hybridity in more depth later in the chapter, here, I highlight importance of her lived experience in informing her shifting sense of purpose for higher education related to her raced and gendered epistemologies. Specifically, as she says, she

feels a sense of duty to use her abilities with language to bring out voices that are not being heard—those of other people of mixed ethnicities—in order to help them navigate systems with which she has struggled, most notably, the education system. Delgado Bernal (2006), drawing from the work of Elenes (1997) and her research with undergraduate Chicana/Latina women, points to a strength that marginalized people have that comes from their borderland experiences “living between spaces, cultures, and languages” (p. 123). Importantly, Delgado Bernal says of the young women in her study, “students spoke of their commitment to their families and communities as a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome educational obstacles” (pp. 123-124).

This was also the case for OMITTED who saw great importance in serving as a source of inspiration for her own son, who OMITTED understood, would face additional challenges in the education system as a biracial male. However, it was also very important to OMITTED, particularly as she saw her own struggles with/in schools reflected in the stories of her multiethnic identified peers, to bring out the silenced voices and help develop “tools of navigating these systems because it's not the same for you if you're mixed” (Interview, 5/1/12). OMITTED had developed great strength from her experiences in the margins. She also increasingly recognized that there were far more people like her than she had realized and she understood the importance of using her own strength and experiences to help others navigate through the education system as well, demonstrating, as Delgado Bernal (2006) suggests, a strong commitment to her multiple communities.

She came to this position, in part, through her experiences in the class, where she was in conversation with students who claimed a multitude of racial and ethnic identities

and identifications. The two other students in the class who identified as mixed-race each specified mothers of Pacific Islander background (Samoan and Fijian, respectively) and fathers who were African American. These students expressed some similarities to OMITTED's experiences as a mixed-race person, but they were often identified by others as exclusively African American and could not relate to her experiences of being able to cross racial and ethnic borders. OMITTED welcomed these conversations, valuing, as she noted in the quote above, that there were a lot more people who had experiences like she and her former husband and her son had as mixed-race identified. At the same time, she listened closely to their different perspectives. This played a role in her interest in helping students of mixed ethnicities to navigate systems of education. In her desire to help multiracial students navigate schools, OMITTED is employing what Emma Pérez (1999) calls a "decolonial imaginary" finding a space beyond dichotomies, a space of "in-between, for the shades of gray, for the voices unheard" (p. 58).

To come to a place where she wanted to pursue additional education as a part of her determination to find space for the unheard voices, including her own, OMITTED had to reckon with painful memories of her experiences with/in her K-12 education. Her histories of participation in schools had taken a considerable toll on her sense of her self as a student and her possibilities for higher education. In the next section, I point to OMITTED's narrations of marginalization and exclusion in schools alongside self-recognition of her multiple knowledges.

Educated to Resist School

As discussed in Chapter 1, schools are specific kinds of discourse communities, "complete with specific rules for participation therein" (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p.

295). Specifically, in schools, students are expected to participate in accepted intellectual, linguistic, and social standards. Early in her education autobiography OMITTED described herself as an outsider to the discourse communities of schools. She began by saying that she has never been a good student and that she always struggled in the classroom. In the next sentences, she discounted formal schooling in the development of herself and her understanding of the world. For example, she said that when she remembered her education, she remembered stories wherein her eyes were widened. She immediately qualified that these experiences rarely occurred in school. The next several stories of her education autobiography detail experiences through which she developed what she refers to as “a perspective based in liminality... learn[ing] from separate sides, to fluidly move between racial and socioeconomic boundaries.” (Education autobiography, p. 1). In a similar vein, Anzaldúa (2002a) calls “those who facilitate passages between worlds” (p. 1) *nepantleras*. *Nepantleras* develop their understandings of the world through perspectives from multiple worlds in which they exist. OMITTED wrote of when she first remembered understanding racial difference, as women in a grocery store look from her mother to her with suspicion. She describes her subsequent understanding that she was “marked differently” (Education autobiography, p. 1).

Her next story told of her parents marrying in the in 1970, noting both their interracial relationship and her father’s acceptance into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The LDS Church, which differentiated by race, would have denied him had been an African rather than a Tongan man. She pointedly named racism as what distinguished her father as “not black or African” (education autobiography, p.2), recognizing the LDS Church as one of the liminal spaces in which she was tentatively

allowed. Her next depiction was of her “ethnically diverse, and socio-economically challenged area,” a neighborhood to which she had much attachment (Education autobiography, p. 3). Through these first pages of her autobiography, she described in great detail her sociocultural context while also emphasizing its importance to her understanding of the world. Her critical consciousness was evident throughout these descriptions. In the telling of these stories, she at once focuses the reader on the complex identities and identifications of her youth, as a biracial LDS girl from a diverse, low-income neighborhood. She signals that she has places of hypervisibility (the grocery store), belonging (her neighborhood as a young child), and liminality (in the LDS Church) marginality (school). She is vigilant of these spaces. She moves between them—she cannot hold rigid boundaries.

As OMITTED shifted to stories of her formal schooling, she recounted being screeched at as her first memory of school. This first memory reflected many negative memories that were to follow. This led her to resist school as a place in which she was mostly omitted as a valid participant (Moje & Lewis, 2007). Though her kindergarten teacher screamed at her for not reading in class, a positive experience in first grade facilitated her love of reading and her sense of herself as a good reader. As she said, “In first grade my nice new teacher, asked me sweetly to read for her and I did... This began my love affair with reading. From that moment on, the only valid experiences (in my mind) I would have in school centered around reading and interpretation” (Education autobiography, p. 3).

OMITTED’s love of reading and her early understanding of her gift with language helped her to mediate the negative experiences that she had in school, and there

were many. For example, she described being part of a program called Chapter 1¹⁷ in fourth grade because she was “bad at math” (Education autobiography, p. 4). Yet in addition to math, she learned, as she said, about the importance of making eye contact and drinking 64 ounces of water a day. OMITTED said that the program was meant to give students extra help and that she went there specifically for math. Yet, as she noted, she found it insulting when the teacher:

began each session by playing Whitney Houston’s “I Believe Children Are the Future” and tearing up while looking each of us in the eye. I hated the program... I was an expert reader, writer and speller, who cared if I didn’t do my math homework. (Education autobiography, p. 5)

Education research has clearly demonstrated the relationship between creating exclusion through tracking in schools, and the subsequent dropping out or disengaging from school (Fine, 1991; McDonough, 1997). While these studies refer to high school, Angela Valenzuela (1999) has discussed at length the ways that schools alienate and disserve students by divesting them of their language and culture and by not caring for them, both in terms of caring about their schooling and caring about them as people. While her research has focused on Mexican and Mexican American students, her points are effective in understanding OMITTED’s negative experiences in schooling. The assimilationist practices of her teacher in the Chapter 1 Program can clearly be seen as subtractive schooling, which failed to recognize the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), including linguistic capital, honed through pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2006) that she brought to school. OMITTED was in the program for math,

¹⁷ As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education of 1965, the Chapter 1 Program provided financial grants to education agencies to “to meet the special needs of educationally deprived children who live in areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families” (retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/Biennial/101.html>).

but she understood that she was a good student in language arts. Indeed, she refers to herself as an expert. She missed class parties in which students celebrated their successes because she had to leave class to participate in the Chapter 1 Program. Not only was this frustrating and unfair, she notes that it undermined the presumed goal of learning about her potential and negated the positives aspects of the program.

She seemed to resign herself to her bad luck with teachers. She noted in her autobiography that in her 13 years of public education, she had only a handful of good teachers. Fifth grade was a particularly difficult year in school. OMITTED was new to the town and the school. While her previous neighborhood had been very diverse, her new neighborhood was predominantly White. As she said, “I was alienated almost immediately. My brown skin was a marker of difference and I was called “nigger” every day for the first two weeks” (Education autobiography, p. 5). In this extremely harsh racist environment, she identifies her teacher as the worst of her tormentors.

OMITTED talked more about this teacher in our interview. She pointed to her experiences with this teacher as extremely negative and damaging to her understanding of herself as a student and marking school as a place that she needed to survive. Indeed, OMITTED had strong negative visceral reactions to the teacher and welcomed any opportunity to stay home. In talking about this teacher, she said:

[Now] I realize how traumatizing and how traumatic the whole experience was. But my teacher was like my biggest bully. She would berate me in front of the class. And like any time I did a good job, I could stay home and read books all the time because I never wanted to go to school, but I loved reading. So I'd stay home and I'd read books for hours. Like really, I would just read and read and read. And I'd get to school and we'd have these weekly ‘what have you been reading?’ meetings. And I'd tell my teacher about you know, the four books I had finished that week. And she would umm...call me a liar and she would like tell me how there was no way I was smart enough to be able to finish those books. And then she'd

quiz me on them and I'd tell her everything that she needed to know about the books. But she couldn't quiz me very well because she hadn't read the books, you know? I mean, she was awful. She was just really brutal...and she set up a discourse of like, racism, you know. She was in her last year of teaching. And she came from this era, like she, like she most obviously came from this era where she believed, where in this era it was ok to believe that a student that looked like me should never be in her classroom. (Interview, 5/1/12)

In this very White space in which OMITTED was treated as an interloper, she developed strong resistance to school, preferring to learn in her own way and in the safety of her home. Though she'd had negative experiences in her early schooling as well, her middle school years, moving to a predominantly White community, the exclusion of her peers, and the extreme contempt of her teacher convinced her that school was not place for her. She identified sixth grade as the time when she disengaged from school, embracing a “counter-hegemonic identity:”

By the time I hit sixth grade, however, I had begun to figure the place out. I realized that I would not fit in in that town and began to create and embrace my own counter-hegemonic identity. I began to get wild with my hand-me-down clothes. I found an old Levi jacket in a bag left on our doorstep by one of our altruistic neighbors. The first day I wore it to school, one of my snottiest neighbors saw it and informed me that it had been hers and she didn't want it anymore. That's why I had it and she didn't. I took the jacket home and drew a picture of the planet Earth on the back. Underneath I scrawled in ominous lettering the cynical words “wasted creation”. I was mocked when I wore it after that, but I rocked that jacket. It was a shield, a statement that at the time I didn't understand. I was rejecting them before they could reject me. That jacket was my preemptive strike. (Education autobiography, p. 7)

OMITTED is describing her sixth-grade self employing resistant capital. That is, “knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Though OMITTED was in middle school, she knew her exclusion was part of her biracial identity that marked her differently. She understood the racism, classism, and sexism being leveled against her in schools. Though her mother was White,

she was continually mocked, harassed, rendered invisible or hypervisible by her White teachers and peers. Negotiating this painful contradiction reflects what AnaLouise Keating (2006) describes as “the painful dimensions of this world-traveling” (p. 9) of the nepantlera through which “their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them vulnerable to rejection, ostracism and other forms of isolation” (Keating, 2006, p.9). The use of nepantlera (Anzaldúa, 2002a) here is particularly relevant in understanding the cultural knowledges that OMITTED drew from and the critical consciousness with which she resisted being rendered invisible.

OMITTED said she understood that she would not fit in and began to define herself in resistance to her classmates and to school. She marked this as an embracing of her counter-hegemonic identity. To some degree, freeing herself from the pain of exclusion also allowed her to embrace multiple knowledges. OMITTED did not stop learning. Rather, she turned to places where her knowledges were validated—home spaces in which she engaged in multiple forms of learning with her family. She wrote about this in her education autobiography:

In seventh grade I began my lifetime of social consciousness when I began to listen to “rebel rock.” Depeche Mode, INXS, George Michael and Bob Marley were standards in our house, but Midnight Oil was our favorite. A radical band from Australia, Midnight Oil sang songs about environmentalism, social justice (especially for the Australian Aborigines), and lower-class issues. My older sister and I would sit next to our tape decks rewinding, pausing, transcribing and interpreting lyrics for hours, educating ourselves about a world far from our own. We also began to explore poetry, poring over the works of e.e. Cummings, Langston Hughes, and Carl Sandburg. (Education autobiography, p. 8)

OMITTED turned away from school and to other knowledges to which she could related. In response to African American women’s devaluation and ridicule in the United States, Collins (2009) writes

The emphasis that Black feminist thinkers have placed on respect illustrates the significance of self-valuation. In a society in which no one is obligated to respect African-American women, we have long admonished one another to have self-respect. (p. 126)

She points to the ways that Black women blues singers instilled this respect through their music, allowing Black women to tap a deeper meaning. Drawing from music that a consciousness of social justice around issues of social class, sexuality, the rights of indigenous Australians, and colonization, OMITTED surrounded herself with her sisters, to educate herself about issues important to her while maintaining a sense of dignity, self-valuation and self-respect.

She and her sisters differentiated the formal education of school from their learning and self-education at home. School was formal, harsh, alienating, and distant. Learning happened in the home through words, songs, and stories and with her family members, but especially her sisters. We talked about this more during her interview:

It's really interesting because the way we thought about education in our family wasn't the same way that we thought about learning. They were two very separate things; and, we loved learning, my sisters and I. We loved, challenging each other. We loved word games and word play. We would like race each other to finish crossword puzzles, like things like that, you know? (Interview, 5/1/12)

For OMITTED, education was not limited to school and classrooms, and she greatly valued the kinds of learning that were affirmed at home through word games and word play. She recognized her language as part of her privileged White identity, particularly because she did not speak Tongan. Yet, OMITTED also emphasized the storytelling and lessons that were woven in the stories told by her father and his extended family and the continuous presence of music in her home. Here, OMITTED exhibits multiple knowledges honed through pedagogies of the home. She draws upon

considerable linguistic capital, which refers not only to language, but also multiple communication skills including “storytelling skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and thyme” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79), as well as communication through visual art, music, or poetry.

Writing specifically of Tongan culture, Saltiban (2012) discusses “the values embedded within angafakatonga [which] emerge from the household, community, and fonua (land) to give credence to ethical imperatives that have thrived in Tongan communities” (p. 53). Delgado Bernal (2001) refers to such practices as “historically developed and accumulated strategies or bodies of knowledge vital to family survival” (p. 624). It was clear that OMITTED used strategies of learning from within her home to cope with the exclusionary and racist practices of her teachers and peers while continuing to develop her love of learning. She drew from epistemological understandings of indigenous peoples’ exploitation and colonization that came from examples and discussions in her home.

Thus for OMITTED, her home became a space where she and her sisters engaged in hybrid pedagogies that reflected the multiple knowledges of her family. By engaging in these pedagogies, she resisted the deficit views that were being mapped onto her as culturally deficient and as inferior to other students. Yet, the marginalization she experienced in school caused her immense pain and difficulty. She was increasingly isolated from her teachers and peers. By the time she reached high school, she was disengaged from formal schooling. As she says: “High school offered nothing that I was interested in. I rarely did my homework; I was more interested in dancing at raves and

skateboarding” (Education autobiography, p. 8).

OMITTED tells of a conflicted and complicated resistance. On one hand, she was resisting to survive and was able to author herself as an intelligent person who loved learning, in contrast to a formal education through which she was demeaned and devalued and marginalized in the discourse community of her school. On the other hand, as her narrative relates more clearly later in the chapter, she came to see herself as a poor student. Her resistance allowed her to maintain an understanding and reinforcement of cultural knowledges that helped her to survive her middle and high school years and which she drew upon years later as she engaged with higher education at the university (Delgado Bernal, 2006).

At the same time, upon reflection, she determined that she took up discourses that suggested she was poor student, and came to see her position in formal schools in a particular way. She had been convinced that school was a place where she did not fit in or belong. Her K-12 experiences with/in schools played a strong role in her student subjectivity. She developed a sense of herself as an outsider, beyond the discourse community of school and its possibilities. She took up that language opening up her education autobiography by saying that she has never been a strong student. It is unsurprising, then, that she did not plan on attending college. In the next section, I highlight OMITTED’s authoring of herself as a “hybrid character,” which includes her understanding of a herself as competent and engaged learner in college, and a holder and creator of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002) intent on using her voice.

**Self-Authoring Student Potential : “I Am a Smart
Girl Stuck in a Hegemonic System That Has
Undervalued my ‘Race’ and Gender”**

OMITTED’s narratives were captivating. From her introduction of herself to her classmates and me during the first week of the semester to her interview with me after the semester had concluded, OMITTED held her audience’s attention through her weaving of words and complex and contradictory understandings of herself. As her introduction (depicted in Figure 4) suggested, she was among other things, constantly contradicting herself. OMITTED was proud of her multiple and shifting identifications because she saw her ability to shift her thinking as she learned from new experiences to be a great strength. She saw these shifts as a function of her critical consciousness and awareness of the multiple power relations around her.

Despite or maybe as a function of her contradictions, OMITTED was very consistent in her expression of the importance of her lived experience as primary in learning about herself and the world. For indeed, she talked about crossing borders (Anzaldúa, 2007) resisting from the margins (hooks, 1990) and traveling to different worlds (Lugones, 1987), often in the same conversation. She was also steadfast in her authoring of herself as good with language and in her view of people as multifaceted and dynamic. She mentioned her love of and abilities with language multiple times from referring to herself as an expert reader, writer, and speller in elementary school, to discussing how she saw higher education as important to her life. Specifically, she saw her goal of being an English teacher as a way “to bring the voices out that aren't being heard (Interview, 5/1/12). She also saw language and expression as vital to understanding

herself and connecting with others. When I asked about how she negotiates her complex identities and identification she replied: “My language, I, I often bring it up, but I really think it is a privilege of mine that I'm able to express myself freely, you know?”

(Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED authored and re-authored of herself as a student through identifications with multiple marginalized racial and ethnic communities including Tongan, White, Latino/a and Black, particularly in the sense that she found alliances across these communities. While she identified as heterosexual, she was also aligned with the queer community, referred to herself as poor, agnostic, a former Mormon, as an avowed feminist, part-time single mother, sister, daughter and co-parent. She talked about each of these in relation to herself as a student, for she had come to understand herself as a student alongside understanding herself in relation to others. Benhabib (1999) describes this as “the narrative model of identity [which] is developed precisely...by developing meaning over time so as to hold past, present and future together” (p. 353). This is the capacity to develop an identity that is meaningful in one’s situated context, holding oneself together to create meaning in one’s life through connection to others.

Through her introduction and her performances as a student in class, I saw OMITTED as a confident and engaged student, from my first meeting with her. So I was surprised, in reading her autobiography, that she saw herself differently. Yet it became clearer through the semester and through her various narratives, that while she saw herself as intelligent, good with language, engaged and observant of her world, performing the role of student was something different. Her sense of herself as a student was tied to her early school experiences in which she was authored as deficient. Yet she

continued to re-author her student subjectivities as she had new experiences as a college student. Her statements near the close of her education autobiography reflected this:

At community college I had a wonderful professor, who finally taught me in the style I learn best: discussion based on reading. After making this discovery I never looked back...My experience at the university has been completely opposite from my experience in the educational system before it. I found my voice in college and I use it often and with vigor.
(Education autobiography, p. 9)

Through recognition of the differences between her previous education and a college context in which she encountered affirmative teachers and multiple ways of learning, OMITTED re-authored herself as strong learner and capable student. In one of her last narratives of the semester, she reflected back on the education autobiography she had written for class early in the semester. Her writing reflects the continued re-authoring of herself as moved through the semester:

I have always thought that I was a terrible student. Much of my life I held this perception that I was not the “learning type.” However, this sentiment is a bit simplistic, if not altogether inaccurate. I realize now that it would be more accurate to say that my own ideas of my place in the educational system have always been complicated by the fact that I am a smart girl stuck in a hegemonic system that has undervalued my “race” and gender...The discourses of “good student” have damaged my self-perceptions and hindered my personal growth. Furthermore, through a shift of thinking—that is, a new way of imagining myself in the educational context—I have been able to recognize how I have been misinformed about my potential.

In the educational narrative that I wrote at the beginning of the semester, I describe the ways in which the school system (and society) made my gender and my racial signifier (that is, my skin tone) an important factor in my educational experience. I was ever aware that others saw me in a certain light, though I failed to connect the very real racial discrimination with my own self-perceptions as a student. This may sound contradictory, and it is. Perhaps because I have been so focused on oppression, I failed to see how I was internalizing discrimination and the ways it informed my learning style. I bought into a ‘dumb’ discourse that literally stunted my progress and silenced me. I enrolled in my first college quarter 16 years

ago and quickly failed. I told myself that I wasn't the schooling type and then allowed my grades and attendance to reflect the sentiment.

These are the dangers of the public school system designed to genderize, racialize and classify students according to the discourses of the hegemony. Relying on established discourses allows students to form inaccurate ideas about themselves. Keeping students aware of gender, racial and class normativity limits their potential, as it did mine.

The public school system failed me in the way I learned to think about myself. (Final reflection, 4/30/12)

OMITTED reflected on her earlier experiences in school to speak to how she developed a student subjectivity that positioned her to fail, and how that influenced her trajectory to higher education. As she said, she did not make a connection between the racial discrimination she experienced in schools and her negative perceptions of herself as a student. She was well aware of the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and gender discriminations that she faced. She named them and she was able to understand these discriminations as oppressive and wrong. Yet, she hadn't considered the ways that she internalized negative messages about her potential in school and for higher education. As Jehangir (2010a) found in her narrative study of first-generation and low-income students, "the feeling of being marginalized in schools starts even before college and FG [first-generation] students see themselves as outsiders in the educational context even before they arrive to college" (p.20). It is not difficult to understand how OMITTED came to see herself as an outsider in the context of education. She was given that message often through her experiences with/in schools.

Importantly, throughout her narratives, OMITTED indicated that she recognized and valued the learning that occurred in her home and with her sisters through reading, crossword puzzles, music, stories, and word play. In the reflection above, she concluded

that because she was unrecognizable within the discourse communities of her schools (Moje & Lewis, 2007), she came to believe, or bought into the discourse, that she was a poor student. She was aware of the negative ways many of her teachers and school officials thought about her early on, and she resisted this. In reflecting back, she saw that the schools failed her in how they taught her to think about herself as a student. With this in mind, alongside her affirming experiences as a college student, OMITTED enacted her agency in re-authoring herself and what higher education might offer her. “Through a shift of thinking—that is, a new way of imagining myself in the educational context—I have been able to recognize how I have been misinformed about my potential” (Final reflection, 4/30/2012).

In my interview with her at the end of the semester, OMITTED spoke about herself confidently as a student. She had recently been accepted to a program for underrepresented students interested in graduate school. The program was competitive, and OMITTED had carefully prepared her application. She was buoyed by the success of being chosen for the program. She had gotten the news a few days before I interviewed her for this study. When I asked her during her interview to describe herself as a student, she replied:

OMITTED: I think that I am pretty dedicated to school. I'm engaged. I like school, I like building umm good relationships with my instructors, umm and I also, I also think that one thing that this last semester has taught me is that I have a lot of potential. You know? And that's been really nice.

Barbara: Yeah...

OMITTED: I mean a lot more potential than I ever realized, because I always thought that I would be good at teaching because it's so performative and I like being in front of a class and I like discussing. But, I think that...yeah, now I can teach college one day.

Barbara: Now you envision yourself as a graduate student and like pursuing that.

OMITTED: Yeah.

Barbara: Right? You had expressed some interest before, but I think now that you're seeing it as a possibility.

OMITTED: Now, now it's something I'm doing.

Barbara: That's right! Now it's something you're doing.
(Interview 5/1/12)

Her response to the interview question points to OMITTED's re-authoring of her student subjectivity. OMITTED had come to see her potential as a student in college and had new visions for her future. As her narrative suggests, she always viewed her lived experiences as primary to her learning. During her K-12 schooling experiences, this meant that her sense of herself often conflicted with how she was seen in schools. Because she valued her epistemologies and school did not, she came to see and refer to herself as knowledgeable, but a poor student. In my interview with her, she authored herself anew through her most recent experiences as a student. Now she envisioned being able to take what she called her perspective based in liminality, which she valued so much, and utilize it pursue graduate studies. This perspective and her understanding of herself as a "hybrid character" were part of OMITTED's self-authoring of her complex identities and identifications and her shifting sense of herself as a student. In the following section, I draw upon the aspects of her narrative in which she discusses her complex identities and identifications to illustrate their interconnectedness as well as their importance to her student subjectivity and her pursuit of higher education.

Moving in the Margins

As illustrated throughout the chapter, OMITTED was highly attuned to her sociocultural context. In her narratives she emphasizes an early understanding of the importance of race and ethnicity, social class, gender, and language to her life. These aspects of her identity mattered greatly to the way she saw the world and the way it saw her and to the experiences she had in school. OMITTED noted that very early in life, she saw herself as “marked differently” referring to her “skin tone signifier.” OMITTED spoke about this passionately and in complex ways. As a biracial child, she realized that she was not White like her mother and that this drew attention to her, especially when she was with her mom. She also realized in school that she was never identified as White, even though this was part of her “ethnic heritage” (Education autobiography, p. 9). Indeed, she recounts an incident in elementary school when she was in a photo for Black History Month because she “looked black” (Education autobiography, p. 4) even though no one in her family identifies as Black. The importance of her ethnicity to her K-12 education is discussed at length above, but her shifting and complex sense of herself as a hybrid character also mattered to her in college. She explained in her interview:

OMITTED: Well, one of my favorite things about myself is that I, I don't know what it is and I think it's because I have been this hybrid character, you know? I like, just...I exist in liminal spaces. I am a part time single mother. I am the middle child, like I'm the 6th of 9 kids, so I'm the middle child. I have always seen myself as a bridge builder and umm, and somebody who can exist in a lot of different spaces, you know? And I think that the reason I am able to do this is because I see my experiences as something that will enhance who I am as a person. (Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED's racial and ethnic identities were central to her descriptions of herself as a hybrid character. She was also vocal in embracing her racial and ethnic ambiguity in class. For example, during a discussion of oppression and privilege, she said: “I'm

mistaken for everything and I love it. I consider this a privilege of oppression because I get to join in communion with people who I normally wouldn't if they thought I was Tongan" (Field note, 1/19/12). This was a provocative statement, and it was contested by some members of the class who argued that oppression, by its nature, did not have privileges and that not everyone could pass or cross borders, literally or figuratively, as readily as OMITTED suggested that she could.

OMITTED also stirred the class when she said that she was committed to her oppressions, on the heels of saying that the way people identify is fluid and very personal. When the class pushed her on this, she replied: "I like having access to places where other people have been oppressed. I want access to the places people have similar struggles to me. I find it hard to think of myself as privileged" (Field note, 1/19/12). Students continued to contest her, wanting resolution in her contradictions. She continued:

OMITTED: It's annoying having these labels placed on you. What society puts on you becomes part of you. It's like it's half and half, what you choose to be and what you are, but also what people put on you. That's the rub. We want people to know how we identify, but we get mad when people don't know based on our very personal ideas. (Field note, 1/19/12)

She explained further, these contradictory statements, which on one hand suggested that she could choose identifications freely and on the other hand suggested that they were placed on her and she was oppressed as a result, when I referenced the class discussion during my interview with her:

Barbara: So, how do you see, like the multiplicities of your identity as important? And how do you negotiate them in relation to education.

OMITTED: Umm (long pause) well...(sighs) umm, well it's really complicated. I mean, because on one hand I have a lot of privilege, you know? My language, I..I often bring it up, but I really think it is a

privilege of mine that I'm able to express myself freely, you know. So, when I was talking about how I want to hold on to my oppression, I was thinking about it like this, like this is something—you can't claim oppression for yourself. And that's already a contradiction to what I'm always saying, like I would like to hold on to my oppression. You can't put it onto yourself. You can't like go to the margins; you are pushed into the margins by people who are (clears throat)...

OMITTED: ...Whatever you do you're always going to be defined by this one thing has put you into the margins anyway, you know? So why not hold onto this oppression, you know...and use it, you know against the systems that have put you there...And maybe I'm thinking about oppression in a different way too. That umm not, I don't want people to continually oppress me, but I want to hold on to these elements of my being that have placed me in the margins. I think maybe that is more accurate saying that.

Barbara: It's clearer to me when you talk about the margins.

OMITTED: Yeah, yes. And I, and I see that. Because that's where the real work can happen. That's what bell hooks says. That's where we can start getting shit done, because we no longer have to worry about conforming to these social standards anymore because now we can create communities of resistance in the margins. Yeah. I think that's probably a better explanation than [saying]I want to hold on to my oppression.

And then like being in the margins and trying to navigate like these, you know the space of umm, the...like these mainstream spaces and like, you know especially because here in Utah there's not like a huge community of marginalized people to pick from, you know. So you just have to find your partners where you can find them. But oftentimes they're not marginalized in the same way that you are. (Interview, 5/1/12)

In the above conversation, OMITTED clarified that she believed the real work of change and resistance happens in the margins and that margins are imposed and not chosen but that she finds value in that space. Indeed, she cites bell hooks (1990) who talks about resisting from marginal spaces.

Diverse pleasures can be experienced, enjoyed even because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place'. For many of us, that movement requires pressing against oppressions set by race, sex, and class dominations. Initially then it is a defiant political gesture. Moving, we confront the realities of choice and location. Within complex and ever

shifting power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and the power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. (hooks, 1990, p. 145)

This was a complicated negotiation for OMITTED, but she did find pleasure in the margins, through the agency she enacted in creating resistance from spaces of exclusion. She expressed fortitude in the discussion of her middle school experience, as she realized that she would never fit in. The realization that she was “differently marked” and would never be recognized as a full member of the discourse community of her school allowed her to embrace aspects of herself that she highly valued and claim a resistant position. OMITTED, despite the contradictory ways she often talked about herself, clearly chose to use the margins as a space to join with others and resist multiple oppressions.

It was very important to find “communities of resistance in the margins” as OMITTED describes above. This was especially true because, though her racial and ethnic ambiguity allowed her access to some spaces, it also left her feeling outside of spaces that were very important to her:

So, I like, I think in some ways I'm really an existentialist and often looking for, searching for authenticity. And because I've always been othered, no matter, you know, because there is no space for me, you know? Because there is no space where everyone is just like me. And I know that that's the case for everyone. But there are spaces for white people to go to where everyone's white. And there are spaces for Tongans to go where everyone's Tongan. But I can't go to any spaces except my family, and even in my family it's not the case where everyone is exactly like me... I'm always interested in, in the other, you know, because it's the silenced entity which is everything...but I'm also not the other, because I also am the norm. I have this language...and so I also feel like I have sort of this duty as this hybrid character to...to bring the voices out that aren't

being heard, you know and so, in that way I guess I also...and that's where I get my umm, this, this social justice bone, you know is because I can see, because my own life I've never had this space where I can be just who I am...but that's not true either (laughs) because I do have these spaces where I can be who I am. In fact, I can only be who I am, and I insist on it. And I shove it down your throat, you know? And so I have this, I've always had this fierce sense of self, like even from the time I was in 6th grade on once I had this bully teacher, I realized that nothing was ever going to be easy for me. (Interview, 5/1/12)

I have excerpted this discussion at length because it illustrates the complexity and contradiction with which OMITTED thinks about her identities and identifications. What she is suggesting here is that her racial and ethnic identifications matter differently in different spaces. Further, she shifts her identifications strategically, drawing upon racial and ethnic ambiguity and her power to name her identities and identifications in various spaces in order to build coalitions across difference.

She highly values her Tongan identity, but feels that it is often contested and she expressed a great sense of loss that she does not speak Tongan. This is complexified by an education system that emphasizes, privileges, and teaches White aspects of her identity. Yet this is an identity, which she is almost always denied. Far from being merely private thoughts and personal negotiations, these aspects of identity and identification matter greatly to OMITTED's sense of herself as a person relating to others in the world and as a student; and they are interwoven through her experiences with/in education. She stated it thus:

...You know, I've spent my whole...all my education learning about my mother. And I'm ready to learn about my father (getting teary). Ohhh...it brings up such a serious loss (laughing and crying), it just, it hurts, you know. And that's another one of those spaces. It hurts to be in the margins of that Tonganness, you know? Because, because my Tonganness is questioned, you know? And I can't do anything about the way I'm treated for being a Tongan. You know? And I can't also do anything about the ways I'm treated for not being Tongan enough. (Interview, 5/1/2012)

This statement reflects more than just the loss of Tongan language. It reflects the privileging and reinforcing of the English language and White Western epistemologies in education at the expense of the Tongan epistemologies she brought to school. As she suggested, she had spent her whole education learning about her mother, about her Whiteness. She acknowledged and was proud of her strong command of the English language, particularly as a writer, but she also saw the performance of her language skills as reinforced by an education system that privileges Whiteness while never recognizing her as White, leaving her in the margins. In describing living as a nepantlera (Keating, 2006) says "our worldviews and self-identities are shattered. Nepantla is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic; it signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions, and changes. Nepantla hurts!!!!" (p. 9). OMITTED both relished what she gained and grieved what she lost living within and between cultures, finding herself crossing margins or in the margins of the margins, or as she said, in the "margins of the Tonganness" (Interview, 5/1/12). These experiences also greatly informed her desire to pursue graduate work around multiethnic identity and Oceanic epistemologies, directly influencing her trajectory to graduate studies.

While race and ethnicity were the aspects of identity of which OMITTED most often, she also talked about being discounted as a woman in some of her classes at the university. She reflected on why she was not being heard in a particular class, wondering if she was being seen as too confident or bossy as a woman:

And nobody wanted to listen to me. And it was just really frustrating and I couldn't figure out why they didn't want to work with me. And I like, I was like taking a step backwards trying not to be too bossy, because I know I can be bossy and....I don't know, I think people have a problem with like, my level of confidence as a woman on this campus or in a classroom. And, and I think that like teachers also, like this particular instructor also, like I

could see that he didn't want to encourage me because he could see that I was confident, you know. (Interview, 5/1/12)

Her negotiations of gender, race and ethnicity are further complicated by her role as a mother pursuing higher education. She most often spoke about herself as a “part time single mother” whose ex-husband was also a “part time single father,” as they shared custody of her son. She also talked about the importance of forging alliances with other Mothers of Color who are students. She wrote:

Earlier this week I ran into a friend of mine in the library. She has never been a close friend, though...we both had always liked each other very much. After a few moments of superficial pleasantries, she asked me how I was able to manage being a single mother of color and a full-time student... She is also a single mother of color and her question unified the two of us instantly. I started answering her question with my usual commitment to the import of my own voice when I looked at her and noticed she was fighting back tears...I closed my mouth and pulled her close to me, allowing the similarity of our personal plights to weave a supernatural link between our bodies.

That physical connection exemplified the need for a singlemotherofcolorcommunity...Women must rely on each other; good things come from such spaces. The great minds of our times were formed in such communities. I thought of bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and told her we were the next. I'm always willing to convince women of our own brilliance and importance.

The next day she brought her young son to my house to play with my young son... as my friend and I exchanged stirring stories of survival, anger, wit, debasement, triumph, urgency, inadequacies and desperation. I listened to my friend describe some of the various experiences that landed her at the place wherein she currently found herself...We found safety in our similar experiences. Our understanding of our mutual oppression informed our conversation. We didn't have to legitimize our experiences with recognition of our race. Our race was already ever-present, ubiquitous, inescapable. It was a part of both us and left us open to speak freely about our motherhood, our frustrations with men, our families and how our bodies have positioned us in each of these circumstances. (Journal entry, 2012)

As OMITTED suggested in her narratives, she continually negotiated complex identities and identifications in relation to higher education. While there were painful experiences, she also drew from experiences of exclusion to become a strong agent. She embraced racial and ethnic ambiguities, in some spaces, to foster identifications of solidarity and forge coalitions across similarity and difference. Weir (2013) writes of a liberation born of an understanding of power and embracing of relationships that develop through identities and identifications:

Once we understand identities as not only effects of power but as our connections to others, and to what matters to us, it is possible to see identities as not only effects of subjection but as sources of liberation...which involve critical and transformative identifications with defining communities and critical and transformative relations with others. (p. 41)

OMITTED also recognized that there are some identities that are mapped onto her and which she cannot escape whether or not she identifies with them. At the same time, she is publically denied other identities that she claims for herself. She reconciles this by finding power in the margins, forming alliances, and occupying the margins as a space of resistance. Here, I have focused on race, ethnicity, and gender as presented throughout her narratives, with only brief interweaving of or references to her age, her shifting socioeconomic status, language, and being a first-generation college student as aspects of her identity that have mattered to her education trajectory. The multiple aspects of her situated context that matter to her education reinforce the notion that students' trajectories to higher education are nuanced and involve multiple aspects of identity. While the analysis has not focused tightly on specific identities and identification other aspects of identity can never fully be disentangled and have hovered in her narratives.

Chapter Discussion

OMITTED spoke of identities and identification and their relationship to her student subjectivity in complex ways. Indeed she talked about herself as a poststructuralist and was continually undoing her definitions even as she was trying to define herself. When I talked about the complexity of her contradictions, she said, “Yeah, I’m totally a poststructuralist. Yeah. And you know that’s [English professor’s] influence” (Interview, 5/1/2012). She also said that she was an existentialist and searching for authenticity. OMITTED mourned the feeling of not being “Tongan enough” and longing to speak the Tongan language, even as she talked, more abstractly, about being unable to define one’s self as part of any identity groups. This was interrelated to her student subjectivity in that she most often experienced Other-ness and marginalization in her schooling experiences through the ways she was raced, classed, and gendered in schools.

The importance of authoring herself in relation to her student subjectivity must be underscored here. As Weir (2013) writes,

Without an experience of belonging to defining communities—without an experience of these as more than just external conditions, regimes that produce us—then we are atomistic individuals. If my meaning and my freedom consist only in my self-invention, with no expansion of myself beyond the line between me and my future self, with no connections laterally, or backward, with no ability to discover and find meaning in those connections that I have *not chosen*, then I will fail to live a meaningful life. My freedom, then, must be social freedom: must be situated in my social connections. (p. 37)

Though OMITTED celebrated the spaces of belonging she found by crossing borders, there was always a longing for spaces of belonging that recognized the multiplicities of self that she lived, and as part of the communities that were not chosen

but which she held dear. School was a place where her race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status were significant markers of who she was. That is, she had identities and all the laden meaning that came with them mapped onto her for the purpose of excluding her or highlighting her as someone to be given “extra help” as in the Chapter 1 program she attended. Yet OMITTED was never recognized in the complexity of whom she knew herself to be as part of a biracial multiethnic family, neither for the knowledges she brought to school nor in the way she racially and ethnically identified herself as part of a family or community. She was simply relegated to the margins of her schools. While she resisted in her own way, comprehending the ways that she was being positioned through racialization and social class biases, the experiences in school had an effect beyond socially excluding her as Other. As Moje and Lewis (2007) argue, she was also excluded as a full participant in the discourse community of her middle school. In other words, she could not maintain a sense of herself and her connection to others within the walls of her school.

Her discussion of the tension between wanting to define herself and being subjected to identities that are mapped onto her are at the crux of her conflict.

What society puts on you becomes part of you. It’s like it’s half and half, what you choose to be and what you are, but also what people put on you. That’s the rub. We want people to know how we identify, but we get mad when people don’t know based on our very personal ideas. (Field note, 1/19/12)

Her statement here is about more than “what you choose to be and what you are” and getting mad when people don’t know exactly how we want to be identified. Her statement also speaks to the reality that we can choose to be what and who we are, but that does not mean that we will be recognized as such—not only by individual people,

but importantly, by institutions and by communities that matter to us. OMITTED's desire to name herself in a way that reflected her history and understandings of herself, her connection to her family and communities, and to shift and cross borders was only semisuccessful. That is, while her racial and ethnic ambiguity allowed her to form alliances with and be parts of communities which she might not otherwise, she was simultaneously marginalized in spaces in which she was forced to participate or be physically present, particularly the schools she attended. The limitation of individuals' abilities to cross borders or name selves is that because society is structured around socially constructed identity categories and because these categories are often applied rigidly, naming oneself does not ensure that one will be recognized.

Every single one of the stories OMITTED tells in her education narrative was about her understanding of herself and the world through her relationship to others. It was necessary for her to cross borders and make connections to others. Authoring herself as a hybrid student, with the ability to learn from multiple sides was about authoring a self that could remain whole in the face of being identified in ways that fragmented her. In keeping herself together as Weir (2013) says, understanding one's place in reactions of power one must re-cognize oneself to fit within that understanding and maintain oneself. This is always a lived and felt process. While Weir (2013) points to this in the abstract, Moraga refers to this as "theory in the flesh" (1983b) developed through the realities of living in a body marked with "skin tone signifiers" (OMITTED, Education autobiography, p. 1)

Bringing multiple feminist theories together was essential to my analysis in order to reflect OMITTED's need to author herself as an individual and define for

herself spaces of belonging. Indeed to understand her sense of commitment to others who had similar experiences in school, one needs to have a sense of, as Delgado Bernal (2006) pointed out in her study of Chicana/Latina undergraduates, the strengths that come from living in the borderlands and having commitment to multiple communities. In OMITTED's case, the community she wanted to bring voice to was not the Tongan or White communities or even exclusively bracial Tongan/White identified students, but rather those who experienced the marginalization through mixed-ethnicity identities and identifications.

OMITTED's narratives bring to the fore several important issues in the study of higher education and the education debt that persists as students are marginalized and disserved by the education system. Specifically, as the number of multiracial/multiethnic students in the United States increases, the need to understand students' histories of participation in schools, how those histories have mattered to their student subjectivity, and the relationship of student subjectivity to their education decision-making becomes more urgent. Indeed if the desire to decrease the opportunity gap in higher education is real, then students' education decision-making must be understood in relation to their situated contexts, and their history of participation in schools is an especially important part of that context. OMITTED resisted the ways that her school marginalized her and continued to learn in her home and find spaces in which she felt belonging, but as she noted, the "dumb discourse" that was mapped onto her remained a part of her understanding of herself and undermined her initial decisions about and engagement with higher education. As she said, "relying on established discourses allows students to form inaccurate ideas about themselves. The public school system

failed me in the way I learned to think about myself. (Final reflection, 4/30/12)

OMITTED's story also provides insight into how issues of agency and resistance play out in the context of education trajectories and education decision-making. OMITTED's story suggests that her resistance to the hostile discourse communities of her early schooling was essential to her survival. At the same time, complicating notions that resistance to school results in social reproduction, OMITTED's narrative provides an example of resisting school to survive while simultaneously nurturing other ways of knowing, which she tapped into to return to higher education. Yet this narrative was further complexified as she came to see herself as a "bad student" in spaces of formal education. In OMITTED's case, she drew upon her multiple knowledges in college where she found affirmation of her lived experiences and re-authored herself. This finding echoes findings of several feminist race scholars (who identify the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2006) that students draw upon to persist to and through higher education.

Finally, OMITTED's embracing of specific identities in particular places along with her insistence of the shifting and multiple nature of identities and identifications brings to the fore tensions in feminist theory between the nature of power and identity. OMITTED articulated both a power to name and to cross borders along with an understanding of the hegemonic nature of being "marked" as other and pushed to the margins. She both embraced a poststructuralist subjectivity and clung to very specific ethnic identities as well as what she referred to as an Oceanic epistemology that had distinct characteristics. She did not apologize for, but rather celebrated these

contradictions. This reinforces my assertion of the need to bring poststructural and feminist race theories in conversation in order to reflect students' complex forms of agency and resistance.

CHAPTER 7

A BROADER VIEW: CROSS CASE

CONSIDERATIONS

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I presented the narratives of three undergraduate women students: October, Crimson Butterfly, and OMITTED. The case studies centered the education narratives of each woman as she detailed her trajectory to higher education. Each narrative included information about personal history, experiences with/in schools, purpose for attending higher education, understanding student subjectivity, and how complex identities and identifications mattered to student subjectivity and education decision-making. The case studies illustrate how each woman differently exercised agency, within her situated context, self-authoring and re-authoring her student subjectivity to persist to higher education.

In this chapter, I provide a cross case analysis. Reading across the cases assists in considering the broader implications that the research has for understanding the relationship between complex identities and identifications, student subjectivities, and education decision-making. I touch upon two particular findings that emerged across the cases, and which are important to understanding the participants' trajectories to higher education: 1) the complex role of family and 2) histories of participation in schools. After discussing the two findings across participants' case studies, I consider implications for education policy, practice, and research and conclude the study.

Finding 1: The Complex Roles of Family

Each of the participants in the study pointed to the ways that their family influenced their thinking about education and their pursuit of higher education. This section points to the ways that family mattered to each participant's trajectory. I consider this primarily in terms of student subjectivity, family support in engaging education, and tensions and contradictions in families and participants' understandings about and desires for education. Emphasis is placed on how each woman's story works to complicate and extend the current research on the role of family in the pursuit of college. In doing so, I draw from the work of Delgado Bernal (2001) which highlights the pedagogies of the home. I emphasize the ways that each of the women used cultural knowledge developed in the home as sources of capital (Yosso, 2005) to pursue and persist in education. Figure 5 illustrates the complex role of the family, depicting tension between the multiple roles participants hold in their families and communities and the situated contexts within which they make decisions about education, alongside capital developed in the home, which comes to bear on their pursuit of higher education. Below, I discuss the complex roles of family in regard to each participant's trajectory to higher education.

October

Growing up, October lived with her mother and older brother. Her mother taught her many skills and lessons to help her survive in the world. October indicated that her mother did not have a strong understanding of the workings of the education system or the path to higher education. She sent her daughter to Catholic schools, with their smaller class sizes, and trusted the school to do well by her child. Her mother understood that education was important to October and supported her in the ways she was able.

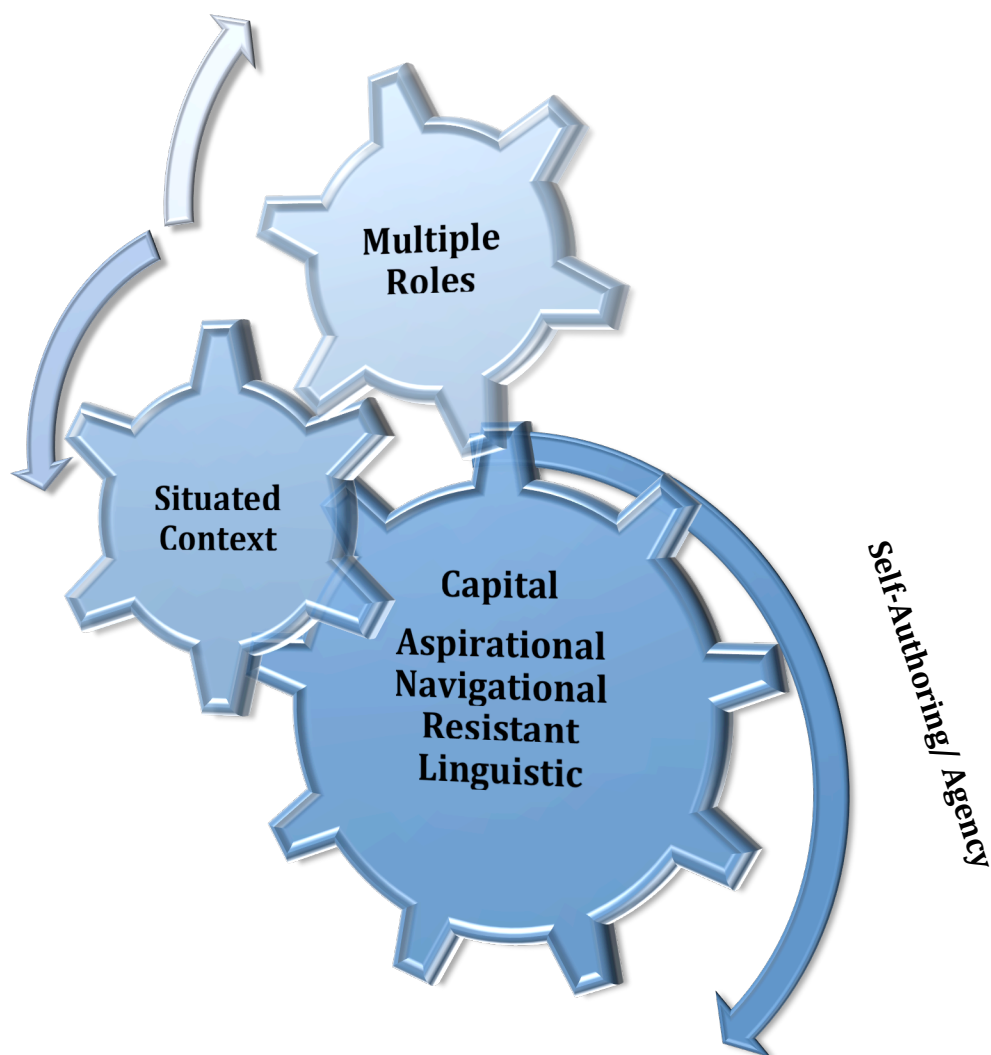


Figure 5: Complex Role of Family

For example, when October wanted to go to the Catholic prep school her mother allowed it even though she was unable to pay the tuition. She did this because she knew it would make October happy, and because she valued a Catholic education for her daughter. In doing so, her mother reinforced and legitimated October's desire for education, signaling to October that she believed in her and trusted her ability to make choices in her best interest. October's mother also helped to care for her newborn daughter while October completed community college. October also had support from, as she called him, her "best brother." Her older brother paid for her transcripts from the Catholic high school so that she could graduate. Further, he helped advise her on her education options and loaned her money to attend community college. This family support was vital to October's completion of her associate's degree.

When October returned to college, enrolling at the university almost 20 years after attending community college, her husband and children were important considerations. Her husband's job loss prompted her return to college to pursue nursing, in part to access better job opportunities. But October was also fulfilling a long-held desire to complete a 4-year degree, and to be, as she said, more than a mom. School, work, and her role as a wife and mother meant that she was constantly busy and often tired. She lamented missing important moments in her children's life. Upon returning to college, her son had just turned 1 year old. After being home with her children for several years, the transitions was tough on everyone:

October: I stood home for 9 years. Yeah, Anya was 9 by the time I went back to school.

Barbara: Ok, Umm, and how was that when you first went back to school?

October: It was hard for them. Cause I just, Javier was just a year, maybe a year old.

Barbara: How old is he now?

October: He's 3. So he was a year old, and I, you know having a baby transitioning from me being always home to being out of the home and, he didn't like me. He did not like me (strong emphasis here). I would come home wanting to give him a hug or anything. Nope. He did not want anything to do with me. That hurt. Then working also, going to school and then working, so that was really hard.

We talked about all she had to do and the shortage of time. In addition to her new work and school responsibilities, she continued to do much of the household maintenance and scheduling of the children's appointments and activities. As we talked about this, the list grew:

October: ...And the commute and you know, baking cookies (laughs).

Barbara: Yeah (sighs and laughs).

October: ...satisfy everyone's hunger, you know?

October had referenced baking cookies before as part of the multitude of expectations her family, and particularly her husband, had of her. During a conversation in class, another woman talked about how patriarchy was reinforced in her everyday life. The student then said that growing up in Utah she had "the sense growing up that playing the mom is what women's role is" (Student, field notes, 3/8/2012). October agreed with this, saying: "in real life a woman is seen as needing to keep a good house and cater to the needs of her family. If her family is clothed well and her house is neat that is success." (October, Field note, 3/8/2012). Although this came up in a discussion of the normalized gender roles and expectations of women within the Mormon Church, these gender roles also pervade many ethnic communities connected to the Catholic Church, of which

October is a member. Indeed, the words by October echo the argument made by Michelle Holling (2006) regarding the socialization of Chicana and Latinas gender roles: “The gendered role of motherhood and being a nurturer, values espoused by the Catholic church, are tantamount of a ‘good woman’” (Holling, 2006, p. 89).

This conversation speaks to the interconnectedness of October’s identities and identifications as Latina, Catholic, wife, and mother and the multiple and conflicting expectations of her in a state where the gender roles are clearly marked for women. Later in the same conversation as several women students gave examples of multiple responsibilities at home in addition to their academic work, October expressed frustration:

My husband is use to that, me baking cookies or making dinner and he’s like “you used to do that every morning” and I’m like “I’m trying to rush out of here trying to eat something and you want me to make dinner on top of it?” So I throw something in the crock pot just to shut him up. (Field note, 3/8/2012)

October endured long days and talked about chewing gum and listening to music loudly to combat falling asleep during her drive home. She rarely had time to herself. Managing all that she did was a balancing act, yet October was determined to satisfy everyone’s hunger, literally and figuratively. Her family was proud of her for going to school, but they continued to expect her to do what she had done for them before she began working and going to school. Her roles as a student, mother, and employee were all demanding, and they were often in tension as she juggled it all. Her sense of herself as a student was complicated by her other responsibilities and aspirations. Her family was a great source of motivation for October, and she was determined to meet all of her

demands. At the same time, the desire for her children to see her complete school was also a strong incentive when her multiple responsibilities discouraged her.

October's story complicates the simplistic way that family is often considered in the research on education decision-making. While research is beginning to consider the multiple ways that family of origin contributes to students' orientation toward and enrollment in college (Jehangir, 2010b), there is considerable work to be done in this area. Further, there is very little research on nontraditional students' decision making around higher education (Bergerson, 2010), much less the roles families play in these decisions. October's narrative speaks to each of these issues. Her descriptions of support from her family of origin moved beyond traditional forms such as financial support to include other forms of support such as ongoing advice, encouragement, and childcare. Her return to school highlights challenges of caring for a family, including by financially providing for them, while carrying the responsibilities of a student. October's narrative explained better job prospects in order to support her family as the tangible reason for her return to school. But she also spoke of the inspiration her children provide her in her desire to finish, both to model to them that she can do it and to show them that they can, too. October employed considerable aspirational capital, desiring a better life for herself and her family, as well as navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) in moving through both a career and an education system that were not built for her success. That is, she navigated systems that were not flexible in accommodating her multiple roles as student, worker, and mother. In navigating these roles, she relied upon both lessons learned in the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and was subjected to expectations that came from within her home (Holling, 2006).

Crimson Butterfly

Crimson Butterfly's family was also important to her decision making around college. First, her family emphasized the priority of education from an early age, relocating several times to try to find the right school to give set her on an academic path that included college. Her parents stressed the significance of education not only for her future success, but also their family's success, echoing the findings of Zhou and Bankston (2001) who argue that Vietnamese refugee parents consider education of utmost importance, especially for their daughters. Her parents began saving money for her to go to college from the time that she was young. They also encouraged and supported her older brother and sister in going to college. Crimson Butterfly's parents were very influential in deciding where she studied. She told me, for example, that she had wanted to study in the state of Washington. Because of both the increased expense of out of state tuition and the distance from home, her parents discouraged this and urged her to attend college in state. While they wanted her to attend a university closer to their home, she had strong attachment to the university she ultimately chose to go to and was able to convince them that it was the best choice, despite the long commute. As Jehangir (2010a) stresses, costs of college are central in the decision making of low-income and first-generation college students and their parents. Further, students in these groups are more likely to live off campus.

Her parents were also influential in Crimson Butterfly's determination of what to study. While they wanted her to major in a STEM field first and foremost, they were also open to a career in the financial sector. Crimson Butterfly was not interested in any of these fields of study. Her major became a negotiation with her parents. She appealed to

her parents' emphasis on Catholic teachings, including helping others, to propose majoring in social work. Crimson Butterfly also planned a second major in gender studies, and at the end of the semester she was determining whether and how she might tell her parents of this plan, anticipating that they would question this choice.

Crimson Butterfly's parents prioritized education at this point in her life, and they did not want her to work or date while going to school. This became a point of tension for Crimson Butterfly who was attempting to claim some independence from her parents at the same time that she wanted to make them proud and live up to their expectations. It is important to note that while her family was very supportive of education, their views about what majors might bring financial stability and success were limited to a few areas of study. Crimson Butterfly's family was a source of support and tension when it came to higher education. She continually negotiated this aspect of her life. Her story provides a nuanced account of a family who desires higher education for their child and goes to great lengths, including changing elementary and middle schools several times to get her on a college going track. Yet Crimson Butterfly's feelings of exclusion during her K-12 schooling countered any benefits she got from the curriculum so carefully chosen by her parents. As a result, she nearly left high school to get a general equivalency diploma (GED). Further, her desire to compromise with her parents about a college major led her to choose a subject with which she had little familiarity and some uncertainty.

Like October, Crimson Butterfly's narrative also works to complexify research in the area of family support in relation to pursuing higher and persisting in higher education. Generally, her story suggests that traditional forms of family support such as orientation toward college and getting children on a college-going track, and saving for

college tuition, while important and highly emphasized, are not enough to ensure that students are receiving an education that will result in college attendance. In Crimson Butterfly's case, while she did enroll in college, she suggests that being in STEM classes and the pressure and isolation that came with being on that track almost forced her out of high school.

Crimson Butterfly's story also works to challenge research on higher education research that studies Asian American students in aggregate. Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez (2014) argue that viewing Asian Americans as a monolithic group raises several problems in understanding student experience in higher education. Specifically, using Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), the very broad category within which students of Asian descent are often included, Crimson Butterfly would be part of a group that is considered overrepresented among college students. As Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez note, AAPI students are underrepresented in the research because, in the aggregate, they are pursuing higher education at greater rates than any other racial or ethnic group. Looking more specifically at research around the relationship of family support to higher education for Asian American students, Crimson Butterfly's story both reflects and complicates the research. For example, Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez (2014) argue that family influence and intergenerational differences between parents and their children play are significant in the lives of Asian American students. This is explained, in part, by conflict between a sense of loyalty and obligation to family and tradition on one hand and burgeoning independence on the other. They note that this is especially true for Asian American women. Crimson Butterfly's discord with her family

echoes the research in this regard, as she took up, contested, and reworked the pedagogies of her family and community (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez (2014) also point out that Asian American parents are predominantly first-generation immigrants, bringing issues of immigration and language to the fore in these conflicts. They argue for the importance of studying Asian American college students' experiences in more nuanced ways and note the lack of studies that move beyond broad categories such as East Asian, South Asian and Pacific Islander. In telling of the importance of tradition to her family, *Crimson Butterfly* speaks to a very specific Vietnamese ethnic history, reflecting her parents' experiences with war and as refugees. She highlights this specifically in discussing the importance of maintaining Vietnamese as first language and the first language that she will pass on to her children. Thus her experience exemplifies the importance of understanding students' situated context and contests the notion that the category "Asian American" can tell us much of anything about students' experiences.

Gloria and Ho's (2003) research, which studied several Asian American groups including Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese American, and Pacific Islander, suggests that family and family support is highly correlated to positive college experience. This was complicated for *Crimson Butterfly*, as she benefitted from her parents' high expectations of her and the importance they placed on her studying and also experienced consternation in attempting to please them by negotiating what and where she studied, deferring her own desires. Illustrating both navigational and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), she developed a student subjectivity that was part of her larger sense of herself as a hardworking workaholic as a way to negotiate her own spaces of

independence and meet her parents' expectations of her. An added complication for Crimson Butterfly was her identification as queer/questioning. She kept this part of her life from her parents. And while it was directly related to her desire to have gender studies as a co-major, she did not plan to reveal this to her parents, knowing that it would be difficult for them to understand. In discussing family support Crimson Butterfly's commitment to her parents' ideals alongside the tensions she felt related to those commitments placed her in a precarious position in relation to education.

OMITTED

OMITTED's narrative contributes yet another understanding of the complex influence of family on higher education decision-making. OMITTED's writing and speaking about their impact on her formal education at first appears subtle. For example, she noted in her final reflection of the semester that if she was doing well she was allowed to stay home and read books in elementary and middle school. Because she didn't want to go to school, being able to stay home and read was a motivator for her. At home, OMITTED was supported in her love of reading, language, and music and developed considerable linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). As she said in her interview, "It's really interesting because the way we thought about education in our family wasn't the same way that we thought about learning. They were two very separate things; and, we loved learning, my sisters and I" (Interview, 5/1/12). In her family, learning was greatly valued. The value that OMITTED's family placed on learning was paramount and did not depend on validation by the education system, reflecting the immense importance of pedagogies of the home in her life. This greatly benefitted OMITTED. An understanding of learning that was separate from education meant that she would continue to learn

despite being marginalized in and disserved by the schools she attended. Learning at home not only helped her to cope with a hostile school environment, but also to succeed in her most recent engagement with higher education as she drew upon skills that were developed through learning in the home and flourished in her college studies (Delgado Bernal, 2006).

OMITTED also recounted the emphasis placed on education by her father's extended family. She remembered:

My father believed in education very much. And even more so than him, his brothers and sisters really believed in education. And I remember sitting at family reunions and like getting these lectures that were addressed to like all 50 of us grandchildren, telling us that we needed to pursue an education because that's how you survive in America—this is my Tongan side of my family. (Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED had an implicit understanding of the value of formal education from her father's side of the family. Having emigrated from Tonga, her father and his siblings knew the importance of education in establishing themselves in the United States, at least in an ambiguous sense. OMITTED also had an explicit model of the LDS values that pervaded her family and community, the importance of being a wife and mother. She continued the conversation quoted above:

Umm, but at the same time, like nobody ever pulled me aside specifically and said 'listen I think you are, I'm really impressed with the way that you can read so much, you know and I think you have this aptitude for, you know English that I think you should explore.' Nobody ever really said anything like that to me. And whenever anyone, whenever I thought about my future, I don't know if anybody ever just came right out and said this to me, but I always thought about my future as a wife and a mother when I was a child. You know, that I would meet somebody who was a good Mormon guy, and he would marry me in the temple. And we would be together forever. And we would have a family. And he would always take care of me, and I would take care of the house you know? Just like the super, traditional gender roles. (Interview, 5/1/12)

OMITTED stated in her education narrative and in her interview that she did not take seriously her first attempt at college because, while education was valued by her family, her most tangible model for her future was as a wife and mother. This aligns with Madsen's (2010) study of Utah women in which local discourses often place higher education for women in conflict with the emphasis on women's primary roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers. Madsen notes that this is particularly true for women of the Mormon faith. Hearing her extended family talk about the importance of education to her and her cousins was subsumed by the very specific roles she saw for women in the religious community of which her family was a part. Because the LDS religion is very culturally dominant in the area in which she lives, OMITTED saw the most venerated role for herself to be that of wife and mother.

As this vision for her life was undone, first by a husband who did not subscribe to traditional roles and later by the dissolution of her marriage, OMITTED saw education differently. As she returned to college, family continued to play an important role in her decision-making around education. Specifically, she cited the motivation to provide insurance for her son and to have more secure jobs as a reason to return to school. In doing so, the parenting arrangement she had with her ex-husband made being a parent and student possible. Finally, as with October, OMITTED said that it was important to her to show her son that he could go to college by seeing his mother successfully do so. In this way, she is instilling values that embolden him to reject the place society envisions for him and to strive for more (Collins, 2009).

OMITTED's narrative provides an example of how an understanding of learning developed in the home, and held separate from education provided in school, provided

her a wealth of knowledge that drew from to author herself as smart and as good with language. Both were important parts of the student subjectivity with which she approached her recent engagement with higher education. This type of support is less commonly cited in research on the family's role in students' pursuit of college (Delgado Bernal, 2006 for a notable exception). Further, her situation provides a nuanced glimpse of the way that powerful cultural models, in this case the religious dictum of the primacy of the role of wife and mother (Madsen, 2010), can supersede positive messages about the importance of education. Finally, as in the case of October, OMITTED's sense of responsibility in modeling successful completion of higher education to her child became a way in which her family was important to her decision making around higher education.

In this section, I have illustrated the complex roles that families played in the education trajectories of the three Women of Color participants in this study. Specifically I have pointed to how each of the women's narratives complicate previous research on the role of the family in higher education, highlighting both forms of capital that families provide and tensions that come with family expectations for the participants in the study. Further, I have suggested that, particularly as students are entering 4-year colleges later in life and often with children and partners of their own, the concept of "family" needs to be considered more broadly and holistically in order to reflect the ways that families figure in to students' education trajectories. In the next section, I draw upon the three participants' experiences with/in education to illustrate how participants' histories of participation in schools are significant to both student subjectivity and education decision-making.

Finding 2: Experiences With/In Education:

Histories of Participation

Moje and Lewis (2007) argue that learning is shaped by and mired in power relations, as it is situated within discourse communities or the struggle to gain access to such communities, and their resources. Recognizing schools as discourse communities, it is apparent, in the narratives of the participants, that power relations in institutions of formal education shaped learning in the discourse communities of participants' schools. For the women in the study, the power relations within schools were to their disadvantage. Yet, as Moje and Lewis suggest, "we can participate in creating differently valued subject positions, even when attempting to challenge or subvert oppressive power relations" (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). The women in this study challenged and subverted power relations in institutions of formal education through their self- and re-authorings.

In this section, I highlight the women's histories of participation in schools as important moments in their trajectories to higher education. This is true in at least two ways. First, reflecting upon their experiences led to recognition that they had been positioned outside the discourse communities of schools. They wrestled with their understandings of their student subjectivities in light of earlier experiences with/in schools. They resisted and challenged these positions as they authored their student subjectivities, critiquing the discrimination and exclusion practiced by their schools. Secondly, each of the women wielded their agency in re-authoring themselves as part of their pursuit of higher education. This re-authoring involved acts of taking up, resisting and disrupting discourses about education and their relationship to it. "And the acts of

taking up, disrupting, and transforming discourses have implications for how one conceptualizes the constructs of identity and agency” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 14). Figure 6 illustrates the agitation between participants’ student subjectivities and their histories of participation in school, with an emphasis on how they drew upon various forms of capital acquired in their homes and communities to author and re-author themselves as students.

As Moje and Lewis (2007) argue, “agency might be thought of as the strategic making and re-making of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools, and histories, as embedded within relations of power.” (p. 18). The participants in this study were aware of the relations of power in their early schooling. October was aware of the cultural assumptions that Latinos in her town would not pursue 4-year degrees. Crimson Butterfly knew that she was seen as different, both by White students in her early school environments and among Asian American students in her STEM-focused middle school. She remembers being bullied and harassed since the beginning of her education and attributes this to racism, prejudice, and sexism. OMITTED was keenly aware that she would never fit in at a school where she was teased daily and in which the teacher was the worst of her tormentors.

Moje and Lewis (2007) pose that,

Learning... also leaves a residue; it makes a mark on the participant. In that sense, learning draws from and constitutes ‘histories of participation’ in other spaces, at other times and with other people. Indeed, what makes learning so complex—and more than just participation—is that people bring their histories of participation to bear on each new act or moment of participating... Learning goes beyond the moment of participation to constitute a history and to shape a future act of participating. (p.16)

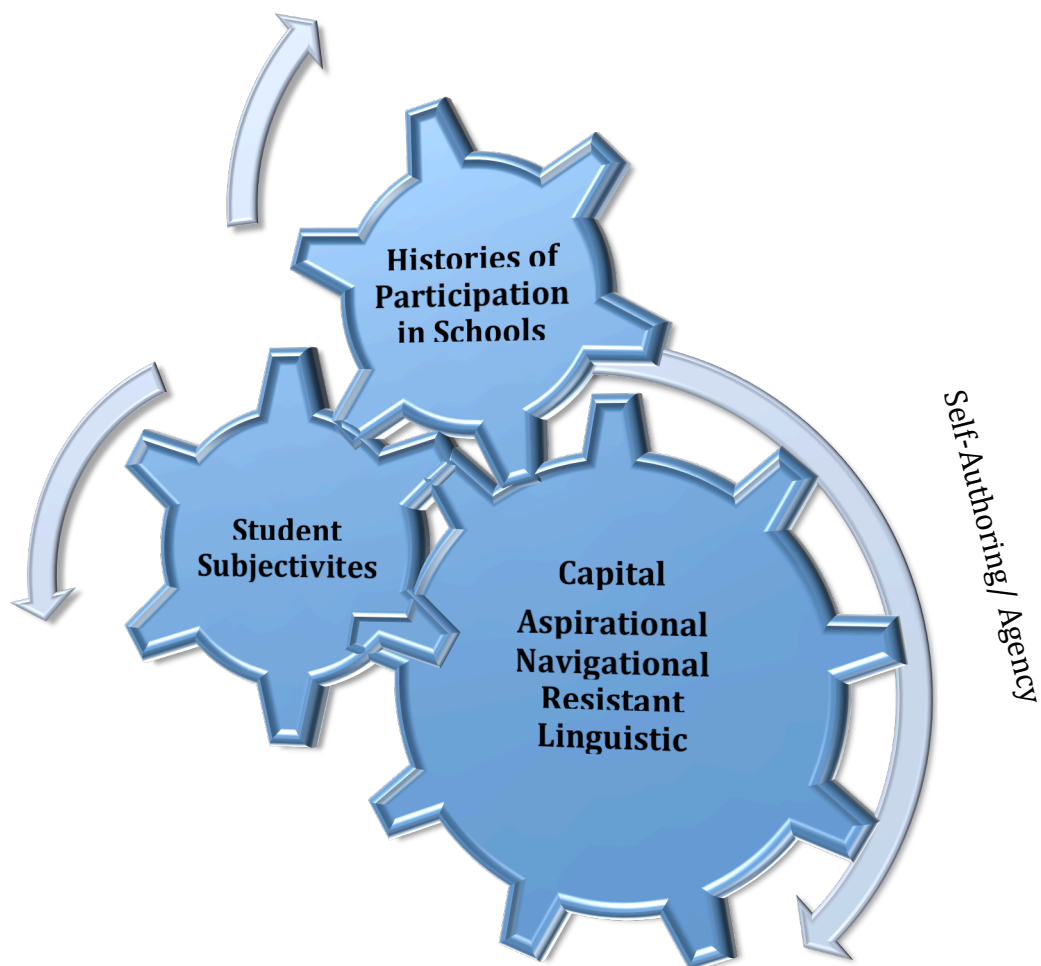


Figure 6: Histories of Participation in School and Student Subjectivities

Each of the case studies shows clear places that the education system is failing the student, in part by exerting discourses that exclude them from full participation in the discourse communities of their schools. Their histories of participation left marks on the women in this study, contributing to student subjectivities in which they questioned their own abilities and potentials for higher education and in the subsequent decisions they made about higher education.

In October's small Catholic schools in which she was not othered or underrepresented within her classroom spaces, there pervaded a discourse that tracked her and her peers through low expectations. Fewer than half of her eighth-grade classmates went to high school. She recalled that a handful of students from her high school pursued community college education, and very rarely—as in the case of her friend who defied their high school counselor and applied to Ivy League schools—a 4-year college education. October connected these low expectations for her academic success to her own sense of vulnerability as a student and to holding herself back, not trusting that she could complete a 4-year degree. She blamed herself for not asking the right questions and having poor study habits. In her return to higher education to pursue a 4-year degree, she continued to question herself as student, worrying about returning to her old study habits and questioning if she would make it. Indeed, she points directly to the importance of her history of participation as she says:

I am taking these past schooling experiences into account in order to avoid the same mistakes. Since school was not my best subject. I am learning to ask for the help in order to have a successful college experience. Otherwise, I will give into my self-esteem of not being able to accomplish competing in a 4-year university. (Final reflection, 4/26/2015)

In Crimson Butterfly's elementary school, her teacher was content to leave her in the back of the class. She was quiet and did not draw attention to herself. She did not ask questions, and her teacher assumed she understood the material and was merely being a polite and respectful Asian girl. She felt isolated and as though she could not ask for help, ultimately turning to on-line resources for assistance in understanding her homework. She said: "Ever since pre-school, my teacher, fellow students and employees would always put me aside and not have a care in the world for me. I was alone and asked myself, 'what is wrong with me that nobody likes me?'" (Education autobiography, p.1). Importantly, Crimson Butterfly did not remember one teacher in her K-12 schooling that she felt understood her or was supportive of her. These lonely experiences in school left deep marks on her as she recounted:

The harsh influence and environment I have experienced throughout made me think to myself to just drop everything and start working. Grab a GED and be okay with working for the rest of my life, a "drop-out" title was something I was okay with. (Education autobiography, p.3)

Feeling lost and hopeless, she relinquished the money her parents had saved for college to her older brother and contemplated dropping out of high school.

OMITTED's narrative provides a strong example of the tracking and deficit orientation and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) experienced by many Students of Color. Her diversely populated low-income elementary school used progressive programming to emphasize healthy amounts of water consumption and the necessity of eye contact in an attempt to assimilate her to middle-class White cultural values. Her middle school negated her joy of reading, alleging dishonesty and assuming she was incapable of profuse reading. OMITTED, too, was deeply marked by her history of

participation in the schools she attended. She developed an identity of resistance to school. As she noted,

I was never interested in academics and I never, I never worked hard, you know. I was never interested in school, but I think it was because I had all of these teachers. I had this one teacher who really was like a bully to me in elementary school... writing about it so much in college has helped me realize how traumatizing and how traumatic the whole experience was. (Interview, 5/1/2012)

While she had confidence in herself and in her aptitude with language, seeing herself in contradiction to institutions of formal schooling, she developed a sense of herself as a bad student and not the school type. This student subjectivity led her to not really take school seriously, and this was reflected in both her postsecondary options and choices immediately following high school.

In each of their cases, despite their differences in age, race and ethnicity, religious affiliation and upbringing and places of schooling, their histories of participation in schools pushed them away from higher education. Yet each of the participants had some level of desire for higher education and pursued it immediately after high school. Each woman's story is a unique example of an underrepresented student who, considering the statistics and current research in higher education, was not supposed to make it. With multiple strikes against them, being first-generation college students, coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and being Students of Color, the research suggests they were at "high risk" for not making it to college. Their stories are not tales of the American dream fulfilled despite the odds nor examples of what is possible for *anyone* who just works hard enough. Their stories work to complicate multiple discourses, the discourses that would have them fail, the discourses of education as the great balancing wheel, and the discourses that insist they can succeed.

Their persistence and their continual re-authoring of themselves as students point to their agency, their enactment of their desires for higher education drawing upon resources, tools, and identities and complex identifications, but not without limitations. Their successes are not merely a result of hard work, suggesting that anyone can achieve what they have. Nor are their successes secured; they continue the active process of re-authoring themselves and renegotiating their relationships to higher education. Their stories defy simplistic binaries of success and failure and speak to both the importance of and the need for more nuanced research in understanding students' trajectories to higher education. Indeed, while this research supports Ladson Billings' assessment of the opportunity in education in terms of an education debt—which has accrued through historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies in education—the qualitative narrative case study approach of this research highlights that the decisions surrounding the pursuit of higher education happen in situated contexts.

Discussion

This study has focused in tightly on the narratives of three Women of Color who persisted to and in higher education in order to explore their trajectories and how their student subjectivities mattered to their education decision-making. Close attention was paid to their complex identities and identifications, including the multiple roles they perform in their lives, to consider how they enact agency through the authorings of themselves as students. In considering their narratives in relation to the agency they demonstrated in authoring themselves as students, it was necessary to capture the hopefulness and re-imaginative possibilities of breaking free from the impositions of the constructed categories of identity and the implications that the embodiment of those

categories had on their experiences with/in schools, as well as the shifting nature of power relations that changes with place and time (Weir, 2013).

In the opening of this dissertation, I pointed to popular discourses surrounding education and higher education. Education was, and continues to be, promoted as a great equalizer in society, an institution that, through hard work and drive, anyone can access, engage with, and change their life circumstances for the better. I brought these discourses into tension with the very real inequalities that continue to exist, as low-income, first-generation, and Students of Color continue to be underrepresented in higher education, despite their and their families' aspirations for them. Through the lived realities of the participants, I have attempted to disrupt these discourses, pointing to their experiences as evidence of the blatant racism, sexism, and classism that continue to marginalize girls and Women of Color and hinder the path to higher education. At the same time, their stories demonstrate considerable agency and ingenuity as they work from their places of power, employing multiple knowledges (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002, 2006) and forms of capital (Yosso, 2005) to persist to and in higher education. In doing so, I employed the insight from several feminist race scholars (Alcoff, 2006; Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2002b, 2007; Collins, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002; 2006; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; hooks, 1984; 1990; Lugones, 1997; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Villenas, 2005, 2006; Villenas & Moreno, 2001; Yosso, 2005) to speak to the dynamic ways in which identity is lived through the imposition of power based on socially constructed identity categories. For, while we all exist in relations of power to one another, it has become clear that there are consistent nodes of power with which we all contend, though differently.

These nodes of power are located in influential institutions, such as schools, which have been organized around socially constructed categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Feminist race theories provide better understandings of the effects of power organized through these categories by centering on the experiences of those who have lived their effects. At the same time, because no two people's situated contexts are the same, it was necessary to try to focus in on the particulars of each woman in her situated context while seeing the glaring ways in which relations of power invariably included institutional racism, sexism, and classism in the women's lived experiences. In many ways, the tensions of poststructural feminism and feminist race theories play out in the sites of education. Specifically, as the women in this study illustrate, they found possibilities by taking up or denying particular discourses to situate themselves as knowers and speakers rather than known or spoken. At the same time, as Ladson Billings (2006) aptly notes, the education debt means that these women are operating from marginal positions that have been firmly established through historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies.

The struggles for education and its promises take place on a discursive plane in which in those desiring education merely need to "choose" a college and "choose a major" to take advantage of its opportunities. I have attempted to maintain the tensions between the frameworks of poststructural feminism—drawing upon its impetus to disrupt the simplicity of these discourses and simultaneously honoring the ways that the women in this study took up these discourses for their hopes and possibilities they offered to their lives—and feminist race theories—remaining grounded in the lived realities of *October*, *Crimson Butterfly*, and *OMITTED* and the way they have been positioned with/in

educational institutions entrenched in very specific relations of power. In the remainder of the chapter, I address the research questions that were at the center of this dissertation. Specifically, 1) how did October, Crimson Butterfly, and OMITTED develop their student subjectivities and how did their complex identities and identifications figure into this and 2) How did their student subjectivities matter to their decisions to persist to and in higher education?

October, Crimson Butterfly, and OMITTED occupied very different subject positions. Yet each of the women developed a sense of herself as a student primarily through two main sources: family relationships and teachings and experiences with/in schools. In this discussion, I point to two specific ways that student subjectivities shifted and were disrupted: first through the disruption of discourses about who they were or could be in relation to education. The second is through specific strategies to move around the obstacles in their way.

I first discuss the taking up of, reworking, and rejecting of discourses that circulated in their lives. Patti Lather (2007) discusses how “in order to be intelligible, we need to repeat the familiar and organized. The task is not how to repeat, but to repeat in such a way that the repetition displaces that which it enables” (p.39). Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000), says it more pointedly:

Even though discourse is productive and works in a very material way through social institutions to construct realities that control both the actions and bodies of people, it can be contested [by questioning]...how does patriarchy function in the world? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its linguistic, social, and material effects on women? How does it continue to exist? What are its differences from itself? Once these questions can be asked of the specific, local, everyday situations that oppress women, and once the working of patriarchy is made intelligible at the level of micropractice, women can begin to make different statements about their lives. (p. 486)

In other words, we reproduce discourses, in part, to remain intelligible to one another. We repeat them because they are familiar and recognizable ways of understanding the world, one another, and ourselves. But disruption of discourses serves to disrupt the effects of their power. The participants in this study each disrupted various discourses and re-authored themselves to make different statements about their lives, and more specifically to make different statements about themselves as students. October disrupted the discourses that pervaded her K-12 schools. That is, she disrupted the discourses, both within her school and beyond, that said that Latina/os do not pursue higher education. Further, she insisted that she followed her own discourses, rewriting expectations for higher education to meet her own desires for herself and for her children.

Crimson Butterfly disrupted discourses that trapped her between the model minority stereotype and the exotic Asian woman stereotype. During her middle and high school years, she refused to conform to expectations of performing in uncomfortable ways as a student, while simultaneously conforming to the academic expectations of her parents. To do so, she moved outside of the school system, engaging in online spaces to manage the tensions between school and family expectations. She continued contesting limiting discourses in college. She actively disrupted understandings and representations of Asian American students in the classroom in which the research was conducted by deconstructing these stereotypes and myths. In this way, she authored her higher education as a different experience than those of middle school and high school. She spoke back to discourses that had been mapped onto her. In answering a question about how she developed a critical eye for discourses perpetuated by media about Asian Americans, she said:

Crimson Butterfly: I put up with all of that b.s. in school. College is completely different for me. I saw the lies in those things before. I wish I could go back. It's like 'you guys don't' know what you're talking about; I pity you guys.' Because I was different, I knew those stereotypes weren't true for me, my family. And, you, uh this class was a safe zone, so, for me, so it was a good place to tear up those lies. People listened. (Interview, 4/30/2012)

While Crimson Butterfly said that she had seen the discourses about Asian Americans as lies, it wasn't until she was in college that she actively worked to disrupt them.

OMITTED also disrupted discourses about herself. In her case, she shifted her thinking about herself foremost as a mother and wife, discourses that she took up as a member of the LDS faith, when her situated context as a wife changed. This enabled her to see school as an investment in herself. Secondly, she said that she had "bought into" the discourse of being a dumb student, but altered this thinking as she was affirmed in her knowledges in higher education. She came to see and critique, as a particularly negative aspect of her precollege education, the way she had been taught to think of herself as a bad student and how this had then played out in her sense of herself as a student.

For each of the women, then, the disruption of negative discourses surrounding them as girls and young Women of Color was part of their re-authoring of themselves to persist to and in higher education as they experienced the world and saw the falsity of these discourses in their lives. The second way that participants shifted their student subjectivities was by utilizing, more directly, strategies and lessons drawn from their families and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Specifically, October drew from the aspirations that her family had for her and which she had for herself (Villenas & Moreno, 2001; Yosso, 2005) as a source of determination. She employed navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) to make her way to an engage in community college. She worked around a

lack of guidance and resources, exploring community college through her own initiative and cobbling together resources to enable the completion of an associate's degree.

Similarly, she drew upon her aspirations for a more secure future for family and her educational aspirations for her children in navigating her return to college to pursue a 4-year degree.

Crimson Butterfly, too, drew upon the aspirational wealth of her family (Yosso, 2005) and especially her mother's modeling of hard work and desires for a future for Crimson beyond what had been possible for herself (Collins, 2009; Villenas, 2005, 2006; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). She also demonstrated incredible navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) to survive the tensions between marginalization in her schooling alongside the expectations of engagement with, and achievement in schooling through the use of online resources and social medial. As she persisted to higher education, she continued to navigate multiple spaces to maintain connection to her family while crafting spaces of belonging to satisfy her burgeoning independence and self-discovery, while maintaining a cohesive sense of self (Anzaldúa, 2002a; Weir, 2013).

Finally, OMITTED resisted hostile school environments and her experiences of exclusion and racism within them, in part, by immersing herself in pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2006) and utilizing resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) to reject deficit assumptions she experienced in school. In developing a student subjectivity in which she was knowledgeable she found ways to move across racial and ethnic boundaries (Anzaldúa, 2002a) and to find a sense of pleasure in the margins (hooks, 1990). She learned to see herself beyond dichotomies, finding in between spaces to bring voice to her experiences (Pérez, 1999) through linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) developed through

storytelling and oral traditions in her home. These are but some of the examples of how participants in this study re-authored their student subjectivities both reframing deficit discourses to which they were subjected, and which they had, at times taken up, and used strategies grounded in their multiple knowledges in order to re-author themselves as capable and knowledgeable students. In these ways they positioned themselves to engage, re-engage and persist in higher education.

Implications

The findings of this research are based upon the case studies of three Women of Color participants. In exploring the relationship between student subjectivities, complex identities and identifications, and education decision-making across their complex identities and identification, it became clear that the women's histories of participation in school and the influence of their families mattered greatly to their education trajectories. Further, their complex identities and identifications mattered greatly to their experiences within schools and thus to their trajectories to higher education. While case studies are not generalizable to larger populations, a great strength of this research is the nuanced perspective and the insights that the case studies presented add to research on education decision-making and persistence to and in higher education. Therefore, I argue that solutions to underrepresentation of particular populations and understandings of how some students from those populations persist to and in higher education require nuanced research of situated context. Studying issues of underrepresentation and persistence through the lives of those that research is meant to serve brings to the fore questions and implications for future research in higher education.

Implications for education

The first implication of this research is that families mediate negative and marginalizing experiences in schools, facilitating persistence to and in education. There is an abundance of research linking students' connectedness to schools, socially and academically, with educational success. The importance of a sense of belonging to positive academic outcomes has been documented throughout the education pipeline from middle school through college (Jehangir, 2010a, 2010b; Koyoma, 2007; Matthews, 2014; Syed, Azmitia & Cooper, 2011). Matthews (2014) argues that a sense of connection to the school community is essential to having a positive view of education. Conversely, detachment from, or lack of connectedness to, school has been connected to lower academic performance and decreased school attendance (Perna, 2006; Tierney, 2002). The research findings presented in this dissertation support previous research in the sense that as participants felt marginalized from or tracked within their schools, each began to disengage in some way. October initially resigned herself to just working, Crimson Butterfly considered dropping out of high school. OMITTED felt that high school had nothing left to offer her. It was support from, lessons learned in, and expectations of family that led, in large part, to their enrollment in higher education.

While considerable research in education correlates parents not pursuing higher education with decreased enrollment or degree attainment for their children (Kelly, 2005; Mortenson, 2010; National Center for Higher Education Statistics [NCHESES], 2012; NCHEMS, 2007), this dissertation research complicates that view. I suggest, along with other critical research in education (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002, 2006; Jehangir, 2010a, 2010b; Yosso, 2005) that families provide resources and encouragement that *mediate*

negative or marginalizing experiences in K-12 schooling, facilitating students' persistence to and in higher education. It was clear that marginalization produced significant barriers to education for each of the women, making her trajectory unnecessarily difficult. An important finding of this research links the marginalization experienced in schools, whether social or academic marginalization, with doubts about their abilities and prospects as students. Further, this left an effect beyond the moment. Specifically, being socially or academically marginalized in their pre-college experiences created tentativeness about their willingness to engage with and ability to succeed in higher education. This finding shifts the focus from deficit views of families to the institutions in which students are being educated.

Relatedly, at a policy and practice level, schools must heed the calls that have been made by education scholars for decades (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Deyhle, 1995; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amati, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Saltiban, 2012; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999) in order to identify and eliminate the marginalization of students within the education system. It is clear that continued work needs to be done at every level of the education pipeline to ensure that students' cultural wealth, multiple knowledges, languages and abilities are affirmed and seen as assets rather than deficits in schools. This is discussed further in the second implication for higher education.

A second implication of this research is that institutions of higher education need to authenticate the desires for diverse student bodies and perspectives by radically shifting to center the multiple perspectives they bring. In contrast to marginalization—which participants faced through racist, sexist, and classist experiences and school practices—the participants in this study, and other students in the class in which research

was generated, expressed a sense of belonging and safety in the class and were highly engaged in their learning. They responded to the call to bring their whole selves into the classroom. The production of these data speaks strongly to the level of engagement with which students participate when they feel that their voices matter, that the knowledge they bring is valued, and that their knowledges are connected to and can help to change larger society. The students in the class and the participants in this study took up their roles as co-producers of knowledge with enthusiasm and purpose. This was fostered through curriculum and pedagogy in which they were positioned as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This was reinforced through drawing upon their lives as texts and reading the social world locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally through media texts that they identified as important to their lives.

Bringing whole selves into classroom requires that students see their perspectives and knowledges as valuable. Beyond superficial calls for diverse student populations and perspectives in higher education, pedagogy and classroom practices must reflect a genuine valuing of these perspectives. As Rendon (1992) has found, students being asked about themselves as people and learning about the identities and personhood of their peers is validating. It is significant to students finding a sense of belonging in higher education. A genuine interest in student success requires *knowing* students—their challenges and fears as well as their strengths, aspirations, and what is important to them in their lives. Knowing students in such ways takes time, attention, and care. Academic outcomes will only improve by approaching students and their learning from such a perspective.

A third implication of this study is that students' desires to contribute to the

learning of others who have been marginalized with/in schools can be utilized in mutually beneficial ways to support students throughout the K-16 pipeline. Each of the participants in the study expressed a strong desire to share their knowledges with others, particularly so that the lessons they had learned through negative experiences with/in schools could be ameliorated for others. This speaks to commitment to other marginalized students along the education pipeline (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Saltiban, 2010) as well as the desire to put to their own experiences and knowledges to use to make an impact on others. Indeed, as Delgado Bernal, Alemán, and Garavito (2009) have shown in their research with college students enrolled and engaged in a year-long course in Ethnic Studies and simultaneously mentoring students in a school serving predominantly working-class elementary school Students of Color, such experiences can provide decolonizing spaces and discourses (Pérez, 1998). These spaces affirm the college students, by centering and validating their multiple knowledges, and the elementary school students they mentor. This research supports expanding such programs for the benefit of underrepresented students across the education pipeline.

Implications for teacher education

Because the participants' previous experiences with and in institutions of learning greatly influenced their sense of who they could be as students, this research also has implications for teacher education. Many of the points made above—the importance of recognizing students' multiple knowledges, developing curriculum and utilizing pedagogical tools that center students—apply to learning throughout the education pipeline. In regard to teacher education, I highlight two important aspects. First, it is essential for teachers to fully comprehend the significance of what happens in their

classrooms to students' future learning. That is, teacher candidates must be aware of how histories of participation in schooling connect to student sense of themselves as students and their sense of possibilities for the future.

The second implication for teacher education is related to the first. Teachers must engage in critical reflexivity of the power they hold as authorities in the classroom simultaneously keeping a sense of the additional ways they may hold power, through privileged identities and identifications (i.e., through race, class, gender, heterosexuality, ability), at the forefront of their thinking and acting with students. Teachers hold powerful roles and can employ their privileges in multiple ways. Awareness of and respect for the multiple knowledges and perspectives of students, as well as for students' identities and identifications, require vigilance about the many ways teachers employ and reinforce power and privilege, particularly in their classrooms.

Implications for policy in higher education

Higher education research continues to emphasize quantitative data and to privilege the patterns that emerge from large data sets as Truth. Indeed, as I write this, the university at which this research was conducted increasingly demands the development and use of metrics to define the impact of various retention initiatives. As discussed throughout this dissertation, while statistical data are important in understanding large trends, much is missed when aggregate data are not examined more closely and, specifically, through more nuanced investigations that get at the real lives and experiences of those whom the education is meant to serve. Further, as universities work to increase the diversity of their student populations, improve their national rankings, grow enrollment, and generate funding, issues like student recruitment, retention, average

time to degree, and graduation rates become ever more significant. Understanding students as individuals and in more complex ways, through their own voicings of the strengths, knowledges, skills, fears, and vulnerabilities they bring will better engage students as stakeholders and help to insure institutions of higher education are serving students and responding to their needs. The desired outcomes in persistence to degree will likely follow.

Directions for Future Research

This study and its findings raise several questions to be addressed in future research. The first that I address is the need for a better understanding of the relationship between experiences with/in the education system, student subjectivities, and education decision-making. An important but not surprising finding of this study was that students' histories of participation in schools matter greatly to the development of their student subjectivities. Specifically, low expectations and deficit views of them and the knowledges they brought to school were detrimental to the participants' understandings of themselves as students and their engagements with education.

This research suggests that negative experiences or histories of participation in schooling leave marks beyond the moment (Moje & Lewis, 2010), including seeing oneself as outside of the discourse communities of schools. This in turn can influence students' education trajectories in terms of engagement with higher education. In the current study, negative experiences with/in schools were revealed through participants' descriptions of loneliness, lack of confidence in their abilities as students, and self-blaming and internalization of negative messages about who they were and could be as students. Further, each participant linked these experiences to later decisions that

influenced their higher education choices, for example, not believing they could make it in a 4-year college or considering dropping out of high school or coming to coming to see themselves as bad students. These findings indicate that future research should explore the relationship between experiences with/in the education system, student subjectivities, and education decision-making.

A second recommendation for future research relates, as discussed in the previous section, to the need for more mixed methods research that provides context-specific information to institutions of higher education. Higher education research continues to emphasize quantitative data and to privilege the patterns that emerge from large data in the development of policies and programming. Future research, while attending to the issues brought to the fore in large quantitative studies, must interrogate its findings through the use of qualitative data, which is able to consider the complexity of the lives rendered invisible in quantitative research. Because each institution of higher education has a unique culture that reflects the geography, economy, demographic makeup, and local practices and traditions within which it is situated, qualitative data must be included in institutions' research regarding issues in higher education in order to be effective. Thus, I echo education scholars who have called for nuanced insight into students' higher education decision-making through qualitative perspectives (Bergerson, 2010; Perna, 2006; Torres, Hones, & Renn, 2009).

(In)Conclusion

This study has highlighted the narratives of October, Crimson Butterfly, and OMITTED—three Women of Color who persisted to and in higher education. Their intimate stories along with precise details about their situated contexts are important

reminders of the multifaceted and dynamic conditions under which students and their families make decisions about higher education. Their stories were, in some regards, familiar. They reinforce the pervasiveness of racism, sexism, and classism in institutions of education and the painful and disturbing realities faced by students in the education system. They further reinforce how experiences of marginalization and discrimination serve to create unnecessary barriers along the education pipeline, pushing students away from rather than toward higher education.

This research has also pointed to the power and strength that participants drew from their lived experiences, and especially from the informal lessons learned in their families and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002, 2006; Yosso, 2005) in order to pursue and persist to higher education. Each participant exerted agency in authoring and re-authoring herself as a student to envision the possibilities that higher education held for her future. This more holistic view is a power reminder of why we must not allow our understanding of the pursuit of education to be fixed by aggregate data. The individuals who enter institutions of education must not be overshadowed by numbers, patterns, and grand narratives that get told in order to explain why some make it to and through college and others simply don't.

I am moved by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2013) warnings about the dangers of a single story. Thus, I frame the final section of this dissertation as an (in)conclusion to the study. I implore readers to not capture the participants in the cages of the stories that they told through their narratives; as should be clear, their stories are ever shifting. But more, I call upon researchers, educators, policy makers, and administrators not to believe they know the students they hope to engage through the statistics said to reflect their lives

and communities. Numbers provide but one story. As Adichie has said, “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize” (TED, 2013). It is my greatest hope that through these women’s narratives I have made a strong argument for working to holistically understand students, their strengths, abilities, knowledges, and needs and using their perspectives to inform research in that will effectively eliminate the opportunity gap in education

APPENDIX A

COURSE SYLLABUS¹⁸

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In this course, we will draw from a wide variety of texts to critically examine and reflect on the social, political, economic, and historical context of schooling for students in U.S. K-12 and higher educational systems who are/have been minoritized. We will pay particular attention to the experiences of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people – hereafter referred to as *gender and sexual minorities*. We will read from poetry, short stories, narratives, critical essays, and empirical research. Additionally, we will engage with media including films, TV shows, music, and blogs and other websites.

Students will be introduced to concepts, theories, and skills that will provide opportunities to consider the educational experiences and realities of gender and sexual minority students. The class will also take up experiences of gender and sexual minorities in social institutions that are connected to educational systems such as healthcare, family, politics, media, and work. A vital component of the course will be to consider the way that intersectionality unfolds in the lives of gender and sexual minorities, therefore, race, class, age, ability, religion, and citizenship status will be considered throughout the course.

Generally, students will be asked to consider three foundational themes throughout the course: historical trajectory, textual presentation, and personal connection. This means that with each topic students will be expected to read, write, and discuss through each of these lenses. Students will consider the history of the issue, the way it is presented (discursively and textually), and how they understand the issue's impact on them personally. Students will develop skills to critically engage with the topics in order to consider the multiple debates surrounding topics, and to reflect on what they know/believe about the issues and why they know/believe the ways they do.

Finally, the course will challenge students to be more reflective about their educational experiences and the schooling conditions of gender and sexual minority (and majority)

¹⁸ This is an excerpted version of the full syllabus.

students in general, and to apply the concepts introduced in class in an analysis of their own educational experiences. This process will also provide students with the opportunity to develop skills and access resources to navigate being a student at the University. More specifically, the course is intended to enable students to:

1. Develop an understanding of histories, concepts, perspectives, and theories for examining the complex realities of historically underrepresented students – with particular attention to gender and sexual minority students;
2. Articulate understandings of concepts such as meritocracy, privilege, normativity, social justice, resistance, agency, and activism, and to apply these concepts to their personal educational experiences and to the on-going public debate over educational (under)achievement, equity, and the politics of education;
3. Engage in dialogues about gender and sexuality, the use of power and privilege to institutionalize inequity, methods for achieving social and educational change, and the practice of leadership and activism in educational and community settings; and
4. Make connections between theory and practice by telling their own stories and critically reflecting on their own identities along with those of others.

TOPICS

Power, Privilege, and Oppression

Feminism – and the history of Women's/Gender Studies

Intersectionality

Healthcare, Reproduction

Work

Family

Communities

Political History

Media Representation and Slogans

Education

Safe Spaces

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

This is a demanding course, both in regard to time and academic rigor. The course consists of short lectures, assigned readings, films, guest speakers, and intensive group discussion about topics, issues, and concepts that are often difficult to address (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, power, and privilege). We will integrate a pedagogical approach that is based on a collaborative, constructivist teaching/learning process and offers a seminar-like learning experience for a community of learners. This collaborative pedagogical approach assumes that every member can and will contribute in multiple ways by bringing her/his lived experience(s) and expertise into the teaching/learning process. It is your job to actively participate in this process, by sharing your ideas, experiences, and questions in class on a regular basis.

Classroom Conduct: Much of what we will be studying in this course deals with issues of sex, gender, and sexuality. We will also take up issues of race/ethnicity, nationality, citizenship status, class, and religion. There are likely to be times when you disagree with the ideas and perspectives of the readings or others in the class. While such disagreement may be uncomfortable, it is in the sharing of different ideas and perspectives that we come to a better understanding of ourselves and our diverse society. In this class your ideas and your views are important, respected, and valued. As members of a shared community, even a temporary one such as this class, we all must take responsibility for creating a space where we can be open and honest in our discussions. It is expected that you will treat your classmates, the teaching assistants, and the professors, as you would like to be treated. For example, avoid personal insults and confrontations when you disagree with the ideas of a classmate. Do not surf the Internet, text, or wear headphones in class. Remaining respectful of others is a central requirement for this course, and the professors will work to facilitate a classroom climate that is conducive to thinking and learning.

GRADED COMPONENTS OF THE COURSE

You will earn points towards your final grade in the following ways. Please see detailed descriptions for the assignments at the end of the syllabus.

1. ***Class Participation*** -- (15% of your grade)
2. ***Educational Autobiography*** -- (25% of your grade)
3. ***Reflective Journal*** -- (35% of your grade)
4. ***(Re)storying my self*** -- (25% of your grade)

DETAILED SCHEDULE

**** ALL READINGS CAN BE FOUND ON CANVAS – WE CAN HELP YOU WITH THIS IF YOU NEED IT! A NOTEBOOK CONTAINING HARD COPIES OF ALL READINGS WILL ALSO BE AVAILABLE IN THE GS LOUNGE.**

WEEK 1 –

Class #1 Introduction to the course

- Review the syllabus
- Getting to know one another – “Me, the student, self-portrait”

Class #2 Learning to read (again)

- Cohen, Samuel. (2007). “Introduction for students: Active reading, critical thinking, and the writing process,” In Samuel Cohen (Ed.). *50 Essays: A portable anthology*, (pp. 1-10). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s.
- Lee, Jee Yuen. (2001). “Beyond bean counting,” In B. Findlen (Ed.). *Listen up: Voices from the next feminist generation*, (pp. 67-73). Seattle, WA: Seal Press.
- Moraga, Cherrie. (1983). “Entering the lives of others,” In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical Women of*

Color. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press.

WEEK 2 --

Class #3 Common Language – Assumptions, commonsense, hegemony, & normativity.

- Lull, James. (2011). "Hegemony." In G. Dines & J. M. Humez (Eds.). *Gender, race, and class in media: A critical reader* (3rd Edition) (pp. 33-36). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Kumashiro, K. (2008). "Introduction." In K. Kumashiro, *The seduction of common sense: How the right has framed the debate on America's schools* (pp. 1-5). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Class #4 Common Language – prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression

- Johnson, Allen. (2006) "Privilege, oppression, and difference," In A. Johnson, *Privilege, power, and difference* (2nd edition) (pp. 12-40). New York: McGraw Hill.

WEEK 3 --

Class #5 Common Language – gender and sexuality in depth.

DUE: EDUCATIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- Tauches, Kimberly. (2011). "Transgendering: challenging the 'normal,'" In S. Seidman, N. Fischer, & C. Meeks (Eds.). *Introducing the new sexuality studies* (2nd Edition), (pp. 134-139). New York: Routledge.
- Esterberg, Kristen G. (2011). "The bisexual menace revisited: Or, shaking up social categories is hard to do," In S. Seidman, N. Fischer, & C. Meeks (Eds.). *Introducing the new sexuality studies* (2nd Edition), (pp. 278-284). New York: Routledge.
- LaMarre, Nicole. (2011). "Sexual narratives of 'straight' women," In S. Seidman, N. Fischer, & C. Meeks (Eds.). *Introducing the new sexuality studies* (2nd Edition), (pp. 253-259). New York: Routledge

Class #6 Discourse Day!

- Handout outlining various definitions of discourse (Gee, Foucault, Fairclough, Lakoff via Kumashiro etc.)
- Examples of Discourses – excerpts from
 - Gonick, M. (2006) "Between 'girl power' and 'reviving Ophelia: Constituting the neoliberal girl subject." *NWSA Journal*, 18(2), pp. 1-23.
 - Hackford-Peer, Kim. (2010). "In the name of safety: Discursive positionings of queer youth." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29(6). (pp. 541-556).

WEEK 4 --

Class #7 Discourses in practice in K12 education reports and narratives

- AAUW Report: *How Schools Shortchange Girls—handout and class discussion of findings*.
- Orenstien, P. (1994) "Anita Hill is a boy: Tales from a gender-fair classroom" from *School Girls*, pp. 245-270.

Class #8 Discourses in practice in K12 education reports and narratives

- Friend, R. A. (1993). Choices, not closets: Heterosexism and homophobia in schools. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in United States Schools* (pp. 209-235): State University of New York Press.
- Miceli, Melinda S. (2011). "Schools and the social control of sexuality." In S. Seidman, N. Fischer, & C. Meeks (Eds.). *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies* (2nd Edition) (pp. 438-445). New York: Routledge.

WEEK 5 --

DUE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL #1

Class #9 Discourses in practice in Higher Education

- UVU Women in Higher Ed:
 - <http://www.uvu.edu/wep/info/researchsnapshots/index.html>
 - <http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/kuer/news.newsmain/article/0/1/1846466/KUER.Local.News/The.College.Gender.Gap.in.Utah>
- Yoas, Kat Marie. (2006). "I went to college and all I got was this trailer-trash t-shirt." In Melody Berger (Ed.). *We don't need another wave: Dispatches from the next generation of feminists* (pp. 261-270). Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Class #10 Discourses in practice in Higher Education

- http://www.campuspride.org/challenges_facing_lgbt.asp
- [http://www.campusprideblog.org/blog/campus-pride-issues-warning-regarding-princeton-review's-top-20-\"gay-community-accepted\"-colleg](http://www.campusprideblog.org/blog/campus-pride-issues-warning-regarding-princeton-review's-top-20-\)
- <http://www.campusclimateindex.org/>
- De Cecco, John P. (2000). "Apologia pro gay and lesbian studies: My 'history and memory' as Allegheny student and editor of the *Journal of Homosexuality*," In Sonya L. Jones (Ed.) *A sea of stories: The shaping power of narrative in gay and lesbian cultures* (pp. 11-24). New York: Harrington Park Press.

WEEK 6 --

Class #11 Valentine's Day – Love Stories...

- Excerpt from Brown, Rita Mae *Rubyfruit Jungle*. ("Violet Hill Elementary School")
- "Brideland" Naomi Wolf from *Manifesta* (p. 35-40).
- "How Love Can Hurt and Heal" by Anónima 1 from *Latinas Telling Testimonios* (Summer, 2009)
- "Love Poem" Audrey Lorde from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (p125)

Class #12 Critical Analysis Day #1

- Students who signed up to present on this day will lead the class in a discussion centered on the text/artifact they bring in.

WEEK 7 --

Class #13 History

DUE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL #2

- Rossi, Alice S. (Ed.) *The feminist papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* (1973). New York: Columbia University Press. (pp. 407-421 Suffrage and Seneca Falls)
- Women's History Project: <http://www.legacy98.org/move-hist.html>
- Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a woman?
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ain't_I_a_Woman%3F#cite_note-Mabee-0

Class #14 History

- Film – *If these walls could talk 2*
- Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”
- Title IX: <http://www.titleix.info/Faces-of-Title-IX/Meet-the-Faces-of-Title-IX.aspx> <http://www.titleix.info/Resources/Fact-or-Myth.aspx>

WEEK 8 --

Class #15 Intersectionality

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1994). "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against Women of Color." In: M. Albertson Fineman, & R. Mykitiuk, (Eds.). *The public nature of private violence*. (pp. 93-118). New York: Routledge.

Class #16 History re-cap(?)

- Olson, Alix (2006). “womyn before,” In Melody Berger (Ed.), *We don't need another wave: Dispatches from the next generation of feminists*. (pp. 8-12). Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.
- Jervis, Lisa. (2006). “Forward: goodbye to feminism's generational divide,” In M. Berger (Ed.). *We don't need another wave: Dispatches from the next generation of feminists* (pp. 13-18). Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.
- Moise, Lenelle (2006). “Rice tight with beans: Loving Caribbean style,” In Melody Berger (Ed.), *We don't need another wave: Dispatches from the next generation of feminists* (pp. 40-50). Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

WEEK 9 --

Class #17 Media

DUE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL #3

- Film – *Still Killing Us Softly 4*
- Pozner, Jennifer L. (2006). “Reclaiming the media for a progressive feminist future,” In Melody Berger (Ed.), *We don't need another wave: Dispatches from the next generation of feminists* (pp. 287-301). Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Class #18 Media

- Film – *Inside South of Nowhere*
- Gibson, Rhonda. (2006). “From zero to 24/7: Images of sexual minorities on television,” In L. Castaneda and S. Campbell (Eds.) *News and sexuality: Media portraits of diversity* (pp. 257-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

WEEK 10 – SPRING BREAK**WEEK 11 –**

Class #19 Critical Analysis Day #2

DUE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL #4

- Students who signed up to present on this day will lead the class in a discussion centered on the text/artifact they bring in.

Class #20 Space and Safety

- Gonick, M., Shannon, L., & Allison, A. (2006). A Room of our own: Girls, feminism, and schooling. *Feminist teacher*, 16(2), pp. 138-149.
- Reyes, E. (2002). Moving from the field of terror to the field of hope: Project 10 East, a gay- straight alliance. In E. d. l. Reyes & P. Gozempa (Eds.), *Pockets of Hope*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

WEEK 12 --

Class #21 The university as a “safe” space

- Come prepared to share your campus walk experience – this will be the primary text for today’s discussion
- <http://www.genderblind.org/2010/02/04/columbia/>
- <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/12/20/transgender>

Class #22 Healthcare and Reproduction

- Delgado Bernal, Dolores (2009) “A lifetime of exams we don’t talk about.” In *Latinas telling testimonios*.
- <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book/childbirthexcerpt.asp?id=88&chapterID=31>
 - The Politics of Women’s Health: Why is maternal care like this ? From “Our Bodies Ourselves Website.
 - Pick one other topic under The Politics of Women’s Health and be prepared to summarize and discuss in class. What discourses are present in the discussion of the issue?

WEEK 13 --

Class #23 Family and Work – Having it all.

DUE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL #5

- Facts about Working Women: <http://www.womenemployed.org/index.php?id=20>
- You Tube Video: Should Women Stay at Home to Look after the Kids? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mf-yOaLii4> (needs to be viewed critically). What / who is missing from this discussion? What assumptions are being made?

Class #24 What is a Family?

- “Family and Work: Challenging the Definitions” by Patricia Hill Collins *Black feminist thought* (p. 53-55).
- Excerpts from *Waiting in the Wings* by Cherie Moraga

- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/15/women-changing-name-after-marriage_n_927707.html

WEEK 14 --

Class #25 “New” Families

- Visit the maps on this webpage and look at how families are being defined through law and policy:
http://www.familyequality.org/site/PageServer?pagename=policy_state
- Riggs, Damien W. (2006) “Proving the case: Psychology, subjectivity, and representations of lesbian and gay parents in the media,” In Laura Castaneda and Shannon Campbell (Eds.) *News and Sexuality: Media Portraits of Diversity* (pp. 235-255). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Class #26 Bringing things together

- Film: *Rent*

WEEK 15 – WEEK 16

Final student reflective presentations

APPENDIX B

EDUCATION AUTOBIOGRAPHY

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

This assignment requires you to provide a narrative of your educational experiences to date. In the paper, consider what your experiences have been and how you have met your academic and social goals. Be sure to clearly articulate your ideas of success in school and note if there were any cultural congruities or incongruities in your experiences. It is important to be as specific as possible and if you make an assertion be sure to use concrete examples to illustrate your points.

Ideally your paper will center on a number of themes in your experiences. Consider, for example, how your sense(s) of self (or your identities) were influenced by your experiences in school and how your identity influenced how you viewed (and currently view) education and schooling. Also include how you developed your sense of yourself in relation to school. In other words, we want to know how what helped you form your ideas about what school means and who and how you should be in school. What messages did you get about the role of school in your life and whom or where did these messages come from? Were these messages ever in conflict with one another and if so, how? Or if you received similar or compatible messages, discuss that. Also discuss how your experiences with education have shaped your identity in terms of how you see yourself as a student and in what ways education is a part of your life and future.

Remember that the purpose of this assignment is to provide a narrative of your experiences. Simply listing your experiences is not sufficient. Focusing on holidays or one particular aspect of your identity is also not sufficient as you should aim to show the complexity between how your own experiences inside and outside of school influenced your education and how education influenced your sense of self both inside and outside of school. You should also include reflections that consider the multiple aspects of one's identity including (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, and ability status) and/or others that are important to your sense of who you are.

APPENDIX C

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

You will be asked to keep a small notebook or journal that can be turned in throughout the semester. You will turn your journals in on February 6, February 21, March 6, March 20, and April 3. Your journals will also help you with your final assignment, so you may find it helpful to journal more often than what is required. Each time you turn your journal in, there should be a new entry that takes up a topic covered in class during the previous two weeks. Each entry should be the equivalent of 1-2 double-spaced typed pages of writing. The format of the journals is open: you can type them or write them by hand (but your handwriting must be legible). You can also include other texts in your reflections – for example an advertisement or article from a newspaper, magazine, or website that illustrates a claim you’re making or that helps you reflect on a topic we’re discussing. When journaling, consider including some combination of the following: reflections on the readings, thoughts about how what we are learning in class relates to your view of your own educational trajectory (either in the past, in the present, or as you see yourself in the future). What are some of the discourses you are seeing (about college students– especially gendered, sexed, raced, classed discourses, and particularly as they relate to education)? The expectation is that you are reflecting upon what we are learning and relating it to real life contexts. Thus it is not the length of your reflections that matter most, but the thought that you are putting into these reflections.

APPENDIX D

FINAL REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

You will reflect back on your educational autobiography using tools and language from class and (re)consider how you see yourself in relation to education. What discourses do you think were circulating within your original autobiography? What were you told about who you were or should be as a student and what your potential is/ was? Where did these messages come from? Were there conflicting messages about education? Which appealed to you? Which did you resist? How did you decide what you wanted to do in terms of education/ schooling? How do you see yourself in relation to education? How did you make educational decisions? What did you see as limits and possibilities and what informed these ideas? Finally, how have these things shifted and changed since you have come to college?

As a part of your analysis, create a self-portrait or some sort of representation of yourself. Using your narratives of self over the semester (autobiography, reflective journals, etc.) take some of your own quotes, look for shifts over time, think about how you constructed/deconstructed/ reconstructed yourself over the semester. This is a representation of your choosing. It can be poster, PowerPoint, poetry, performance, zine, video (other options are available as well, be creative). The goal is to overlay ideas, look for conflicts or tensions in your own words/descriptions/ depictions. During the last 3 class periods you will present part of this (re)storying or your (re)presentation of yourself. You can choose how what and how you want to share, but the class should get a sense of what you have learned and how your thinking has shifted (or not shifted and why) as the semester has progressed.

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