

5-2008

In Search of One's Pack: A Narrative Study of a Working-Class Woman in the Academy

Elaine M. Kelly

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Elaine M., "In Search of One's Pack: A Narrative Study of a Working-Class Woman in the Academy" (2008). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1034.

<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1034>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact cclouser@iup.edu, sara.parme@iup.edu.

IN SEARCH OF ONE'S PACK:
A NARRATIVE STUDY OF A WORKING-CLASS WOMAN IN THE ACADEMY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Elaine M. Kelly

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2008

© 2008 by Elaine M. Kelly

All Rights Reserved

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Elaine M. Kelly

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 25, 2007 _____

Signature on File _____

Claude Mark Hurlbert, D. A.
Professor of English, Advisor

October 25, 2007 _____

Signature on File _____

Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Professor of English

October 25, 2007 _____

Signature on File _____

Dr. Lynne B. Alvine
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signature on file _____

Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: In Search of One's Pack: A Narrative Study of a Working-Class Woman in the
Academy

Author: Elaine M. Kelly

Dissertation Chair: Dr. C. Mark Hurlbert

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Lynne Alvine
Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci

Utilizing an autobiographical approach by comparing and contrasting my story with other scholars' stories whose social-class backgrounds are similar to mine, and by analyzing this information through the works of scholars whose research has helped others working in the fields of composition and teaching, I explore the crisscrossing of the female sex, working class, and academia. This exploration attempts to uncover the influences of social class and gender on an academic from a working-class background. Additionally, it attempts to reveal the hierarchical system that silences the voices of some academics' and prevents them from being accepted as valuable members in the academy. My key research question is: What can scholars in the field of composition learn about the influences of social class and gender from my narrative, a woman with a working-class background who teaches as an adjunct faculty member in the academy?

Several issues emerge in addressing the primary research question. First and for most, I found through my research that many female academics from working-class backgrounds feel torn; they want to maintain their connections to their cultural upbringing while fitting into the academy. However, this group of academics fears they do not fit into either world. Second, the act of storytelling as a means to uncover layers of cultural conditioning offers an uncommon view of a personal and professional academic life, suggesting that being from a working-class background is a state of tension that can

negatively affect both the professional and personal life. Next, this condition is subtly maintained by college and university policies as well as faculty and administration members. Finally, changing attitudes about the role and value of academics from working-class backgrounds requires a review of their conditions and a change in consciousness by all people involved.

I hope that this dissertation will further illuminate the problems and concerns other academics from working-class backgrounds face. Although my narrative is only one perspective, I believe that my dissertation can give a unique viewpoint and context to the life of an academic from the working class – one that makes the private public.

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Nicole, my grandchildren, Damiana, Finnaeus, and Taryan, my sister, Janet, and to all who have the courage to sound their “barbaric yelp.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing any dissertation is not a simple task, but when writing is coupled with working full time as an adjunct instructor and being a single mother, it could be impossible without the support and encouragement of many people.

First and foremost, I want to thank my committee members – Claude Mark Hurlbert, Gian Pagnucci, and Lynne Alvine – for their support during the whole process from proposal to final draft. Mark, my dissertation director, provided the critical questions and suggestions that helped me to make the right choices and gain much needed perspective on the task of writing narrative autobiography. I am grateful to all my committee members for their support on this narrative research project.

I also want to thank my daughter, Nicole Bradley, and sister, Janet Kelly, for always believing in my ability to complete this project; their unwavering support gave me the courage to continue. I want to thank my dear friend Susan Frenchik for providing me with the mental image of my name with the letters Ph.D.; seeing this image in my mind's eye helped me to stay focused in the foggiest of times. I want to thank my good friend Brad Heilman for his expertise in proofreading and editing; his keen attention to details helped to make the final draft easier to read. And I want to thank my close friend and confidante, Thomas Gombar for spending hours reading and re-reading drafts of this dissertation, while commenting and asking vital questions that helped strengthen the presentation of this dissertation. Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
One	AN INTRODUCTION TO IN SEARCH OF ONE’S PACK: SETTING THE SCENE	1
	June 1971: New Castle, PA	1
	August 1987: New Castle, PA	6
	The Topic and Purpose of this Study	7
	Primary Question	9
	Framing My Story	10
	Overview of Research	13
	The Narrative Study in Context	14
	There’s Method to My Madness: Methodology	18
	Why the Narrative Approach?	18
	Those Who Have Gone Before Me: Teacher Stories.....	24
	Limitations of Narrative.....	25
	How Will I Maintain Sound Ethics and Truth-telling?.....	33
	“What’s Class Got To Do With It?”	34
	Issues Surrounding the Definitions of Social Class	36
	Argument for Clear Definitions	41
	Definitions of Key Terms	43
	In Short: Chapter Summaries.....	51
Two	“THE MISTAKEN ZYGOTE”	53
	Introduction to Chapter Two.....	53
	“The Mirror Has Two Faces”: The Internal Split of an Academic from a Working-Class Background	56
	“A Room of [My] Own”	56
	No Room at the Inn.....	57
	In the Good Company of Books	60
	The Social Implications of the Use of Space and the Ownership of Books: A Critical Analysis of No Room at the Inn.....	64
	Summing It Up.....	70
	“A Room of [My] Own,” Relived.....	74
	The Birth Certificate	76
	At Home, Nowhere: Thoughts Behind “The Birth Certificate	78
	On the Island of the Mistaken Zygote: A Critical Analysis.....	82
	Summing It Up.....	89
	Conclusion: Chapter Two	90

Three	GOING TO CLASS.....	94
	Introduction to Chapter Three.....	94
	The Bus Stop.....	94
	Part 1: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School	98
	Analysis of Part 1: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School.....	102
	Part 2: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School	109
	Analysis of Part 2: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School.....	114
	Mirror, Mirror on the Wall.....	120
	Analysis of Mirror, Mirror on the Wall	123
	The Four Pillars: “Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence”?	132
	Analysis of the Four Pillars: Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence”?	141
	Conclusion: Chapter Three	146
Four	“THE FOX AND THE HOUND”	147
	Introduction to Chapter Four	147
	New Beginnings: A Story from the Academy	147
	A Fly in the Ointment: Stories from the Academy	151
	Analysis of A Fly in the Ointment.....	161
	Summing It Up.....	168
	The Winds of Change?.....	169
	“The In-Two-Minds-Mother”: A Story from Home	172
	My Schedule: My Life as a Working-Class Academic	176
	Fourth Down and Ninety-eight Yards to Go.....	182
Five	THE NEXUS	185
	Introduction to Chapter Five.....	185
	Recapping: Then and Now.....	187
	“Calling Home”	190
	Guess Who’s Knocking at the Backdoor?	193
	The Rub.....	196
	Tell Me Another Story: A Call for Narrative Research.....	216
	Looking East.....	220
	WORKS CITED	224

CHAPTER ONE:

AN INTRODUCTION TO IN SEARCH OF ONE'S PACK:

SETTING THE SCENE

“To dare write about [the] working class [when] the working class itself is denied a name, never mind a literary category, is to plunge in over one’s head.”

(Janet Zandy)

June 1971: New Castle, PA

I was happy to finally be done with high school. My school experience at the time taught me that education was not for me, so the idea of going to college was not something that I wanted to consider, nor was it something that my parents promoted. All I wanted, and all my parents wanted for me, was to get a job – any job that offered a paycheck. So the day after I graduated from high school, I “hit the streets” of my hometown, New Castle, Pennsylvania. My plan was to stop at every retail store in town until I found employment. I did not care where I worked, as long as I worked. I decided to start at the west end of Main Street. New Castle, like most small river towns in western Pennsylvania, was a steel town where many immigrants, including my great-grandparents, had settled at the turn of the twentieth century. Most of the shops were family owned and operated; sons and daughters worked with fathers and mothers who barely spoke English. The shops lining Main Street were a hodge-podge of cultural diversity: Passerretti’s Italian Restaurant, Polansky’s Meat Market, Silverman’s Shoe Store, Winter Brothers Clothier, Butt’s Floral Shop, and Rashid’s Oriental Rugs were all perspective employers. As I was deciding where to start, I could smell the combined scents of peppers, old frying grease, and stale beer wafting from the local hotdog/beer

joint. My mouth started to tingle and water as if I could taste Coney Island's infamous hot sauce. Looking towards the dingy, little bar, nestled between the five-story Penn Power Building and the ten-story First Federal Savings and Loan Building, I saw Joe, one of the owners, in the front window preparing for the lunch crowd; he had his left arm stretched out, lining buns up his bare arm and slapping a hotdog in each one, then slapping a layer of Coney Island Hot Sauce over each hotdog. I watched as he slid the row of hotdogs off his arm onto a table; then he wrapped each one in a white, wax paper. I laughed to myself, remembering how my brother, sister, and I would always wrinkle our noses and stick out our tongues when our father would tell us that the reason the hotdogs were so tasty was because Joe never washed his arms.

I decided to skip the restaurants and apply at the clothing and shoe stores first, hoping to find employment. The routine was the same: I'd enter the store, a salesperson would approach me asking if I needed help, and I would reply by asking if they were hiring; the salesperson would then call for the owner, and the owner would say, "We're not hiring at this time." It was late in the day, and I had almost given up when I walked into Davis Shoe Store, located four blocks from where I had started. Mr. Davis was a tall, bald-headed, robust man who spoke in a deep voice. For some reason he liked me, and even though he said he did not need anyone, he offered me a part-time job selling shoes. I was thrilled to have my first job. I was thrilled to start my new life.

As time passed, however, the luster of selling shoes grew increasingly mundane. The more I sold shoes, the less I liked it. Selling shoes did not offer me a sense of accomplishment or a sense of well-being. As a retail clerk, I had no authority over my work. I just did what I was told; I was told to dust off the shoe displays, check-in the

inventory, stock the selves, and wait on the customers. It took about one year of working at this job before I admitted to myself that it was not the career of my dreams. So I went to my parents to explain my dissatisfaction and to ask them if I could go to college to earn a teaching degree. They were both in the kitchen. My father was seated at the head of the kitchen table (where he always sat), drinking a cup of coffee. My mother was preparing a grilled cheese sandwich and tomato soup for his lunch. Teaching, for some reason that I did not fully understand at the time, seemed to be something that I could do well. I was told by other family members and friends that I was good at taking care of people, especially children, and that two of my best qualities were my ability to extend compassion and empathy toward others, two qualities that I believed, and still believe, good teachers should possess. However, even though I expressed my passion about my desire to return to school, my parents, who believed in a patriarchal household and who distrusted people with “too much” education, responded with a resounding no. My father was the first to speak, “Education is a waste of time, especially for you.”

Then, before I could refute my father’s remark, my mother spoke, “You will never make it in college. You hated high school and college is much tougher. You just need to focus on what a woman is supposed to focus on – getting married and starting a family. Family is everything. And it should be everything to you, too!”

My father confirmed, “I agree with your mother on this one, Susie (my family nicknamed me Susie). College is just a waste of time and money, especially for a woman. Once you get married, all you’ll need to worry about is your husband and children.”

As they spoke, I felt the finality of their words and saw the determination in their eyes. My chest felt tight and it was hard to breathe. A small voice inside me wanted to

lash out, screaming, “You’re wrong!” But I didn’t because there was a larger voice inside of me whispering, “They’re right – be a good girl and listen to what they say.” So I did what they suggested: I got married and started a family. After six years of living with an abusive husband, I packed my bags and left New Castle with my four-year-old daughter. My family was not supportive of my move or of my decision to divorce, even though they knew about the abuse. My mother was worried about me, wondering how I would make it on my own. Her advice, which my father supported, was simple, at least for her because she believed that a woman could not survive on her own and needed a man to take care of her. According to this belief, any man was better than no man; my mother said, “It’s a big house. When he comes home, go to your room and just stay out of his way.”

This time I did not take my parents’ advice.

I often think of this story when I am feeling discouraged about finishing my dissertation or feeling out of place in the universities where I work. I remember this story because it reminds me of my roots and how far I’ve come since the days of relying on someone else to take care of me. It reminds me of how frightened I was to strike out on my own without the good wishes and blessings of my family, of how frightened I felt to be on my own, *alone*. And this story also reminds me of when I felt as if I had no other choice. It was not a choice between going or staying; it was a choice between life or death, or as Charlotte Perkins Gillman put it, “between going, sane, and staying, insane” (25). Not being allowed to express myself in ways that were meaningful was stifling to me: always submitting to the needs of others, always doing what other people wanted me to do, always behaving in the manner that other people expected me to behave, always

saying what other people wanted me to say – never saying what I wanted to say, never hearing my own voice. I was voiceless; hence, I was powerless. Because I had no voice, I had lost my passion for the life that I once knew as a child. I felt fatigued, depressed, and confused most of the time. Clarissa Pinkola Estes asserts, “A woman’s issues of soul cannot be treated by carving her into a more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture, nor can she be bent into a more intellectually acceptable shape by those who claim to be the sole bearers of consciousness” (4). My family of origin was trying to “carve” me “into a more acceptable form,” and I resisted at age twenty-eight, leaving my place of birth, my family of origin, and my husband. As I said, it was not a matter of staying or leaving. It was a matter “between going, sane, and staying, insane” (Gillman 25).

My mother’s advice was not said because she was uncaring. On the contrary, she was concerned for my, and my daughter’s, well being, both physically and spiritually. My mother worried about how I would support myself and my four-year-old daughter. I was twenty-eight years old, uneducated, unskilled, unemployed, and, most of all, a woman. According to my family’s belief, a woman was, and still is in many respects, unable to take care of herself. My mother also worried about my soul and the afterlife. According to my mother’s religion, and the religion I grew up with, divorce was a major sin, hence, frowned upon by the church. If there was trouble in the home, it was the wife’s duty to make things right. In other words, according to my mother’s belief, since my husband was prone to “temper-tantrums,” it was my responsibility not to provoke or upset him. In fact, when he was upset, it was just naturally assumed that because I was a

female, I upset him; therefore, it was my responsibility to calm him down, and according to my mother, “not get in his way.”

At this time, going back to school was not even a consideration, not even a fleeting thought in my head, nor mentioned by anyone in my family as an alternative to my situation. The best I could hope for, and the best my family wished for me, was to land a “good” secretarial job with a bank or with the electric company until I could find another husband.

It would take me an additional six years before I would gather the courage to enter college for the first time.

August 1987: New Castle, PA

“This is going to change you,” my brother asserted in a disconcerting tone. I looked around the dinner table and saw my mother, father, and brother, all leaning forward in their chairs, with their heads tilted to one side, their mouths agape in disbelief, and their eyes squinted and focused on me. “This is going to change you,” hung in the air like smoke – thick, heavy, smothering smoke – like the kind created by damp, smoldering leaves. “This is going to change you,” echoed through my head, stung my eyes, and filled my chest as they sang in concert, each expressing their fear that I would lose touch with my roots, with my religion. I heard the sound of their words; I saw the concern on their faces. But I did not understand their reasoning. It made no sense. A few days before this family meeting, I announced with great confidence that I was going back to school to earn an undergraduate degree, with the long-term goal of attaining a Ph.D. I would be the first to complete a four year college education in my family. I was thirty-four, a single mother in a dead-end job, a job that paid the bills, but caused me to dislike

getting up in the morning, a job that allowed me no creativity, no voice. I felt smothered by my circumstances. I was trapped and desperate to find a way out. I thought they would be proud of and happy for me for taking charge of my situation; instead, even though my marriage did not work out, according to my parents and brother, I would still be better served finding a good man and settling down.

“*This is going to change you,*” these six simple, but powerful, words still echo through my head. I have embraced these words, believing that I needed to change to become a better person; thus, the sentiment of these words has been the driving force throughout my academic career. It has been the mere hope for this change, for this unfolding of a deeper understanding of my life, of my purpose, of finding my voice and having it heard, that has kept me sane. Yet, on the other hand, this change is something that my mother, father, and brother all feared; this change has also awarded me a type of separation, isolation if you will, from my family and childhood friends. And this change has not awarded me acceptance as a *legitimate* member of academia. I feel as if I am caught between two worlds: the world of my family of origin, and the world of academia.

The question is “why”?

The Topic and Purpose of This Study

Through telling my story, comparing and contrasting it with the stories of other scholars whose social-class backgrounds are similar to mine, and by analyzing this information through the work of scholars whose research has helped others working in the field of composition, I will explore the crisscrossing of the female gender, the working class, and the academy. By presenting my narrative, I hope to reveal and gain a better understanding of this intersection and inspire other academics to explore the effects

gender and social class have on the learning process. My narrative should generate a portrait of a single life, my life, and offer one interpretation or reinterpretation of that life. I believe the narrative of my experience as an academic who teaches as an adjunct instructor in a university setting can provide an example of what it is like to be a female academic with a working-class background and some of the hurdles one must navigate in order to co-exist with other academics. Hopefully, this picture will reveal various aspects of the working-class academics' experiences in the academy that will help other academics and me not only better understand ourselves but also better understand the experiences of teachers and students from working-class backgrounds, opening the door to the acceptance of others, adding more voices, thus, helping eliminate dehumanization and "otherness."

The combination of my school and my home experiences are valuable to me; each contributes to my understanding of the dynamics of the classroom as a whole and the dynamics of each student who enrolls in the courses that I teach and of the faculty with whom I teach. Although my narrative is only one story that does not claim to represent the whole picture, my hope is that it will reveal the importance of both school and home experience and how it relates to the learning process. My story is not unique; that is, the tangible events that have unfolded throughout my life are unique to me, but the feelings and tension conveyed from these events may have been experienced by others in similar ways. Hopefully, this commonality will allow me, as well as other academics, to better understand the importance of what each group has to offer, and to see possible ways of weaving the strengths of both sides together to fortify the fabric of composition theory and practice. Storytelling offers a person a way to comprehend and claim his or her past.

Gian Pagnucci suggests, in *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, that it is through the telling of our stories that we, as individuals, can resolve the issues of our past (92). Sandra Gardner states, “Claiming one’s past can renew the self as well as stimulate intellectual energy [. . .]. [O]ne’s history becomes a resource and an integral part of one’s work, something to learn from rather than deny” (55). By claiming my past, I hope to validate others who try to cross socioeconomic and gender borders, and more importantly, I hope to empower them to do the same.

Primary Question

My key research question is: What can scholars in the field of composition learn about the influences of social class and gender from my narrative, a woman with a working-class background who teaches writing courses as an adjunct faculty member in one community college, one university, and two branch campuses of two different mid-western state universities? A secondary question that I will explore and that will help me answer the key question is: what are the issues – theoretical, pedagogical, and personal – that affect academic women from working-class backgrounds?

Being an academic from the working class creates a state of tension; it is like a very thin thread that weaves itself through the fabric of social settings – sometimes visible on the surface, but many times hidden underneath the surface. In this dissertation, I seek to reveal my point of view of this thread and what it is like to be an academic from the working class. This narrative is shaped deliberately to mimic my sojourn through the academy by exposing the almost constant personal and professional tension. What does my sojourn look like? To answer my primary research question I must digress from the main plotline occasionally. These digressions are necessary to better understand the

experience of an academic from a working-class background. What might appear to be departures from the subject should be considered as critical in presenting a truer representation of an academic from the working class. To accomplish this I am structuring, or as Richard Meyer says, “framing,” this dissertation to follow a linear line of personal and professional development. This may seem to be an organizing smugness, but as Meyer states, “A frame is a point of view, perspective, stance, or relationship that is a foundational part of a story” (119). Of course, there are many frames to any story. In order for me to expose the hidden threads of social tension of the academic from the working class, as I mentioned, I will include, as frames to my story, other working-class scholars’ viewpoints. Also, as mentioned, these fragmented stances may appear as digressions, but I believe these perspectives are integral to the whole context and necessary to understand the nature of the academic from the working-class experience. The following is an outline of the four central organizational periods of time that frame my story as an academic from the working class.

Framing My Story

- The Use of Space and Ownership of Books: As a child, my family of origin did not uphold academic endeavors as necessary or important; therefore, my parents did not designate a space for intellectual activity nor did they see the necessity of having books in the home. My parents’ attitude about the use of space and ownership of books impacted my belief about school and education in profound ways, and their attitude was directly related to their working-class background.

- Primary and Secondary Educational Experience: My early school experiences made me feel as if school was not for me. What I was taught at home was in opposition to what was taught at school. As a result, throughout my public school experience, I felt like a fish out of water, misplaced and misunderstood. I could never seem to “get it right.” I had difficulty performing educational activities in the manner that most of my teachers expected. My failure to “adequately” perform to these arbitrary standards caused me to dislike school.
- Undergraduate and Graduate Educational Experience: I reentered the educational system when I was thirty-four years-old. As a non-traditional undergraduate, I claimed arbitrary standards of education as my own instead of rejecting them as I did during my early educational experience. I was a single parent, so for most of my undergraduate experience, I had to work full-time in order to meet my financial obligations. Regardless of my other responsibilities, I excelled in my studies, graduating Summa Cum Laude. But the pressure of trying to maintain my 4.0 GPA was highly stressful, causing me to deny parts of myself, parts of my family and background, and did not offer me confidence in myself as an academic. Through the use of a student-centered classroom, my graduate studies showed me the arbitrary nature of educational standards, and this realization helped me gain confidence in myself as an intellectual and fueled my desire to teach at the university level and pursue my doctoral degree.

- The Adjunct Faculty/Graduate Student Experience: As a doctoral candidate filled with newfound confidence, I chose adjunct teaching hoping to gain enough experience, along with a Ph.D., to secure a full-time teaching position with a university. I discovered just how difficult it is for a person from the working class to maintain a family of four on an adjunct salary and finish a doctoral degree. This endeavor proved to be not only exhausting, but also nearly impossible. My working-class background offered me little or no role models, no support group, no trust fund, and no college fund. I found myself caught between the proverbial rock and hard place – trying to finish my education while maintaining my family responsibilities.

As a narrative, my study seeks to answer my primary question by delving into my memory in order to examine the issues that emerge from the four periods listed above. The salient idea that surfaces through writing this dissertation is that being an academic from the working class creates a state of tension. This condition is shaped by the following partial list of issues that surface throughout this study:

- The working-class attitude about education
- The conflicting value systems of the school and a working-class home
- The belief in arbitrary educational standards
- The working-class attitude about not questioning authority
- The lack of money
- The lack of professional and social support groups
- The feeling of being out of place and inferior

As these issues surface in the various stories I relate throughout this dissertation, my intention is to deliberately mirror the sense of tension that I experienced as a child, as a student, and as an adjunct instructor from the working class by supporting these stories with other scholars from working-class backgrounds who have written on this topic. The combination of my memory and the memory of other academics from the working class should reveal a composite of what it is like to be an academic from the working class. I have written this narrative study in a way that echoes my life experience. Furthermore, these four periods provide an organizational framework that allow for what I believe are the critical digressions and the salient stories which offer a way to move from one point in time to the next. I hope that framing my story as I describe it will provide an access point for readers to enter my story and not just read about it.

Overview of Research

I have found through my research that many academics, especially women, from working-class backgrounds feel torn: they want to maintain their connections to their families, and they want to fit into the academy. However, much of the time these women fear that they do not fit into either world. They feel uncomfortable with the language they use, fearing their true voice will slip out – the dialect of the academic at home and the dialect of the working class at work; they are disheartened about being expected to be middle-class professionals, socially and economically. They are dismayed about being ignored and not seen as valued members of their profession. I find this situation intriguingly ironic because, like many scholars, I am drawn to the university setting because of its reputation as a place where individuality is welcomed, where independent thinking and diversity is respected, even encouraged because of “the implication that

[independent thinking and] diversity among faculty members is said to stimulate intellectual endeavors” (Tokarczyk & Fay 3). Academic women with working-class backgrounds and the academy should explore and confront these issues. Not only is this group of academics seemingly affected in negative ways, but also, like any other institution where members are disillusioned, the academy is seemingly affected in negative ways because a number of its members feel segregated.

The Narrative Study in Context

This narrative study is not concerned with the conventional American Dream of upward mobility nor does it intend to offer a romantic vision of working-class life. It is also not a place for me to say how great I am or how hard I have it. I acknowledge that one drawback to any autobiography is the narrative’s tendency to allow the storyteller to fall into narcissism. As a storyteller and researcher, I realize the possibility of this type of self-absorption, and I will try to avoid egotism by connecting my stories to the larger picture: that is, I will connect my stories to the issues that an academic from the working class faces and support my findings with the writings of other scholars who have researched the phenomena of being an academic from the working class. Although I understand the dangers of narcissism and will attempt to avoid it, I also realize that it might be next to impossible to do at times. Nevertheless, I have done my best to avoid such pitfalls. My intention for telling my story is not to become self-absorbed but to simply grasp a better understanding of the relationships among the female gender, the working class, and the academy, and how this relationship affects and influences theory and pedagogy, as well as the educational process. I believe, as other scholars believe, that the best way to attain my objectives for this study is through the use of narrative.

Supporting the use of the narrative, Joseph Trimmer, in *Narration As Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life*, states that “stories intensify life.” That is, through the telling of a story, life is enacted, and through enacting we, the readers, are able to see and understand how various elements play a role in building our perspectives, and how these perspectives relate to the making of theory and pedagogy. Trimmer also suggests that stories, placed in a larger context, create the possibility for “finding the selves we set aside” as well as recognizing how different points of view “can shape and reshape the same story” (xiii). Pagnucci furthers Trimmer’s idea about how stories are shaped and reshaped by suggesting that stories are open for reinterpretations and for different possibilities for understanding any event. Pagnucci proposes that narratives are used “to make some sort of interpretation of the world as it passes us, but this interpretation is always just one of many.” Pagnucci cites Richard Meyer to reinforce the value of narrative by reminding the reader that “every story is told from a particular viewpoint, but it can always be retold from another perspective. No one frame is the definitive answer for any given story. Each frame is just one more lens of understanding, and the lenses can always be changed” (49). Peter McLaren, in “Border Disputes: Multicultural Narratives, Identity Formation, and Critical Pedagogy in Postmodern America,” suggests that all theories of social reality presuppose a “narrative intentionality.” That is, narratives are not just about seeing the world in different ways, but rather, McLaren asserts, about “living in particular ways” (207). Essentially, McLaren’s argument is that people “live out” what they believe, in ways that have material and emotional effects, and through the telling of personal narratives those material and emotional effects are revealed.

If Trimmer, Pagnucci, and McLaren are correct, telling my story should add to the reader's understanding of the connection between gender, class, and academia by offering my interpretation of various events relative to this study and allowing the reader to reinterpret those events. As I mentioned, this study aims to enhance my own, as well as the reader's, knowledge of self, and self in relation to others, by telling my story as a female, working-class academic. Hopefully, this enriched self-realization can help the reader and me see through different eyes, opening the door to the acceptance of others, adding more voices, and helping eliminate dehumanization and the idea of "otherness."

Louise DeSalvo sees the value of personal narrative as a way to better understand the self and the self in relationship to others. DeSalvo paraphrases Virginia Woolf, saying that the moments of profound insight that come from writing about our soulful, thoughtful examination of our psychic wounds should be called "shocks." They force us into being aware of ourselves and our relationship to others and our place in the world that we would not otherwise have had. They realign the essential nature of our being (DeSalvo 5). Woolf believes that whether or not a writer writes autobiographically, it "scratches and scrapes" the very depths of his or her experience; it is from him or herself that a writer produces whatever he or she creates (*Mrs. Dalloway* ix). DeSalvo's and Woolf's insight is valuable to my narrative study insofar as it supports the idea of storytelling as a means of understanding not only the self but also the self in relation to one's culture.

As mentioned, this study is based on my autobiography as a working-class academic who is advancing my scholarship, sharing my experience with others, and making the private public. Victor Villanueva asserts, in *Bootstraps: From an American*

Academic of Color, that he chose the narrative approach as a way to make the private public. Villanueva suggests that “[p]erhaps in narrating [his personal story, making the personal public and public personalized], the exception can become the rule – boots for everyone, strong straps” (xvii). Villanueva cites Antonio Gramsci for support:

Autobiography can be conceived ‘politically.’ One knows that one’s life is similar to that of a thousand others, but through ‘chance’ it has had opportunities that the thousand others in reality could not or did not have. By narrating it, one creates this possibility, suggests the process, indicates the opening. (Villanueva xvii)

Both Villanueva and Mike Rose, in *Lives on the Boundary*, seize the opportunity that Gramsci talks about by utilizing the autobiographical narrative to share and reveal their struggles and triumphs as educators in order to give their readers a better understanding of their experiences and to show their readers different ways of looking at the same experience. Rose claims that he chose to use the personal narrative form to “present the cognitive and social reality of [the educational underclass] – the brain as well as the heart of it --” (xi) because he “did not know how else to get it right” (xii). I, too, want to make the personal public and the public personal. I do not know any other way of doing it right. Why? Because through my personal narrative, a lived life is revealed. Max Van Manen states that a “lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body [. . .]. Lived experience is the breathing of meaning” (36). And a lived experience is best represented through the use of narrative. By narrating my story, my lived experience, I make the private public, and as Trimmer suggests, create the possibility for “finding the selves we set aside” as well as recognize how different points of view “can shape and reshape the

same story” (xiii). And as Pagnucci points out, this shaping and reshaping allows for various interpretation and reinterpretation and for different possibilities for understanding any event (49).

There’s Method to My Madness: Methodology

Terry Eagleton argues that “we cannot think, act, or desire except in narrative” (72). I choose the term “narrative inquiry” to describe how I will study the intersection of gender and class in academia. The term “narrative inquiry,” according to Thomas A. Schwandt in *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*, signals the activities involved in working with the various kinds of stories of life experiences found in autobiographies, biographies, and the like: “It is concerned with the means of generating data in the form of stories, means of interpreting that data, and means of representing it in narrative or storied form” (98). In this study, as mentioned, I use autobiography, or personal narrative, to look closely at my own story as a working-class academic who has taught, as an adjunct instructor, composition courses over the last nine years (1998-2007), in order to grasp a better understanding of the relationships between the female gender, working class, and academia, and how this relationship affects and influences composition theory and pedagogy, as well as education itself. I will also juxtapose my story with other academics, who have similar backgrounds and who have written about their experiences, in an attempt to create a more comprehensive picture of what it is like to be a female scholar with a working-class background who teaches in the university setting.

Why the Narrative Approach?

Stories are the fabric of our lives. We, as members of the human race, tell and listen to stories daily. We tell and listen to stories on the evening news, we read and

repeat stories from newspapers, and we share various stories about our daily routines with our friends and families. We tell and listen to stories because stories help us understand our existence. Joseph Campbell, a noted scholar of mythology, explains our fascination with stories in *The Power of Myth*; Campbell believes that we tell stories to try to come to terms with the world and to harmonize our lives with reality (2). Campbell's observation corresponds to Clarissa Pinkola Estes' assertion about the importance of stories. As a scholar in cantadora and psychoanalysis, Estes asserts, in *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, that stories, whether they are factual or fictional, provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we find and follow the path of those who have gone before us. Estes also believes that the instruction found in stories reassures us that the path has not run out, but leads us into our own sense of knowing (4). Gian Pagnucci also reinforces the value of stories as a way to make sense of the world; he states that telling stories has the potential to help us grow as human beings (41). And according to Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, editors of *The Narrative Study of Lives*, "Listening to people talk in their own terms about what had been significant in their lives seemed to us far more valuable than studying preconceived psychometric scales or contrived experiments" (ix). To sum up these scholars/writers, we read stories for pleasure because they entertain us. And we read stories for profit because they enlighten us. Stories draw us into their imaginative worlds and engage us with the power of their invention. Stories provide us with more than just the news of the day and more than the pleasures of using our imagination. Stories have the ability to enlarge our understanding of ourselves and deepen our appreciation of others and our craft, the craft of teaching composition.

Supporting the use of the narrative, Josselson and Lieblich discuss three hermeneutic perspectives that share the idea that life and story are internally related, and that “the intertwining of experience and story lies at the core of individual life and psychological understanding” (19). Peter McLaren, who I mentioned in connection with the value of narrative research, presents the concept of understanding an individual’s life as multi-vocal. McLaren helps to further Josselson and Lieblich’s idea by stating that each lens of identity and facet of experience cannot be described independently; rather, identity should be explored as “inextricable webs” (211). According to McLaren, a person is not *just* his or her gender, race, or class (in reference to this study, his or her gender, class, or academic position) but a blending of all aspects of that person’s life. A quote by Stuart Hall, found in Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt *Resources for Teaching Cultural Conversations*, helps to explain McLaren’s inextricable webs:

The point is not simply that, since our racial [and other] differences do not constitute all of us, we are always different, negotiating different kinds of differences – of gender, of sexuality, of class [etc. etc.] It is that these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation. We are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation with others, but with a series of different positionalities. Each has for us its point of profound subjective identification. (Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt 39-40)

Simply put, it is next to impossible to segregate a person’s gender, class, ethnicity, or sexuality, for example, into neat, compact categories. A person is more than

the sum of his or her parts, so to speak, and cannot be reduced to just one category. A person is not his or her gender or social class alone. Gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, for example, are tightly woven together, and to separate one aspect from the other would destroy the fabric and yield a partial representation of a person's life. For instance, I am a woman, but to pigeonhole me under the category of woman and not consider the other aspects of my life would give an incomplete picture of who I am and what my life is like.

Carl Grant and Christine Sleeter believe that in order to fully understand how a person's perspective is developed, attention needs to be given to the integration of various aspects of that person's life. Grant and Sleeter assert, in their article, "Race, Class, and Gender in Education Research: An Argument for Integrative Analysis," that people are not members of just one status, but members of many groups, such as gender and social class group, and that these "simultaneous memberships influence perceptions and actions" of each individual (196). As I said in reference to Stuart Hall's quote, I am not just a female. I am also a female from a working-class background who, currently, teaches as an adjunct English instructor in a university setting. According to the message in Stuart Hall's quote and Grant and Sleeters' assertion in their article, I am linked with a gender, a social class, and an educational group that have colored my experiences and helped build my perspective. Thus, my view of reality and actions based on my membership in these various groups differs from a person from different status groups, such as someone who is a male from the working class and works as an adjunct. McLaren believes that narratives are best understood as "assemblages," as multiple lines of force "crisscrossing, cutting through, freezing, trapping, and repressing power" (211), and

because narratives have the ability to show how various aspects of a person's life intersect, the best way to reveal the crisscrossing of gender, class, and academic hierarchy, according to McLaren, is through narratives. I now realize that gender does not stand alone and see the importance of various aspects of my life, including gender and social class, in shaping my circumstances and the way I handle these circumstances. Telling my personal narrative is an effective way to reveal the dimensions of my "lived life."

Because of its ability to show how various aspects of a person's life intersect, narrative inquiry has been utilized and developed in the fields of psychology and the social sciences in order to gain a more complete understanding of the human experience. The narrative approach has also been used and developed in educational research, thus, impacting scholarship in composition studies research. According to Max Van Manen in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, researchers should choose a method of research that can "maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator" (2). Van Manen believes that the phenomenology or hermeneutics, or what he also refers to as human science, approach works best when studying human life:

[. . .] because pedagogy requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and relations of living with [others]. And pedagogy requires a way with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. (2)

Because many educators are seeking to understand the phenomenon of lived life, and because life does not come in neat little packages with a set of instructions that work at all times and in all places, a method of research that attempts to conceptualize, categorize, and claim objectivity – e.g., an empirical analytic study – does not work as well when researching human life. Such studies alienate the researcher and the reader “from the actual content of the concept of life” (Van Manen 3). For Van Manen, phenomenological research always begins in the world in which we live, or to use his term, the “lifeworld.” Van Manen believes that in order to understand this “lifeworld,” we must experience it; we must be a part, not apart, of the world that we, as researchers and educators, are questioning and trying to describe (5). It is through this lived experience that we, as educators and researchers, come to *know* our subject. Pagnucci states, “Stories connect what we know to what we’re trying to understand. They make things personal, give things meaning. They make things matter” (9). Pagnucci uses the ideas of Neil Postman to reinforce this aspect of storytelling; Pagnucci cites Postman saying that it is only through the use of stories that facts assume any meaning, that “stories provide a structure for our perceptions” (40). Pagnucci’s assertion supports Van Manen’s idea that life informs theory, not the other way about. And pedagogy grows out of theory. Because of the ability to show how various aspects of a person’s life intersect, storytelling allows for a more complete understanding of the human experience. A more complete understanding allows researchers and educators to know their subject, which consequently allows researchers and educators to develop sound theory, which in turn allows them to develop more effective pedagogy.

Those Who Have Gone Before Me: Teacher Stories

Along with Victor Villanueva and Mike Rose, many other educators in the academy have used the narrative form of research to open up possibilities and new understandings of events, making the “private public.” Richard Rodriguez tells his story in *Hunger for Memory* by revealing the difficulties he encountered while trying to assimilate into mainstream America. Michael Blitz and C. Mark Hurlbert also use the narrative form of research in *Letters for the Living* to explore issues of violence in students’ and teachers’ lives and the possibilities for peace through writing. Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy in *Writing & Healing* use a collection of narratives to examine the verbal and relational consequences of a wide variety of trauma-producing experiences and argue that writing has the potential to help survivors deal with these events in a way that mitigates their traumatic consequences. bell hooks uses her story in *Where We Stand: Class Matters* to uncover how race and gender can be used as screens to deflect attention away from the harsh realities of class politics and how class and race are intertwined. And both C. L. Barney Dews and Carolyn Leste Law, in their edited collection, *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, and Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay, in their edited collection, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, use the narrative approach to reveal the struggles that academics from working-class backgrounds face in the institutions where they work. All of these aforementioned scholars have utilized the narrative approach to research, offering their interpretations and allowing for others’ reinterpretations, making the private public.

As I mentioned, what I am proposing to write is my story, an autobiography, in a sense, a reinterpretation of events in my personal and professional life. I am suggesting that the whole will generate a portrait that is one interpretation or reinterpretation of a life. I believe the narrative of my experience as an academic who teaches composition classes in a university setting can provide one example of what it is like to be a female academic with a working-class background. Hopefully, this single picture will reveal various aspects of the working-class academics' experiences in the academy that will help the field of composition not only better understand the experiences of teachers with working-class backgrounds, but also how these teachers relate to their students and to other faculty members. I hope to accomplish this through sharing my autobiography, comparing and contrasting it with the stories of other scholars whose social-class backgrounds are similar to mine, and by analyzing this information through the work of scholars whose research has helped others working in the field of composition.

Limitations of Narrative:

Alternatives to traditional research practices have helped the narrative become an accepted means of knowledge production. Nonetheless, narrative inquiry has received criticisms as a methodology. In addition to the narrator falling into narcissism as mentioned, a major concern in using the personal narrative as critical text is the problem of self-representation. Philip Gerard defines autobiography, uncovering the limits of the narrative approach:

By autobiography I refer to a long account of one's own life, encompassing a fairly complete lifetime, or focused within formative years or some other limiting time frame. It may be anecdotal, fragmented,

jumping from scene to scene with large holes in the record, or it may be methodical. It is likely to be intimate and revealing, candid and self-conscious at the same time, and as a record of fact and event may be notoriously unreliable. (137)

The “narrating self” can lie, invent, and/or retell a story, believing his or her own interpretation, or reinterpretation, of events. I am relying on my memory to recreate the stories of my past. Many of the memories I use in this dissertation are foggy, water-colored recollections, blurred by time. My memories consist of feelings and snapshot images, causing me to piece together the event in such a way that I recreate the feelings and images that I remember, more so than the actual happenings. But are these feelings and images the same feelings and images of the past? James Britton believes that our memories are a “storehouse of what must have been [. . . and that in] recall [. . .] we elaborate and extend an initial outline by applying our knowledge, drawn from experience, of the way things are, the way events happen, the way people behave, ourselves in particular” (30). Because memories are more about how we perceived what happened rather than what actually happened, I think it is safe to say that time has altered my perception of the past. Thus, I decided that I needed a mediating source of information that would increase the credibility and legitimacy of this dissertation, so I asked my sister, Janet, to read each story. After she completed each read, we discussed her interpretation in relation to mine. But this method, I discovered, was also subject to misrepresentation of the actual event. Our five year age difference and our diverse experiences have colored both of our perceptions, leaving us to interpret the past from different points of view. Furthermore, my sister did not recall some of the stories

contained in this dissertation because she was too young and/or the event did not impact her life in the same way it had impacted mine. So, of course, this lack of being able to verify my stories became a concern that led me to question how I wanted to represent myself or, in other words, in what light I wanted to present myself. A tug-of-war within me emerged -- the researcher versus the subject.

At first, I felt a lot of freedom in writing this dissertation; however, as I gained a deeper understanding of the processes of self-representation and decision-making as researcher and as subject, I realized that this undertaking was much harder than I originally thought it would be. As a result, the tension within me encouraged a more intense revision process than I originally imagined, which was fueled by the issue of how much I wanted to disclose about myself and my experiences. Consequently, this led to issues of honesty and trust and the hope that by building a strong context, I could develop a credible narrative. Gerard's ideas helped me through this process:

By the time you are writing even to a single reader, the act of writing about yourself is anything but natural. It requires selection, artifice and a qualified honesty—"qualified" because all of us need to take to the autobiographical voice as a natural way of talking—to my way of thinking, it's very hard to learn to write memoir or persona essay without first knowing how to write well, because you're trying to learn to do two things at once: write, and come to terms with your life directly. It's a very complex transaction, and everything we've said about emotional cost in fact-based writing is doubled. (143)

In writing about my experiences as an academic from the working class, I found that I had “to come to terms with [my] life directly,” which as mentioned, proved to be more difficult than I had expected. There were times during the processes of decision-making and revision when I did not want to revisit a past experience because of its ability to provoke negative feelings; hence, the impulse to avoid these stories shaped my revisions. That is, how I view myself as an academic from the working class, as a student and adjunct faculty member, is changing as I write and revise these lines. This change influences what I choose to reveal about myself and how I choose to reveal it.

Wondering how the reader of this dissertation will react to my choice of stories, details, and support materials lead me to a deeper understanding of what Gerard meant by “qualified honesty.” As I am interacting with my memories, I am interacting with the dissertation text as well. As I am reconstructing myself as subject and researcher, I am reconstructing a fictive character. My task is to carve out a narrative path in which the subject/researcher and the fictive character, two seemingly conflicting sides, will strengthen my narrative by “scratching and scraping” the very depths of my experience, illuminating a “lived life” in such a way that it “rings true” to the reader. My story, as Tim O’Brien asserts about the nature of storytelling, “Represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed” (71), “seemed” being the key term. Yes, credibility is an issue, but by admitting that I cannot present a perfect representation about self, I give credibility and legitimacy to this dissertation.

Along with self-representation, another concern in using the autobiography as critical text is that the focus on the personal, reflective narrative does not “allow the critics to assess the so-called validity of the author’s assertions” (Denzin 216). However,

I discovered through reading about Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's criteria that a shift toward "trustworthiness" provides a model with which to approach narrative research. Lincoln and Guba developed criteria that serve as a standard for naturalistic inquiry by shifting the focus from validity to "trustworthiness." According to Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba define "trustworthiness" as that quality of an investigation and its findings that make it noteworthy to audiences (164). Van Manen acknowledges the issue of trustworthiness by stating that "phenomenological research is the study of essences." That is, phenomenological research is "less interested in factual status of particular instances" and more interested in whether or not the description shows the reader "the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (10). Said another way, the meaning of an experience lies in its interpretation; the content is not as important as the way a writer describes the experience. For a description of an experience to ring true, it should resonate "with our sense of lived life [. . .]. [It] is something that we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had" (Van Manen 27). Denzin seems to agree with Van Manen. In *Interpretive Biography*, Denzin asserts that research is not done about people, but with them and for them. Stories are valuable as research data, not because they are objective records of reality, but because of their verisimilitude (40).

In addition to the ideas of Van Manen and Denzin, Banks and Banks assert, in their published interview concerning the nature of truth-telling and story-making in academic writing, "The Struggle Over Facts and Fictions," that "any genre or piece of writing that claims to be objective, to represent the actual, is a writing that denies its own existence [. . .] no text is free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror

to the actual” (13). Linda Brodkey also supports the narrative approach to research; she asserts that a more honest strategy – for both quantitative and qualitative researchers – is to admit we are all storytellers (26). Jerome Bruner examines the relationship between narrative and understanding the self. He advocates the narrative mode of thought as conducive to hypothesis generation rather than hypothesis falsification, saying that it is in hypothesis generation that “one cultivates multiple perspectives and possible worlds to match the requirements of these perspectives” (52). Working from Bruner’s idea about storytelling, David Schaafsma, through his own experience, acknowledges that “composing stories is one of the most fundamental ways we make sense of things” (xv). Schaafsma confesses that the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin help him think of storytelling as a way of learning from each other (xvi). In the preface to his book, *Eating on the Street: Teaching literacy in a Multicultural Society*, Schaafsma tells his readers that through the sharing of stories, the teachers of the Dewey Center Community Writing Project not only revealed their learning theories, but they were also able to reshape those theories after hearing each others’ accounts (xvii). Storytelling helped these teachers see how their interpretations were influenced by their perceptions, and in turn helped them further understand each other. The realization of how perception influences interpretation opens the lid on Pandora’s Box, so to speak. Realizing that interpretations are influenced by a person’s perception suggests that there is not just one truth and that truth relies on a person’s point of view. In this sense, truth and fiction are relative terms: “What is [true] under certain conditions can become [false] under a different set of conditions” (Gandhi 450). Truth depends on the context and the interpretation of the situation.

Addressing how perspective influences interpretation, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* asserts that because interpretation depends on who is writing as well as who is reading a text, storytelling has the potential to hold more truth than fact. Woolf states:

When a subject is highly controversial [. . .] one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact [. . .]. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you [the reader] to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. (4)

As noted above, Van Manen suggests, the value of storytelling isn't whether or not the events are factual, but that the events are described in such a way that they "ring true" to the reader (41), that the reader can say, "Ahh yes. I relate to what you are saying." If the story does not ring true, then, as Woolf implies, the reader, "will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it" (*A Room of One's Own* 4). Thus, my intent as storyteller is to evoke, honestly, the various aspects of all that I, as the subject, contain. I have tried to reveal the truth not in dogma but in the paradox, irony, and contradictions that a well told narrative can reveal.

Of course this narrative study is from my point of view; it is just one interpretation. Someone else's interpretation of the same events would more likely than not differ from mine. For example, if my brother or sister were to tell the same story, he

or she would probably interpret the events of that story differently from me and from each other. But the quality of seeing a story from diverse points of view is one of the reasons that storytelling is a valuable research tool. By offering my personal story, as I mentioned, I open the door for a better understanding of the human experience, allowing for reinterpretations, and making the personal public. For a description of an experience to ring true, as Van Manen points out, it should resonate “with our sense of lived life, [it] is something that we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had” (27). Although I recognize and acknowledge that my interpretation of events may deviate from the interpretations of other people, as I tell my story I will try to delineate it in such a way that it shows the reader “the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (Van Manen 10).

I acknowledge the uncertainty and imperfect representation of my interpretation. Although my intent is not to tell a fictional story, I realize that exploring the hidden threads of my experiences as an academic from the working class requires telling tales of tensions, which have more to do with the sense of the moment than the accuracy of the facts. Thus, my objective in this dissertation is to create storied understandings, not an objective truth. The meaning of my experience lies in the interpretation. That is, the content is not as important as the way I describe my lived experience. Through my interpretation I have done my best to describe an event in an attempt to expose my perspective and offer the reader and me a better understanding of what it is like to be an academic from the working class.

How Will I Maintain Sound Ethics and Truth-telling?

Although Van Manen claims that there is not an explicit “method” of investigative procedures that one can master when telling and interpreting stories, he does not take methodology lightly. He makes clear the necessity for maintaining academic integrity by suggesting guidelines that help the researcher write the narrative account. Van Manen starts by stating that it is not enough to just recall an experience that others may have had; the writer must recall the experience in such a way that the heart of the experience is brought to light (41). Stories should make explicit the meaning that is implicit in life as it is lived. And for this type of description to happen, Van Manen believes that the researcher should begin with a true interest in and experience with his or her subject. With this sincere interest and by becoming a part of the subject, a researcher can wholeheartedly ask essential questions from a place of truly wanting to know more about the phenomena. The truer the interest and the more lived experience with his or her subject, the clearer and more precise the question becomes. The clearer and more precise the question, the clearer and more precise the research (Van Manen 43-44).

My interest comes from living the life of a female, working-class, academic who writes and teaches writing in the academy. Because of this lived experience, I have a deep desire to grasp a better understanding of my experience, as well as others’ experiences. My interest in my lived experience has directed me to ask a number of questions about my academic experience as a student and as a teacher in the past, and this interest is a driving force behind my guiding question for this dissertation.

“What’s Class Got To Do With It?”

I was born and raised a working-class person. But I did not realize this class distinction until I was preparing my proposal for this study. I remember when I was around twelve years old, telling my mother that we (our family) were from the middle-class. I do not remember why I asserted this belief, but I do remember being puzzled by her response. She was standing in front of the kitchen sink, looking out the window as she peeled potatoes for dinner. She was wearing her favorite black double-knit slacks and a faded, pastel pink and red floral design smock. She slowly turned and looked me in the eyes and retorted, with an almost angry tone, “We are not middle-class.” Then, she turned her back on me and continued peeling the potatoes. I stood there for a moment or two, staring at the red Formica counter top next to the sink. I took a few steps closer so that I could see what she was doing. I wanted to say something in response, but I did not know what to say. So I watched while she artfully removed the skins so that she barely wasted any of the white part of the potato while at the same time gazing out the window at a robin. I silently stood beside her, running my fingertips along the metal edge of the Formica. As she started cutting the peeled potatoes into smaller pieces, she asked me to hand her a pot from the top of the stove. But I just stood there, staring at her. She asked me again to hand her the pot. I walked across the room to retrieve the pot, handed it to her, then turned and left the kitchen angrily, thinking how much she did not know.

My mother’s comment did not make sense to me. I could not understand why she would say such a thing in such a tone. I wondered why my statement upset her, as if I insulted her by the notion that I considered our family to be from the middle-class. For me, at that time, defining social class was easy; social class divided people by the amount

of money they had and the lifestyle that money offered. From this point of view, I could see only three choices: upper, middle, or lower-class. Our family was definitely not a wealthy family -- we did not own a Mercedes Benz nor did we take a yearly vacation to some exotic place (in fact, we rarely took any kind of vacation). So I knew that we did not fit into the upper-class. And from my twelve-year-old perception, we were not poor either. We seemed to have enough money to buy food to eat, several pairs of shoes for our feet, and a warm house to live in, so I believed that we did not fit into the lower-class. Thus, at the time, it made perfect sense to me to consider my family to be from the middle-class, even if my mother did not agree with me.

As I review the sources that will help me define the term working class, I am reminded of this scene because I believed, like so many people do, that social class was determined by how much money someone had and that anyone could change his or her class through hard work and determination. I have often wondered about my mother's reaction, but have never approached her about this topic after that day because the tone of her voice told me that arguing about social class with her would be a futile exercise. Although my mother did not agree with me, apparently my childhood belief is not uncommon for a lot of people. Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay point out surveys have shown that most people in the United States of America (U.S.A.) like to consider themselves from the middle class, "whether they are employed as sanitation workers or lawyers" (4). But according to Betsy Leondar-Wright, in her article "Working Definitions," most people only consider themselves middle class when the only choices are upper, middle, or lower class. In addition, Sandra Jones points out that most people realize that they do not share the characteristics of the upper class, especially the money

and the lifestyle that money awards, but these same people do not want to be considered from the lower class because people from the lower class carry a negative stigma, such as being lazy drunks (Jones 804). However, Leondar-Wright points out that if working class becomes a choice, most people would consider themselves from the working class because most people, regardless of their professions, have to work for a living (Leondar-Wright). Perhaps my mother understood this distinction and was dismayed by my assumption that my family would be anything but from the working class, or perhaps there was something else driving her response. I will explore my mother's attitude towards social class in chapter two of this dissertation. Nevertheless, my point is that if scholars who research and write about social class issues can agree on anything, they agree that social class rankings are ambiguous and difficult to define.

According to many of these scholars, there seems to be several reasons for the confusion about defining class rank. These reasons seem to extend from a few commonly held but misinformed beliefs, which I will discuss in the following section: Issues Surrounding the Definitions of Social Class. Behind these beliefs stand the ambiguous class identifications that cause the confusion concerning the definition of terms, such as upper class, middle class, and lower class. And this confusion is one of the first problems when addressing the concerns of working-class women in academia, hence, the need for a brief discussion on the myths of class position and the need to define the terms upper, middle, and working class in reference to this dissertation.

Issues Surrounding the Definitions of Social Class

First, I must acknowledge that social class is a complex subject that extends past the scope of this dissertation. One complex and problematic area of social class is

defining social class ranks. Thus, a brief discussion about the confusion surrounding the definitions of upper, middle, and lower class ranks will help place this study in the context of the larger picture.

There does not seem to be much of an argument about the idea that social classes are designed to separate and subordinate people. This is not to say that people do not argue about the negative effects of social class ranking and/or that they do not argue about what determines, or makes up, a certain class. As I have said, social class is a confusing and slippery topic. Michael Zweig, a professor of Economics at the State University of New York and author of several books on the subject of social class, claims, first and foremost, that people in the U.S.A. tend to think about class in terms of income and/or the lifestyles that money can buy. However, Zweig believes that class has more to do with economic and political power than just income and the things we can buy, and that thinking of class only in terms of money and lifestyle hides the power aspect of the social rankings (*What's Class Got To do With It?* 4). The reason for the idea that class is regulated by income and lifestyle seems to extend from four generally held beliefs, which Gary Mantsios calls myths.

Mantsios, who is the director of the Labor Resource Center at Queens College of the City University of New York, outlines these four beliefs in his article "Class in America: Myths and Realities (2000)." Mantsios asserts (1) that most U.S. citizens hold the belief that the United States is a classless society, (2) that we, the people of the U.S.A. are, essentially, a middle-class nation, (3) that we are all getting richer, and (4) that everyone has an equal chance to succeed. (333). Both Zweig and Mantsios claim that these beliefs, held by the U.S.A. public, "obscure the reality of class differences and their

impact on people's lives" (Mantsios 332). Although both Zweig and Mantsios believe that gender and race also play an important part in how a person is viewed in the U.S.A., they also believe that "the lack of clarity about class can lead to problems when addressing the concerns women and minorities raise in their social movements and can undermine the interests of the working-class as well" (Zweig, *What's Class Got To Do With It?* 19). This "lack of clarity" that undermines the concerns of women and minorities is true in my case; thus, it is important to this study because it is directly related to social class. Let me explain.

When looking at my situation as a female family member and as an academic who teaches various composition and literature courses as an adjunct, I would most often look at how gender, not social class, played a role in the drama of my life. I was under the belief, like so many others, that if I worked hard and long enough, I would reach my goals and be a respected member in both my family and in the institutions where I teach. When I could not attain my objectives, I would examine the gender issue first. When, or if, the gender card did not explain the problem at hand, I simply blamed myself for not being smart and/or strong enough to complete my objective. The point here is that I never looked at how my social-class ranking played a role in my situation. This is not to say that I did not recognize and question the irony in my circumstances – for example, that I was, and still am, trying to complete my doctoral degree while working as an adjunct instructor of English and supporting my family of four. I see the irony: the irony that in order to land a full-time faculty position that would offer me a sense of security and of belonging, I need to finish the Ph.D. Yet I have to continue to carry an excessive teaching load, twenty-seven credits a semester, just to make ends meet -- in order to make the

mortgage payments, pay the utility bills, and buy the groceries. In addition to my extensive teaching responsibilities, I drive approximately five hundred miles per week, traveling between the four institutions where I teach, and I also have to attend to the emotional needs of not only myself, but also the emotional needs of my daughter and her two small children. I see the irony. I see the parallels between my life and the life that Tillie Olsen describes in her book *Silences*: that is, I see the crippling effects of hard circumstances -- not enough money, not enough time due to the demands and interruptions of childbearing, child rearing, and exhausting low-paying jobs -- on myself as a graduate student, as an instructor, as a mother, and as an individual. It seems that I am consistently asking myself, just like Andrea Lorde asked herself, “How much tyranny do [I] have to swallow before [I] am able to focus on [my] goals, on [my] writing?” (79).

But again, even though I understood the conflict between trying to educate myself and maintaining the responsibilities to my immediate family, I did not see how my class rank was preventing me from attaining my dream of finishing my Ph.D., nor how it was preventing me from becoming an accepted member in the academy and in my family. As I said before, I believed that all I had to do to succeed, to reach my goal, was to sharpen my focus and work harder, and when I had nothing more to give and still hadn't reached my goal, I blamed myself for not being focused enough, not trying hard enough, not being resilient enough, and/or not being smart enough. In other words, I saw myself as the problem, as the sole cause of my circumstances. And this blaming of myself caused me to falter, caused me to *almost* give up and resign myself to the limiting boundaries that were set for me by my social class at birth. The reasons behind why I did not give up I will explore further in chapters two and three of this dissertation. The point

here is that my blindness to the role that social class plays in my life is an example of the obscurity that Zweig and Manitsios are trying to reveal. Behind the blaming of myself stood my beliefs that the United States was a classless society, and all people had an *equal* chance to succeed; all a person had to do was work hard and long enough. My past way of thinking is not only personally destructive but also, according to Harlon Dalton in *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Blacks and Whites*, “socially destructive”; that is, the belief that a person can succeed solely on his or her merits – if that person works hard and long enough, that person will have a fair opportunity to develop his or her merits, and in the end, those merits will award that individual success – suggests that success in life has nothing to do with social class, gender, or race, and according to Dalton, “This [belief in the merit system] flies in the face of reality” (128). I do not profess that Harlon Dalton and I share the same, exact experience regarding the myths of social class. I am not dehumanized because of the color of my skin like so many African Americans; hence, I do not suffer the indignities of such behavior. However, Dalton’s assertion holds true for me insofar as I believed that I could succeed solely on my merits. When I did not succeed, I blamed myself and believed that there was something inherently wrong with me, as I mentioned above. And this blaming of self is something that many working-class people do when they do not succeed solely on their merits. I will explore this “blaming of self” in the chapters that follow.

I am beginning to see that my difficulty crossing social-class boundaries and maintaining family ties are more than gender-related, more than something lacking in me; I have come to realize that whatever I believe, or others believe, is missing in me is a social construct and that gender is only part of the rub; that is, social class and gender

both play a role in how perspectives are built and how experiences have been shaped. I will reveal the process that lead up to the realization about social constructs influencing my perspective about class and gender in the chapters that follow.

Argument for Clear Definitions

It appears that the lack of clear definitions of class ranks such as upper, middle, and working class are, in part, at the heart of the misinformed beliefs that the United States is a classless society, that most people are from the middle class, that we are all getting richer, and that we all have an *equal* chance to succeed. Whether the lack of clear definitions is by chance or by design is not the issue for this dissertation. The issue here is that key terms need to be defined. As Zweig and Manitsios both suggest, the lack of agreed upon, clear definitions blur the lines between social classes, causing these lines to become hazy and difficult to define (Zweig, *The Working Class Majority* 39; Manitsios 332). One explanation for the lack of clear definitions is founded in the belief that all languages are rooted in their culture. That is, language cannot be separated from its ideology. Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, while discussing Valentin Voloshinov in relation to Bakhtin and Marxism, state that language, a socially constructed sign-system, is itself a material reality; hence, “ideology is not separable from its medium – language” (38). Raman and Widdowson quote Voloshinov as saying, “Consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs” (38). According to Raman and Widdowson, Voloshinov’s central insight was that words are active, dynamic social signs, capable of taking on different meaning and connotations for different social classes in different social and historical situations (38). Hence, a definition of a word that makes sense to one person may not make sense to another.

bell hooks addresses the issue of the lack of a clear and precise definition and reveals the importance of defining terms in several of her books. Although she is advocating for social change in these books, her ideas about the importance of defining words hold true for this study, insofar as if a phenomenon cannot be clearly defined, more likely than not, it cannot be understood. In *All About Love: New Visions*, hooks states, “Our confusion about what we mean when we use the word ‘love’ is the source of our difficulty in loving. If our society had a commonly held understanding of the meaning of love, the act of loving would not be so mystifying” (3). And in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks writes, “A central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification. Without agreed-upon definition(s), we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis” (18). In both of these books, as mentioned previously, hooks is calling for a total societal change, and at the base of both of her arguments is the clarification of key terms. In short, she believes that the lack of a clear definition causes confusion about the meaning of words, in this instance the words are “love” and “feminism.” According to hooks, this confusion opens up a space for the *isms*, such as racism, sexism, and classism. Zweig would agree with hooks on this point, asserting that in order to understand how social ranking works, clear definitions must be given (*The Working Class Majority* 9-10).

The belief concerning the importance of definition extends, as asserted by Selden and Widdowson, from the understanding of how culturally influenced language helps build perceptions and how perceptions create actions. Annette Kolodny supports the idea

that language and thought are interrelated and advocates for clear and precise definitions. Kolodny points out the intimate interaction between language, perception, and action; quoting Benjamin Lee Worf and Edward Sapir she states:

[O]nce particular ‘ways of analyzing and reporting experience [. . .] have become fixed in the language as integrated ‘fashions of speaking,’ they tend to influence the ways in which the personality not only communicates, but also ‘analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels [. . .] reasoning, and builds the house of [. . .] consciousness.’ (Kolodny 612)

In other words, we cannot think outside our language. Language determines who we are, that is, how we see ourselves and how we see the world around us. And how we understand any given situation determines how we react to that situation. “[L]anguage and thought are practically indivisible [. . .]. Without names – and language is essentially a system of naming – we cannot truly claim to be” (Momaday 636). To define something is to name it. The name helps us identify and recognize the object or phenomenon. Therefore, before turning to aspects of working-class women in the academy, I need to clearly define the terms of discussion.

Definitions of Key Terms

I will start with a definition of the term *social class*. Dennis Gilbert and Joseph Kahl state in *The American Class Structure* that social class is a sociological concept that is attributed to a group or a person and that the term can be defined in a number of different ways. Among the various quantitative indicators that most people think to be relevant to social class are income, education level, and occupation (Gilbert and Kahl 12-

17). According to a Marxist point of view, social class is not based on these previously mentioned quantitative indicators but is based on the relation to the means of production; that is, social classes are divided and determined by the amount of power a group or a person has over other groups or individuals in the workplace. Utilizing a Marxist perspective, Michael Zweig defines class in *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret*. He states:

Class is first and foremost a product of power asserted in the production process. This means power over what goes on at work; who will do which tasks at what pace for what pay, and the power to decide what to produce, how to produce it, and where to sell it. But beyond that, production power involves setting the rules for how markets work and the laws governing property rights. Production power includes organizing an educational system that will generate a workforce with the skills and work habits required to keep production going. (12)

According to Zweig's view, social class is determined by who sets the rules for economic production and who tells whom what, when, where, and how to produce various products and services. From this point of view, income, education level, and occupation are secondary and seen as extensions -- perks so to speak -- when drawing the lines between social ranks.

Utilizing Zweig's Marxist perspective and Gilbert and Kahl's observations in this study, I will use the term *social class* to refer to a specific location within a class-stratified society, which is generally differentiated by power: those individuals who make

the rules over those individuals who have little or no say in the matter. I will use income and educational level as secondary qualifiers.

I define social class, first and foremost, according to power structures because power cannot, and does not, exist alone within an individual or a group of people. Power exists as a relationship between and among different individuals or groups. Thus, it is imperative to look at the relationships between classes. Juxtaposing the different social classes against each other and looking at all social classes from a working-class point of view will help reveal the subtleties of the working-class experience. Using income, educational level, and occupational prestige as secondary qualifiers will further expose how power structures work to maintain oppressive class structures. For example, although money is often a result of power, money does not guarantee a position of power. Someone from the lower class can win millions of dollars in a lottery, and although winning that money can boost a person's standard of living, that money does not necessarily give that person power insofar as that person does not automatically take on a position of power, such as law makers, heads of corporations, and/or presidents of universities. The same goes for education. Although education is a mark of the upper and middle classes, education does not guarantee a person a position of power. A person can earn his or her Ph.D., but that degree does not guarantee that person will take on a position of power. In fact, according to Donna Langston, whether or not a person takes on a position of power has more to do with that person's social class and whom that person knows, than what that person knows (66-72). Langston's belief is rooted in Antonio Gramsci's definition of power. Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay tell their readers that Antonio Gramsci defined power structures as hegemony; according to Tokarczyk

and Fay, “Hegemony is the power structure kept in place by the consent of the dominant groups within a society; it is informed by an ethics and perspective representative of those dominant groups” (20). In short, dominant groups have the power to maintain oppressive social classes. Power is the defining qualifier of social class; money and education are secondary indicators.

There are various terms that are given to a social group or a person that help distinguish that group or that person from other social groups. Although there are a number of terms used to discriminate one group from the other, this dissertation focuses on the most common terms: upper class, middle class, and lower class. For this study, I will divide the lower class into two separate categories: the working class and the working poor.

Upper class – otherwise known as capitalists – is the term I use to refer to that group of people at the top of the social class hierarchy. Following a Marxist point of view, a membership in the upper class is generally characterized by the power that a person has over others; the amount of power that a person has “to control the work lives of [his or her] employees. [Consequently, that person’s] economic power finds its way into enormous influence in politics as well” (Zweig, *The Working Class Majority* 13). Although the amount of power varies within the upper class group (i.e., some individuals have more power and control than others), this group of people, who only occupy a very small percentage of the United States’ population, has the power, for the most part, to control the rest of society. According to Zweig, these individuals, for example, own businesses, and, thus, have the power to make the rules; owning the businesses awards these individuals the money and social status that empowers them to influence the

political and cultural life of the whole country. Their influence tends to define everyone's opportunities and limits according to what will be good for them: the capitalists (*The Working Class Majority* 12).

Although the characteristics of the upper class do not appear to be too difficult to define, the characteristics of the middle and lower classes are a different story. That is, the line between these two class positions seems to be blurred at times. Often the qualities of these social classes are confused and misrepresented because, as mentioned, the common misnomer that social classes are defined solely by income and/or lifestyle make it difficult to distinguish between the two classes. Another factor that adds to the confusion extends from the fact that all the members of these classes do not have the same degree of power, the same income, status, or lifestyle as others in their respective class. Likewise, each of these groups is diverse in skill, occupation, race, gender, and authority, which adds to the difficulties in identifying class rank. Additionally, it is not uncommon that a skilled worker from the working class makes more money than a professional from the middle class or that a professional works longer hours and has more stress than a skilled worker. Although these varying aspects are present in the upper class as well, Zweig points out that the upper class is generally not confused with the middle and lower classes, again, because of its level of power over the other social-class rankings (*What's Class Got To Do With It* 4-8).

To make things even more perplexing, a Marxist point of view does not necessarily recognize the middle class as the middle class because class is not a fixed category. According to Zweig, this perspective would categorize many individuals who consider themselves middle class as working class; this perspective would also regard

some individuals who consider themselves working class as middle class. The reason behind the ambiguity exists within the distribution of power (*The Working Class Majority* 10-11). Remember, social class is defined by power: the members' relationship with the means of production, not according to the amount of wealth or prestige of its members.

To demonstrate the point about fluid class boundaries, Zweig uses the example of professionals, such as medical doctors and college professors, and small business owners, such as farmers and building contractors.

Professors, like other professionals, traditionally are considered middle class because they tend to have a substantial amount of authority and flexibility in their jobs. However, Zweig points out, as corporate practices gain ground in colleges and universities, faculty members are less in control of curriculum, degree requirements, and other traditional faculty responsibilities. Zweig also points out that faculty members are also being subjected to inflated teaching loads and larger class sizes, and research activities are increasingly being funded by outside corporations and less supported by the university itself; many faculty members are required to seek funding outside the halls of the academy, oftentimes seeking research support from corporations, thus, according to Zweig, casting the professor in the role of subordinate and supplicant to those with the money to control the research agenda. In short, from Zweig's perspective, the professor's aspirations are being replaced by expectations that the professor is to generate a certain number of "*market-ready*" students, the "*product*," as Zweig put it (italics mine), "of [the] higher education institution" (25), and to do research that corresponds directly with the needs of business. Zweig suggests that as faculty members tailor their research to

corporate needs, they become more like the skilled working class and less like middle-class professionals because of this change in power (*The Working Class Majority* 23-25).

With shifts in power, not only do the middle-class professionals, such as college professors, look more like members of the working class from a Marxist perspective, but also some workers who perform seemingly working-class jobs, such as carpenters and plumbers, look more like members of the middle class because of their ability to have power over others in the work place – again, regardless of their income, educational level, or occupation. For example, building contractors are traditionally seen as working class because of the nature of their work: hard, physical labor that requires little to no formal education. However, according to Zweig, if a person is self-employed, that person then has more independence than workers who are employed by someone else, and this independence allows these entrepreneurs to have more control over their work lives, thus causing some self-employed individuals to look more like members of the middle class than members of the working class (*The Working Class Majority* 21-22).

So where does one draw the line between the middle and lower classes?

Social classes do not fit into neat, compact categories, so drawing hard, steadfast lines between social ranks is next to impossible. Nonetheless, Zweig claims that the job a person does is a strong indicator of that person's social class ranking; the more control a person has over his or her work life, the higher the social rank (*The Working Class Majority* 15). To be a member of the middle class means, according to Zweig, to be in the middle of things, somewhere “[i]n between the capitalist and the working classes” (*What's Class Got To Do With It* 6). And to be a member of the lower classes, working and working poor, according to Zweig, is “to be in a place of relative vulnerability – on

the job, in the market, in politics and culture” (*The Working Class Majority* 13). To help clear the fog from social class boundaries and for the purpose of this dissertation, I will distinguish the middle class from the lower class by, first and foremost, levels of power in the work force. Generally, “middle class” is a term I will give to those people who reside neither at the top nor the bottom of the social class hierarchy: those people who have some level of control over their work lives, such as tenured and tenured-track faculty members. Secondary characteristics that I will ascribe to the middle class are a college education, professional careers (such as professors, lawyers, and doctors), home ownership, perceived secure jobs, the classes of a person’s family and circle of friends, and language (dialect/accent).

I use the term “lower class” to refer to those people who reside at the bottom of the social scale. For this dissertation, I will divide the lower class into two segments: working class and working poor. According to Gilbert and Kahl, Karl Marx defined the working class, or Proletariat, as those individuals who sell their labor for wages in order to stay alive and do not own the means of production (4). For instance, the members of this class physically build bridges, craft furniture, and grow food, but do not themselves own the land or the factories. Considering Marx’s definition of the working classes, I assign the term working class to those people who work for wages but have little or no power over their work lives, nor own the means of production, but earn enough money to support themselves without government assistance, sometimes *passing* as middle class, as opposed to the working poor who work, sometimes at more than one job, but do not earn enough money to survive without government assistance. Secondary characteristics for the working class includes little or no college education, in particular no bachelor’s

degree from a four-year college or university; low or negative net worth (assets minus debts); rental housing or one non-luxury home long saved for and lived in for decades; occupations involving physical work; little control in the workplace; and paid hourly wages rather than salaries.

In Short: Chapter Summaries

This section offers a brief review of the contents of the following chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter two discusses my home life with my family of origin and the use of space and the ownership of books as an indicator of social class. It also reveals my parents' attitudes about education and a woman's place in society, exposing how their attitudes influenced the way I saw education and the role of women in the home and in society.

Chapter three discusses my educational experience as a student, ranging from primary school to the university. I discuss my experience as a female student from a working-class background and how these experiences have influenced the way I see education as a student and as a faculty member in the academy.

Chapter four discusses my experience as an adjunct faculty member and a single mother who is trying to complete a doctoral degree and find a place to call home. This chapter reveals what it is like to be an academic from the working class and shows how oppressive social standards are perpetuated in the academy by a patriarchal hierarchy, while some members of the academy try to dismantle such structures.

Chapter five summarizes what I have learned through telling my story and concludes this dissertation. It starts with an overview of the framing and major issues in this dissertation, then, moves to a discussion about my parents in terms of social class in order to gain a better understanding how their social class affects their views on education and parenting. Next, I talk about the significance of using the back door of my current house in relationship to being a member of the working class and as a metaphor for entering the academy. I, then, give an overview of what I have learned about the issues at hand for academics from working-class backgrounds and suggest a few ways to ease the tensions of being a working-class academic. I follow this discussion with a few suggestions for more research in this area and conclude this dissertation with a discussion about what I have personally gained through the research and writing of this document, supporting the use of storytelling as a legitimate research methodology.

CHAPTER TWO: “THE MISTAKEN ZYGOTE”

“[S]he is not ugly in reality, but [s]he does not match the others. [S]he is so different that [s]he looks like a black bean in a bushel of green peas.”

(Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

Introduction to Chapter Two

Chapter two covers my home experiences as a female from a working-class background. I was born and raised a working-class person, a fact that I did not realize for over fifty years. I am just beginning to see how this fact has marked my life, determined my choices, stirred my wrath, tied my tongue, and opened my mind. My father, who died at the age of seventy-one in 1997, worked as a stone mason most of his adult life. My mother’s paid and unpaid work life overlapped at times. My most vivid memories of my father are images of him arriving home after a long day on the construction site, promptly eating dinner at 5:00 p.m., then, more often than not, heading back out the door to return to the job. My most vivid memories of my mother are images of her cooking, cleaning, caring for family, and keeping the books for my father’s small construction business. My parents’ belief in a long, physically taxing day was rooted in their respective family of origin’s belief. My grandparents on both sides of the family had little formal education; they had to work hard for a living, and their paychecks were modest. My father’s grandparents immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1852, and my mother’s parents immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1900. My grandparents were humble people with dreams of having a better life in this new land. They struggled through language barriers, degrading stereotypes, and difficult working conditions to provide a better life for themselves and their respective families. Both of my grandfathers

worked long hours at physically demanding jobs; my maternal grandfather was a stonemason, who eventually created his own small construction business, working twelve to fourteen-hour days, most of the time six or seven days a week. My paternal grandfather worked for American Cyanamid Powder Mill, a black powder mill, making ammunition for the military. My grandfather's job was physically exhausting. He worked long hours in a dusty, dark plant, and his job was dangerous; during his work life in the mill, he survived several explosions that killed a number of the workers. My grandmothers both took on the traditional role of housewife, where they were left tending to the needs of others, both inside and outside the family circle. Tending to the needs of others encompassed a variety of tasks such as caring for their children, managing livestock, cultivating the garden, harvesting and canning fruits and vegetables, and the like. In essence, my grandparents, and consequently my mother and father, lived by the sweat of their brows and the dirt beneath their fingernails. In fact, they believed that they could tell a person's character by the roughness of his or her hands. If someone's hands were too soft, too clean, then that person was not to be trusted without careful scrutiny. They were proud people who valued loyalty, honesty, and fairness and who followed the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The influence that my grandparents and parents had on me remains a part of who I am today, remains a part of how I see the world, hence, how I respond to various situations. Their passion for life and courage to emigrate from their respective homelands to the United States is the same passion and courage that lives inside me and inspires me to educate myself. Just as Dwight Lang notes, in his essay "The Social Construction of a Working-Class Academic," I, too, "am carrying on a strong family tradition of

geographical and social mobility that dates to the waves of European immigration to North America and to earlier decades when family members in Europe [. . .] were mobile by choice and lifestyle as well as because of dramatic political and economic changes” (161). And just like Lang, as a result of my family history, education, and socialization, I no longer ignore social class position in the United States nor assume that all people in this society share, or should share, my status, values, and beliefs (162).

I see the fallacy of our gender and social constructions. That is, I realize that “sacred [gender and] social beliefs are essentially myths,” but I also recognize how “these constructions are reified by those who view them as inevitable.” I understand that gender and social constructions are real in their effects and believe that they are potentially destructive and/or constructive in their consequences. Because of my belief about gender and society, I “lack the connectedness of those who are born to one class and remain there” (Lang 162). My education, like Richard Rodriguez’s education, has changed me and has separated me from the life I knew as a child (Rodriguez 45). My voyage through social boundaries has created a perspective, an objectivity, and, at times, a fear within myself. Like Rodriguez, “I will never know what [my parents and grandparents] felt at [their] last factory jobs. If tomorrow I worked at some kind of factory, it would go differently for me. My long education would favor me. I could act as a public person – able to defend my interests, to unionize, to petition, to speak up – to challenge and demand” (138).

While my migration through class boundaries is personal, it reflects social forces that shape and drive all of us to act. My story and the stories of others often remain hidden in the broad strokes of social class that push, pull, and compel us. My

grandparents and my parents each had a story to tell, a story that has gone untold for the most part. And the weight of their, as well as my own, untold stories presses me to research the topic of gender and social class in the academy and to write this dissertation.

I write from a double perspective: from the working-class consciousness of my childhood and from the academic consciousness of my journey through the academy as a graduate student and as an adjunct instructor. My purpose is to align these two seemingly conflicting views for several reasons: 1) to provide a place where the lives and voices of working-class people, especially women, can be seen, heard, and respected, 2) to show what it is like to be a working-class academic from a working-class background; and 3) to have a better understanding concerning the intersection of class, gender, and academia.

“The Mirror Has Two Faces”:

The Internal Split of an Academic from a Working-Class Background

“A Room of [My] Own”

I am in my study, a place I created for myself several years ago so that I could get away from the confusion of the house, a quiet space where I can read, think, and write. The room is quite lovely with its vaulted ceiling and wall to wall windows that allow me to feel as if I am outdoors. I am aware of my surroundings this day as I contemplate the opening lines of chapter two for this dissertation. A cool breeze from an open window wraps my body, so I reach for the sweater that is flung over a nearby armchair. I look up and out, away from the computer screen, and notice the trees gently swaying in the spring sun. My attention is drawn back inside. Underneath the windows that surround the room on three sides are shelves, overflowing with my collection of books. To my right and to my left, books line the ledges above the windows. I glance down and notice the

stacks upon stacks of books sitting on the floor waiting to be shelved, but there is no more room on the shelves. I think about the bookcases that are filled with books in the living room, dining room, and bedroom areas and the books that I have tucked away in a closet. In a strange way, I am pleased at what I see. I tell myself that Virginia Woolf would approve of the space that I have carved out for my reading, for my writing, and for my reflection. Woolf asserts that one of the things a woman needs in order to write is “a room of her own” (4) and that this room should offer her solitude, a place to write without interruption. My room is bright. Airy. Quiet. This room gives me a place to read and develop my thoughts and my writings; most of all, this room offers me a quiet place for reflection without interruption. Something about this room and these books excites me, gives me a feeling of security, of identity, of accomplishment. As I breathe in the room’s atmosphere, marveling over my collection of books, thinking about what books I want to add, I remember growing up without a special place like my study and with very few books. And I realize how this scene is in stark contrast to how I grew up.

No Room at the Inn

There was no special room, or space, for reading and reflecting in my parents’ house. That is not to say there wasn’t room for such a place because there was. The lack of a special place for reading and studying simply reflected the attitude my parents had about such activities. As I mentioned, both of my parents respected physical work over intellectual endeavors; hence, adding a quiet place for the activities of reading, reflecting, and studying was never a consideration. The house where I grew up consisted of three bedrooms (my parents shared the largest of the three rooms; my sister and I shared a smaller room that barely fit our twin beds; and my brother had his own room that fit his

bunk-beds, a dresser, a storage trunk, and a desk), a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, one bathroom, a family room, a finished basement, and a three-car garage with a workshop.

Out of these rooms, the family room would have been an ideal place for a study. However, instead of designating the family room space for intellectual activities, or for the whole family to use, my parents chose to occupy this space with my brother's pool table and my father's desk. Both of these items filled the room, leaving just enough space for my father's gun case, which stood in the northeast corner near a large picture window that received the morning sun and that looked out over the rolling countryside. This gun case held my father's small artillery of guns, twenty-two guns in all, ranging from pistols for, what he called sport, to high-powered rifles for hunting.

Although the family room would have made a fine place for reading and reflecting with its light airy feel, there were no shelves for books or chairs for reading in this room. In fact, the *family* room was more of a recreation room for the "guys" than it was a room for the family; in a sense, the room belonged to my father and brother, not my mother, sister, or me. This room is where my brother and his high school buddies spent hours upon hours playing pool and daydreaming about the girls they wanted to date, and where my father would go to concentrate on the paperwork portion of his work and pay household bills. My father and my brother, after he turned twelve, also occupied the garage and workshop area that gave them a place to get away from the confusion of the house so that they could concentrate on their hobbies, which included fixing cars, cutting stone, and building replicas of fireplaces (my father was a stone mason whose

specialty was stone fireplaces). My father also used the garage/workshop area for storing his cars, his tools, and my brother's sports equipment.

If my mother, sister, or I needed a place for entertaining friends, storing our belongings, or other activities such as reading or school work, we were to use our bedrooms or the kitchen. Since my sister and I shared a bedroom that was small and cramped, and that did not have a desk or chair, the kitchen table often doubled as our gathering and study area. The kitchen was the heart of the house. It was where everyone congregated for meals and conversation. The kitchen was a large, open room that was most always alive with the clanging of pots, the combined smells of garlic and onions, the ringing of the phone, and the coming and going of family members. In short, the kitchen was confusing, not a place for reflective thought, reading, or studying, yet it was the place that was offered to the females of my family for such activities. The lack of space for studying sent the message to my sister and me that the acts of reading, writing, and reflecting were less important and not necessary to sustain a female life. Instead, the kitchen that was specified as female space sent the message to my sister and me that the act of careful and time consuming food preparation and entertaining with food were of primary importance.

Unlike the house where I grew up, my house today has several places designated for intellectual development and minimal kitchen space. In addition to the study, each of the two bedrooms has a desk and a reading chair with ample light. The kitchen is a small, aisle kitchen that maximizes space to perform the act of cooking; there is no table and there are no chairs in my kitchen today, only countertops for food preparation (and for feeding the occasional cat who jumps on the counter). In addition to the bedrooms and

kitchen, there is a dining room for eating and socializing, a great room and a living room for entertaining, a full basement for utilitarian purposes, and a garage for housing my car and storing my lawn equipment. The point here is that even though the square footage of living space in my home of origin and my present home are about the same, my home today allocates several different areas for the acts of reading, reflecting, writing, and thinking, something that was missing in my parents' house.

In the Good Company of Books

To go along with the lack of a special place for intellectual development, books were scarce in my family of origin's house. My parents only had one small bookshelf that housed a complete set of the *World Book Encyclopedia*, a two volume dictionary, a medical reference book, a bible, a volume of children's verses by Robert Lewis Stevenson, and a couple of nameless paperbacks. We had these books because of my mother, although at the time she seemed to have very little need for books. The only materials I remember my mother reading were her three cookbooks and a few popular magazines. She kept her cookbooks close to her in the kitchen, and she subscribed to several monthly magazines, such as *The Ladies Home Journal* and *Good House-Keeping*, that she would scan for recipes and the current tips on beautifying and/or maintaining the home. My father, on the other hand, seemed not to have any use for books. I do not recall my father ever buying a book, not even as a gift. I do not recall him ever reading anything other than the newspaper, which he read for the current obituaries and the weather. In fact, when my father would see my mother reading one of her magazines, he would become upset, claiming she was wasting her time.

I do not remember missing, or wondering why we did not have, a space for the labor of intellectual work or books in my family of origin's house. I do not recall my mother or father ever telling me to read a book or study my lessons when I would complain about not having anything to do. They generally discouraged activities that required "too much sitting," as my mother would say, and encouraged me to play outdoors. Physical, not intellectual, activities filled my day as a child, activities such as working in the garden with my grandmother, cleaning the hen house, climbing trees to claim the ripest, juiciest apple or peach, racing my horse through open meadows, riding my bike on the old, dirt road in front of our house, or swimming in the Slippery Rock Creek.

My parents' apparent lack of interest in intellectual activities was also reflected in their lack of interest in buying books for, and consequently reading to, my sister and me. As a small child, I remember begging my parents to read to me.

"Daddy, read me this story?"

"Go ask your mother."

"Please, please, read me this story."

"I said no. Go ask your mother."

"Mommy, would you read me this story?"

"No."

"Pleeease."

"No, I'm too busy."

"Pleeease, Pleeease"

"NO. I have church work to do – go to bed!"

I do not recall my father ever reading to me, my brother, or sister. When I would ask my father to read to me, he would tell me to go ask my mother. When I would ask my mother, she would most often refuse, claiming that she was too busy doing other things (such as cleaning, cooking, or bookkeeping work for her church), or that she was too tired from the day's work. However, no matter how tired she was, she always seemed to have the time to read to my brother and/or help him with his homework. My parents' refusal to buy and read books to me as a child, and the fact that they did buy and read to my brother (and that my brother had a private area in his room for studying), sent the additional message that education was not as important to females as it was to males.

I like books. I have always liked books. I remember my elementary school teachers handing out order forms for books to buy that were geared towards helping and encouraging children to read and write. I would examine the summary for each book on these forms, circling the ones that interested me the most. Strangely enough most of the form was circled. I would envision myself reading these books. Just the thought of owning these books made me feel smart, important. With each order form, I would be filled with hope and excitement over the thought of buying and reading these selected books. However, each time I would ask my parents, usually my mother, if I could order the books circled, her answer was almost always a resounding "No." When I would ask why, she would simply reply that there was not enough money to spend on books; and she would quickly add that even if she did spend the money, she would not have the time to read them to me, and she believed that I was not capable of reading them myself. I want to point out that there always seemed to be money to buy other things such as baseball gloves, motorized dirt bikes, and a small hunting lodge for my father and

brother, but never money for books. I also want to mention that my mother trusted me to prepare family meals and to take care of my sister who was five years younger than me. But she did not trust that I would, or could, read. Once again, this attitude about books and reading implied that intellectual development was not that important.

Over the years I spent in grade school, I was allowed to purchase four paperback books: *The Princess's Cat*, *Scary Ghost Stories*, *Madeline in London*, and *The Children's Garden of Verse*. All are still a part of my book collection and sit on a shelf in my grandchildren's bedroom. As a child, I read these books to myself, over and over again. I read these books to my daughter as she was growing, and I often read these same books to my grandchildren today. Whenever I open one of these four books, I trace my finger over the inscription of my name that I wrote so many years ago. I remember how proud and excited I was to receive each book. I enjoy buying and receiving books. The practice of writing my name and date of purchase on the publication page of each book I collect is something that I still do today. These inscriptions signify the importance these publications have in my life; these inscriptions represent my ownership of these books.

As I reflect on the attitudes of my parents towards the use of space and the ownership of books compared with my attitude today, I am confronted with the question: What role does gender and social class play in the creation of these seemingly conflicting attitudes about the use of space and the ownership of books? I will explore the answer to this question in the following sections of this chapter.

The Social Implications of the Use of Space and the Ownership of Books:

A Critical Analysis of No Room at the Inn

In this section, I will explore how gender and social class influence the use of space and the need to own, or not to own, books within my family of origin. I will focus on gender and the use of space first, then, move onto a discussion about gender and the ownership of books.

The use of space has both gender and social class implications. As noted by scholars who research and write about the use of space, the amount and the use of space indicates the relationship between people and a person's, or group of people's, status within the home and the community. Peter Ward, a professor of history at the University of British Columbia and author of *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home*, states, "The relationship between home and home dwellers is an interactive one. [That is,] if the house is the stage on which the lives of self and family are displayed, the relations among the actors who inhabit it is one of the drama's great themes" (4). Not only does the use of space act as a "stage" for the daily performance of domestic life, it reveals the interpersonal relationships between "home dwellers"; the use of space reveals the hierarchy within the home. In her article "Space Matters! Spatial Inequality in Future Sociology," Ann Tickamyer suggests that the use of space creates and reproduces social hierarchies and inequalities, reinforce or undermine ideologies, and enable and promote some practices over others. Tickamyer asserts:

[The use of space is] 'contested, fluid and uncertain [. . .] made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries [that] are both social and spatial' The ability to control the timing and spacing of

human activities is a key component of modernity and reflects the distribution of power and the control of resources. Relations of power, structures of inequality, and practices of domination and subordination are embedded in spatial design and relations. Thus spatial arrangements are both products and sources of other forms of inequality. They can be studied as the context for better scrutinized systems of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual privilege, as a formative factor in such systems, and as their outcomes. (806)

The use of space in relationship to the actors, or family members in my case, represents the value and authority the males had over the females. Unlike my mother, sister, and I who had to share space with all members of the family, my father and brother had their own private space for entertaining friends, working on their hobbies, and relaxing in a quiet spot. My father and brother also had command over the other areas of the house as well. For example, if they needed to use the kitchen (the space mostly designated for the females in the house), then we, my mother, sister, and I, would have to go to another part of the house. The fact that males in my family had control over and seemingly more right to use the space in the house signifies their importance and authority over the females in the family.

The theme of space as an indicator of male authority and social class standing is a common theme that has been, and still is in many cases, represented, supported, and reinforced by mainstream culture through various forms of media, such as movies, television, and literature. In the movie *Dead Poet's Society*, the study, where Neil eventually commits suicide, is Neil's father's domain. Likewise, on popular 1950s

television shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, the study is the father's domain. And in the Hollywood production of *My Fair Lady*, adapted from the play *Pygmalion*, by George Bernard Shaw, the study belongs to Henry Higgins. In all of these cases, the study is a symbol of social rank, authority, and control. Not only are these studies physically substantial with their rich, mahogany paneled walls, lined with shelves of books, and large impressive desks, which signify an affluent social position, but these studies are also places where each respective father figure executes authority over the child figure: Mr. Perry takes his son, Neil, to the study to discipline Neil's defiant behavior; Ward often takes his sons, Wally and/or Beaver, to his study to express dissatisfaction with and to reprimand the boys' behavior; and Higgins exercises his knowledge on language usage over Eliza Doolittle, an uneducated, poorly spoken young woman, in his study.

Supporting the idea of the use of space as an indicator of social rank and authority, Winifred Gallagher reveals, in *House Thinking: A Room-By-Room Look at How We Live*, that a library in a home has a long history of being a status symbol of the wealthy and that the study, or library as it was popularly called, "with its desk, books, maps, and globe [has] long been the province of male aristocrats" (209). In the media examples given in the previous paragraph, the three authoritarian figures are depicted as educated and from the upper class (Henry Higgins) or middle class (Mr. Perry and Ward Clever) through the portrayal of their respective studies that are richly furnished and embrace full libraries.

In my family of origin, the social class issue is displayed simply by not having a space designated in the home for intellectual activity and by not having many books. As I mentioned, the house where I grew up did not have a study filled with shelves of books or

a place specifically designated for intellectual development. However, there was space designated for physical activities such as playing pool and working on cars and the like. The lack of space for intellectual development carries the implication that these types of activities were not important to my parents' day-to-day lives and that my parents had little or no need for educating themselves and their children. My parents preferred to use the space they had for other types of activities that revolved around physical activities, and the activities that occupied the space in the house were geared more toward the males than the females in the family, except for the kitchen.

The kitchen is often associated with women and women's work. If there was any place in the house where my mother reigned, it was the kitchen; however, there were times that my father and brother would usurp my mother's authority in the kitchen. If my father or brother wanted to entertain their friends in the kitchen, then my mother's role in the kitchen became that of a servant, waiting on the needs of the men. Here, again, the social and gender issue raises its head. Like many members of the working class, the kitchen was the heart of my family's home, a place where friends and other members of the family would gather for food, drink, and conversation. All entertaining of guests and all food preparation performed in the kitchen were considered "women's work," hence, done by the females of my family.

In contrast to my family's use of the kitchen, according to Peter Ward, upper and middle classes, until recently, used the kitchen for food preparation only, and most often the food preparation was done by hired help. The upper and middle classes, for the most part, did not use the kitchen as a place for entertaining; entertaining would have taken place in the dining room or *parlor*, a more formal way of saying *living room*. It is

important to mention that with the advancement of technology and women's rights, the kitchen, today, in a middle-class family is often part of a family room, also known as a great-room, and used to entertain guests (72-74). However, during the 1950s and 1960s when I was growing up, this was not the case. Ward points out that entertaining in the kitchen was a mark of the working class and families who lived in rural areas. He also notes that opposed to the working class and working class rural dwellers who entered their homes most often through the back doors that led into the kitchens, the main entrances to upper or middle-class homes were most often through doors in the front of the house that opened into an entrance hall or vestibule. In these households, the back doors, which most often opened into the kitchens also, were used by servants – or other members from the working classes (73).

Although Ward's research focuses on Canadian family life, his observations hold true for my family of origin. Opposed to Ward's description of the formality of the upper and middle classes, entering the house from the front door, entertaining guests in the parlor, and using the back door for the hired help, my family's working-class lifestyle was quite informal. The main entrance to the house where I grew up was the back door, which opened into the kitchen. The house of my family of origin had a front door, even a small entrance hall, but there was not an easy way to access the front door from the outside of the house, so the front door was seldom used. My parents rarely used the dining room or living room for entertaining guests; most of the entertaining took place in the kitchen. And my parents did not have any hired domestic help.

Just as the use of space can be used as an indicator of a person's social class, the ownership of books also can reveal a person's social class standing, insofar as the

ownership, or the lack of ownership, can expose a person's attitude about intellectual activities such as reading, research, thinking, and writing. If a person values intellectual development, then that person is more likely to own and use books. On the other hand, if a person does not value intellectual development, then that person is more likely not to own or use books. In short, the way a person feels about the necessity to own and/or use books can divulge that person's attitude about education itself. As I mentioned, my parents owned very few books and believed in the power of physical labor over intellectual efforts, and they did not encourage their children to excel in school, which points to their attitude concerning formal education. But is their belief in the physical over the intellectual a marker of their social class? The answer: yes and no. Let me explain.

According to Robert Hughes and Maureen Perry-Jenkins, in their article "Social Class Issues in Family Life Education," education is one of the distinguishing factors between social classes, and attitudes about education are determined by a person's set of values (176). Utilizing Marvin Kohn's research on social class and family life, Hughes and Perry-Jenkins explain how a person's occupation helps develop a value system to which a person subscribes. For example, if a person's occupation requires a more conceptual approach, then that person will find value in intellectual activities that enhance his or her ability to work conceptually; e.g., people who hold bachelors and advanced degrees tend to hold professional positions, such as medical doctors, lawyers, and university professors, that require them to think abstractly, critically, and reflectively. On the other hand, if a person's occupation requires a more concrete approach, then that person will find value in physical activities that enhance his or her ability to work

concretely; e.g., people who have little or no education past high school tend to work at unskilled or skilled trades, such as garbage collectors, janitors, secretaries, retail clerks, and construction workers, that require them to follow a set of standardized rules and work physically with their hands and bodies. I will explain in more detail how a person's occupation helps develop a value system in the next section, entitled *On the Island of the Mistaken Zygote: A critical Analysis*. What I want to point out here is that my parents paid and unpaid occupations centered on physical activities that followed standardized rules and had tangible results. Since my parents' occupations required them to follow set rules and produce tangible results, according to Hughes and Perry-Jenkins' idea about how value systems are developed, my parents would value physical activities more than intellectual ones. If Hughes and Perry-Jenkins are correct, then perhaps my parents' occupations helped develop their value system that did not recognize a need for a space for performing intellectual activities, the need to own and/or use books, and, most of all, the need for a formal education, especially for females, as valuable for sustaining life.

Summing It Up

Why all the fuss about space and books? First of all, space and how it is utilized not only influences how people understand themselves and the world around them, but also the use of space and how it is used reflects a set of beliefs, telling something about the people who use the space. Gaston Bachelard, a noted European philosopher and author of *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, suggests that Carl Jung conceptualized domestic structures as possible fruitful replications or images of mental structures offering grounds for "taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul (xxxvii). Following Bachelard's assertion about

Jung's idea about the house as "a tool for analysis," it is not surprising that houses and their spaces constitute "archetypes" of the psyche.

Secondly, in addition to employing the use of space within a home to understand its occupants, the home is not only a spatial setting for the acting out of power relationships between the dwellers, but also the home is a place where gender structure of society is reinforced. For example, home is often identified with particular representations of women and with a particular version of femininity that places females in subordinate positions. Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe point out, in their article "'Home'-making: On the Spatiality of Daily Social Reproduction in Contemporary Middle-Class Britain," that a home is not just a gendered space but "a space which is critical to the gender constitution of society." According to Gregson and Lowe, "Home space is shown to be inscribed with specific visions of woman, to define women, and to do so in relation to and through the work of domestic labor which takes place with the house, that is through the tasks of social reproduction" (226).

My father was the head of the household with my brother second in command. Their authority over my mother, sister, and me extended from my parents' belief that males are more logical and rational than females. Overall, both of my parents believed that females were less capable, less talented, than males when it came to exerting themselves physically and intellectually. Since females were not quite as capable as their male counterparts, females, evidently, required less space, or maybe it was not a matter of requiring, but a matter of worth; someone with little worth needs little space. This is not to say that my parents did not see any value in women. My parents believed that women were more suited than men to handle the domestic chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and

caring for others, especially children. This, too, is represented by the use of space in the house where I grew up. Men had control of the house, while the women occupied the kitchen. In short, males had authority over females in my family of origin. This attitude about the relationship between males and females is not new. It is commonly known as patriarchal thinking.

Bell hooks describes patriarchy in *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* as “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance” (18). hooks also points out that patriarchal thinking is not limited to men; that is, “women can be as wedded to patriarchal thinking and action as men” (23). In reference to my parents and the use of space, patriarchal thinking is displayed through who allows whom to occupy a room and for whose purpose and interest. The family room and garage space were designated for, first and foremost, my father, then my brother. This implies that my father’s and brother’s need for such a space was greater than my mother’s, sister’s, or mine. However, the use of space was never discussed as a family. The decision was my father’s. I do not recall anyone ever questioning the use of this space. It was what it was – a place for the men in the family and not the women. Thus, the idea that males should have sovereignty over females was not questioned.

My parents’ belief in a male-dominated hierarchical system seemed steadfast. Since my parents did not own or use books, it is doubtful that they ever read about, or even heard of (let alone evaluated), Aristotle’s view of women as “a defective man,” or how his view was rediscovered and adapted by Christian theologians in medieval Europe, or

how Freud extended Aristotle's view by claiming the lack of a penis made women anatomically defective. It is also safe to assume that no one in my family ever heard of, let alone read, Simone DeBeauvoir's ideas about the inequality and "otherness" of women in her book, *The Second Sex*; nor would they have read Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she critiques Freud's work by claiming Freudianism as "the philosophical underpinning that sustained the 'feminine mystique,' a belief that told women that it was normal to be passive and dependent and abnormal to have intellectual ambitions, through the 1940s and 1950s" (qtd. in Donovan 104-105); nor would they have read Mary Daly's book, *The Church and the Second Sex*, where she analyzes women and religion, exposing the misogynous nature of the Christian religion, and where she advocates the overthrow of the established church and its doctrines.

Within my home of origin, as illustrated above, the use of space and who got to use the space reveals two important aspects: 1) the lack of space and the lack of books reveal my family's attitude concerning intellectual activities, thus, their attitudes about education as not being important for sustaining life, especially for females, and 2) who controlled and used particular spaces within the home sent a silent, but not insignificant, message to each family member who resided in my home of origin that reinforced oppressive social standards. The fact that the female members of the house had less control over the use of space, and that the space they did occupy (the kitchen) had a long history as being a woman's place for the caring and nurturing of others, sent the message that the females of the house were less important than the males and that the females were to tend to the needs of the male members of the family.

“A Room of [My] Own,” Relived

So here I am. Writing this portion of a dissertation about how my family of origin has influenced my perspective on intellectual development through the use of space and the ownership of books. It's Sunday around 4:00 p.m., and I've been writing all day. I'm tired. My head hurts. But I must continue because I am under a time constraint. I pause, just for a moment, to look around the room that started this discussion about space and books. As I survey the room, marveling over my collection of books and breathing in the atmosphere, the feeling of contentment, of satisfaction, returns. My mind drifts back to the computer screen in front of me, and I ask myself, "How has my parents' attitude about the aspects of space and books impacted my beliefs, my value system, insofar as the pursuit of knowledge? How has their apparent lack of interest in education prompted me to move beyond my wildest imagination of ever going to college, let alone finishing my doctoral degree?"

The breeze from the window seems a bit cooler than earlier today, and it grabs my attention. I look out the windows before me only to see that the sun is no longer shining. In its place are heavy, ominous clouds, signifying a brewing storm. Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major is playing softly in the background. I know its allegro maestoso, its andante, and its andante vivo assai. I think of my father who loved Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart" and how I used to moan every time my father turned up the volume on the stereo so that he could hear each twang and nasal sound. My father would give me a side-glance as he'd snicker and sing along with old Hank. My mind turns to my mother and how she, too, did not enjoy the whining of country-western, but

how she would defend my father's choice of music, saying that I better be quiet and let my father be.

My fingers start to glide over the keyboard of the computer in time with Mozart as I move from side to side with every beat. I am tired, but I feel light, relieved to be almost finished with this section of chapter two. I am confident because I know the answers to these questions are simple, yet complex.

The surface response to the question of how the use of space and ownership of books influenced me in the past, and still influences me today, is simple: that is, as a female in a house ruled by men, I did not have a “space of my own.” Not having a physical space of my own was matched by not having a voice of my own. In fact, I did not have a voice. “I was taught the words of a woman are almost worthless” (Zandy, *Calling Home* vi). I felt oppressed and needed to be heard, needed a way out. My family's way was not my way. I wanted something different for my life from what my mother and grandmothers had. I wanted to be my own person. I wanted sovereignty over my own life. I wanted a voice: “[H]ow much conviction as to the importance of what one has to say, one's right to say it. And the will, the measureless store of belief in oneself to be able to come to, cleave to, find the form for one's own life comprehensions” (Olsen 27). After many years of trials and tribulations, I came to believe, at age thirty-four, that education was the “voyage out.” How I came to believe that education was the way out is more complex and lies beneath the surface of years of social conditioning, conditioning that has stayed with me through my sojourn in the academy. Since this change is complex and since it will take a lot of space to explain, I will reveal how social conditioning changed my perspective about education in the following chapters.

Once again my attention is drawn away from my writing and to my surroundings. The sky is now dark and the rain is no longer pounding against the side windows. I hear the softness of a gentle mist as it hits the leaves and smell the combined scents of musky wood from the dampened trees and the wet, dirt road that passes in front of my house. I glance down at the clock in the lower right hand corner of my computer: 9:40 p.m. My eyes are heavy but my mind is active and wanders to a scene from long ago:

My mother is angry. I have done, or said, something that upset her, exactly what I did, or said, I cannot recall. But her anger is not new to me; I seem to always upset her. I am trying to apologize for what I have done or said, but she does not seem to want to forgive me. I hear her frustration as she mimics me in a low, whiny voice, "You're sorry, you're sorry. I'm tired of hearing you say you're sorry." I struggle to see this memory in my mind's eye but can't. This memory is more a feeling than a visual image: a feeling of being lost, of being alone, of not fitting in.

The Birth Certificate

I'm ten years-old and in my parent's bedroom, rummaging through the bottom drawer of the blond-wood dresser that stands against the north wall of their room between two narrow windows that hang about five feet from the floor. It's summer, sometime in July, and about 4:15 in the afternoon. My mother is preparing dinner. As usual, my father will walk through the kitchen door at 4:45 p.m., and if the table is not set for dinner, he will start yelling at my mother for slacking on her duties. We eat promptly at 5:00 p.m. The afternoon sun is filtering through the windows, casting a yellowish glow. I can hear the muffled voices of my brother and his friends outside, playing baseball in the field next to our house. I can also hear my mother's voice, but cannot

make out what she is saying; she's talking to her sister, I think, on the phone. I stop for a moment to make sure she is not coming toward the bedroom. No. She's on the phone all right, and the phone is in the kitchen (in those days phones were still attached to the wall, so I knew as long as she was talking, she was still in the kitchen). I continue my search through the drawer. I am hunting for my birth certificate because I am going to prove to myself, once and for all, that I am NOT a real member of this family, that I must have been adopted.

"Ahhhh, there it is," I say to myself, "the metal box." In my mind's ear I hear my mother saying, "Never touch this box because the contents are very important and would be difficult to replace." With a steady hand I slowly open the lid. I stop just long enough to make sure my mother is still on the phone. She is. I start to sift through the papers in the box, glancing at each one but not really reading them. Then I see it: my birth certificate. I take a deep breath and lift it out of the box. I read it. And then read it again. I'm stunned with disbelief. "This is not right," I say to myself, "someone, my mother no doubt, must have anticipated my curiosity and changed this document."

The certificate read -- as plain as the nose on my face:

Elaine M. Kelly

Girl

Born: July 4, 1953

in Jamison Memorial Hospital, New Castle, Pa.

to Eleanor G. Kelly, formerly Eleanor G. Pearl (Mother) and

Elmer A. Kelly (Father)

"Agggh," I gasp aloud, "I know this is wrong. I am definitely not part of this family."

At Home, Nowhere: Thoughts Behind the “The Birth Certificate”

The feeling of *fitting in* is a feeling that I rarely have. I remember being about ten years old, rummaging through my parents’ dresser drawers, searching for my birth certificate. I was convinced that I was adopted, that my parents could not possibly be my *real* parents because we simply had nothing in common. Our ideas about the world seemed, at least by my ten-year-old perspective, in perpetual opposition. I did not agree with my parents’ racist and sexist view of the world, which was supported by their interpretation of the religion they supported. This religious view held that Caucasians, particularly Caucasian males, were in power by divine right. That is, God gave white males authority over the Earth because these men were better equipped in intellect, reason, and body to handle such a great responsibility. According to this view, woman was created from man (which by the way is an ironic way to explain creation, given that all people, including men, enter this world, as we know it, through woman, not the other way about). Woman (Eve) was created as a second thought of God’s to keep man (Adam) company and to be his subordinate. Man was created in the image of God, which made God and man identical. God was the father who knew best, and the fact that Jesus was a male was no accident. My parents held fast to this Christian model of creation and as a consequence believed all that it implied about the relationships between people. By the time I was eight, I had started to question the validity of this religious model for organizing authority. However, overtly questioning the faith brought on greater conflict between my parents and me. Most of the conflict was internal because my parents refused to discuss the issue with me, so I was left to deal with my questions on my own. My parents shut the door on any discussion concerning this topic and demanded that I remove

all foolish thoughts that I had about the legitimacy of the Christian religion from my head. End of story.

However, it was not the end of the story for me. Although I rarely expressed my suspicions about my parents' church, and although I was forced to be an active member until I left home at eighteen, I did not agree with the doctrine of the church and held many questions about its rationale to myself, questions like: Why is Adam not held responsible for his own actions? Why is Eve the scapegoat? If all human life enters this world through a woman (and Jesus is no exception), then why does the creation story portray woman entering life through a man? And who's to say that the Pope is always right in his assumptions? Isn't he human? And aren't all humans subject to error?

At the core of our, my parents and my, religious opposition rested our opposing belief in the value of people, especially women. My parents, and other adult members of the family, were trying to teach me the value of a woman was less than the value of a man, the words and ideas of a woman were not important, and, most of all, a woman's worth was delineated by a man. I did not agree with this idea that women were somehow, and in any way, less than men. Even though I would often assert my belief about the equality of women (and people of color to a lesser degree), my voice, my opinion, was never accepted or respected. As a result, my parents seemed to be constantly surveying me, puzzling over how I fit into the family, sometimes casting me an icy stare, at other times abusing me with their words, or at worst, simply ignoring me. Because I believed in the value of women as equal to men, my family condemned me, and with the support of their God declared that I was a foolish, stupid child, and that they feared for my well-being and that someday, they hoped, I would learn my place. I knew my place, but *my*

place was not the same place that my family had carved out for me. I seemed to be the only one in the family who believed in the equality of women and this belief set me apart from my family.

Because my parents did not see men and women as equally equipped, they saw many of my goals as unattainable, claiming that my dreams were just silly, female whims:

I'm eight years-old and passionately say to my mother, "I want to join the Peace Corps when I get older."

She laughs and says, "You silly girl. You could NEVER join the Peace Corps. The idea is just plain unrealistic."

A few days later I declare to my mother, "I want to be a veterinarian!"

But my mother deflates my dream by simply asserting, "You're not smart enough."

So a few days after that, I proclaim to my mother, "OK. If I can't join the Peace Corps, and if I am not smart enough to be a veterinarian, then I want to be an airline attendant."

But my mother squelches that idea too, proclaiming, "You're too short."

My mother stopped my foolishness, as she called it, by telling me I was only average, at best, and that I should not hope nor dream for anything past finding a *good* man, like my father, to take care of me. I tried soliciting the support of my father, telling him all about my childhood dreams and what my mother had said, but he neither supported nor refuted my desires or my mother's claims. He simply ignored me.

It seemed as if no one in my family ever heard my voice, let alone took me seriously about my hopes and dreams to educate myself, or to travel the world, or to make a positive contribution to our community and beyond. I stopped sharing my childhood dreams with my mother and father after the series of episodes previously mentioned. However, not sharing these dreams did not mean that I accepted my parents' attitudes about me or about the world. In my heart, I felt their view of the world was limited. But I had no way of proving the limitation of this view, only gut feelings that spoke to the very depths of my spirit. Clarissa Pinkola Estes would call these gut feelings my instinctive or intuitive self; my gut feelings, according to Estes, were messages from my unconscious self, telling me to trust myself, that the "great power, intuition, is composed of lightning-fast inner seeing, inner hearing, inner sensing, and inner knowing" (76). Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule would explain my gut feelings as "the subjectivist position on knowing" (68); in other words, Belenky et. al. would say that my gut feelings were my inner voice and that at this stage of my development, as a "subjective" knower, "truth [. . .] is an intuitive reaction — something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed" (69). For me at that time in my life, these gut feelings were just that: gut feelings, not to be shared for fear of being ridiculed, not to be acted upon for fear of being completely alienated from the people whom I called family. I did not have the knowledge to understand these gut feelings or help me past my fear. As a result of not knowing how to conquer my fears, it took nearly twenty-nine years, two broken marriages, the birth of my daughter, and several bouts with severe depression before I could assert myself and break through the boundaries that my parents, and

consequently the rest of my family, placed around me for, what they claimed, my own good.

On the Island of the Mistaken Zygote: A Critical Analysis

Yes. I was, and in many ways still am, a “Mistaken Zygote” within my family of origin. What is a Mistaken Zygote? Clarissa Pinkola Estes created the story of “The Mistaken Zygote” to emphasize the message found in the tale of the “Ugly Duckling” in order to help women come to terms with the feelings of being an outsider in their own family of origins. Both of these stories help explain why women might feel like aliens in their families. The message in both stories is simple; at some point in time, usually at birth, one child was confused with another child and, hence, given to the wrong family. During the childhood of these misplaced children, they are faced with the realization that they do not fit into the family to whom they were given; perhaps the child’s feathers were a different color, or the way he or she spoke sounded different from all the others in the family. These children were ridiculed for their differences and made to feel like they were the problem. But with time and patience, the misplaced child realizes that his or her true family is not the family of origin, but a different family who lives somewhere else. Once the child realizes the mistake, that child, who is probably an adult by this time, can leave the family of origin to join the family to whom he or she belongs (190-196).

As I said, I was, and in many respects still am, the “Mistaken Zygote,” the ugly duckling, of my family. I talked differently: from a very early age, six or seven, my parents told me that I better find a good man to marry, but from this same early age, I talked about experiencing life beyond being a housewife (I wanted to join the Peace Corps, and experience other cultures). I acted differently: although my parents wanted me

to spend time outdoors, they also wanted me to act like a “lady” (sit still, stay clean, and don’t argue), but I liked climbing trees, playing with my brother’s match-box trucks in the dirt, and speaking out when I thought something was unfair. Most of all, I thought differently: my parents believed in external affirmation (an outside approval), but I believed in internal affirmation (the acceptance of self). Estes’ would say that as a child, I was in touch with my true self, with my “Wild Woman” spirit; that is, I was attempting, at an early age to live “a natural life [. . .] one in which the criatura, creature, has innate integrity and healthy boundaries” (6), and that my parents were trying to restrain this natural spirit out of the fear of losing control over me (3). My parents’ unwillingness to acknowledge my “natural” self or, more specifically, my questions about religion and the subordination of women, and my desire to be more than a housewife, was their way of silencing my voice and preparing me for a role in life that they believed to be the natural order of things.

Yes, there was a time while I was growing up that I believed that one of the nurses at Jamison Memorial Hospital, the hospital where I was born, had confused me with the Kelly’s baby, and that I ended up in the wrong family. As the story of the birth certificate shows, I realized these differences between my parents and me at an early age; however, although I noticed these differences, I could not explain them, other than to say I was not the natural child of Elmer A. and Eleanor G. Kelly. I believed that I had been misplaced. After finding the birth certificate and coming to terms with what it revealed, that I was indeed the child of my parents, I had to find another explanation for our differences. Although the stories of the “Mistaken Zygote” and the “Ugly Ducking” are stories that can help a woman get past the initial stages of the feeling of not belonging

that was cultivated by her family of origin and reinforced by the social class she was ascribed, they do not completely explain her situation. These two stories talk about the placement of a female in a family as a mistake, which implies that there is a place in society where she belongs, and all she has to do is find this place or have this place find her.

Although the sentiment in these two stories is comforting in a romantic sense, it is not that easy to find one's place when the culture in which a person lives has a long history of hostility towards women and the working classes. This hostility is so well woven into the fabric of societal thought that if a person is not critically scrutinizing the influences of his or her culture and how these influences help build his or her perception of the world, he or she will not recognize the influences of the culture and view his or her beliefs as innate and not be able to, as Paulo Freire says, "read the world." That is, if people do not understand how their cultures have influenced their perspectives, then their perspectives seem to be the *only* correct ways of looking at the world. Looking at the world from one perspective offers limited opportunities, or places, for the 'others,' or the "Mistaken Zygote," inside the accepted dimension. In the introduction to Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's book, *Literacy: Reading the Word and The World*, Henry Giroux states, "To be able to name one's experience is part of what it [means] to 'read' the world and to begin to understand the political nature of the limits and possibilities that make up the larger society" (7). In this sense, a person needs to be able to question his or her own beliefs and the influences of these beliefs in order to understand the self. Understanding the self can then lead to understanding the differences of others, which in turn can help a

person open up to and accept others' ideas and ways of doing things, which can open up a space for those who are the "Mistaken Zygote" in society as well as in a family.

My parents, as far as I can remember, seldom, if ever, scrutinized the influences of their culture on their beliefs, nor did they question authority figures very often; for example, my parents never questioned the validity of the Christian story of creation that deposited a hierarchal system that not only subjugated women but also, according to Joseph Campbell, a noted scholar of mythology and author of numerous books and articles on the subject, corrupted the whole world (*Joseph Campbell and The Power of the Myth*); they never questioned the arbitrary rule at Children's Hospital (in 1959) that disallowed them to stay overnight with their two year-old daughter, my sister Janet, who had to stay at this hospital, strapped in a covered crib after she underwent major surgery for a cleft palate, and who still vividly remembers the trauma of that experience; and my parents never questioned my first-grade teacher's assertion that I was not working to my full potential; they never questioned her observation or the school's curriculum. My parents just accepted the teacher's perspective as the absolute truth and blamed me for not trying and demanded that I work harder. The unwillingness of my parents to scrutinize and question juxtaposed against my constant scrutinizing and questioning was one of the main differences between us, and at the heart of why I felt like a misfit in my family.

Neither my mother nor my father questioned authority figures. They both played "by the rules," by someone else's rules, believing that playing by the rules awarded them respectability and a chance for a good life. They also believed that these rules were set in stone and were the *natural* order of the world because they did not question their

interpretation of the natural order of things. Perhaps the reason my parents never seemed to question their cultural beliefs was due to the fact that they saw little or no value in reading and reflective thought. Michael Zweig suggests in *The Working Class Majority, America's Best Kept Secret* that there are power systems in place that most people do not see. He says that these systems go unnoticed because we, the people, are too busy, “running on automatic pilot” so to speak, trying to make ends meet. As we go about our lives, indifferent to these “invisible power structures,” we start to internalize them, believing that they are innate, thus, believing that they cannot, and in many cases should not, be changed. Zweig states:

The power of inertia tends to perpetuate existing ways of doing things and existing relationships [. . .]. Invisible force fields of power are built into the structures that hold society together, giving it shape, setting the paths for our opportunity, and setting the limits as well. We tend to take these contours for granted, internalize them, and think of them as the natural order. (12)

Although Zweig is talking in terms of economic power structures and the working class, his idea here is reminiscent of Freire and Macedo's, insofar as the need to question, to become critical thinkers and readers in order to “read the world” and end oppression. I am fully convinced that my parents did not see, let alone understand, the social structure that kept them in their place as working-class citizens of the United States.

My parents had little need, nor time, to be critical thinkers and readers insofar as critically thinking and questioning the social constructs and social norms of their time. They also had little need, nor time, to read various texts from philosophers, theorists, and

the like. My parents were busy people; they worked physically hard to build a better home for their family. Because my parents worked long, hard, exhausting days, the time and energy it takes to critically think and read just was not there. They were too preoccupied with the day to day tedium of supporting a family of five to spend time on abstract thought. Abstract thought did not put a roof over their heads nor pay their bills. Physical labor with concrete results is what they knew and how they made their living. Because my parents were not critical thinkers and readers, they did not question the ideas of gender and social class inequality.

Being concerned parents who wanted their children to grow up “right,” my parents tried to impose their beliefs onto their children. As I mentioned in the section titled, *The Social Implications of the Use of Space and the Ownerships of Books: A Critical Analysis of No Room at the Inn*, at the core of my parents’ beliefs rested a value system, a value system that many scholars would claim is constructed indirectly through social class. Most scholars believe that value systems are not a direct result from social class, but rather value systems are closely related to people’s occupations. Melvin Kohn, a noted scholar who is perhaps one of the most well known social scientists to examine the implications of social class concerning family life, believes that parenting styles have to do with the value system held by the mother and the father, and that these values are mostly determined by occupations. That is, according to Melvin Kohn, social class, although not mutually exclusive, is not the direct predictor of parenting style, but rather the fact that social classes, such as the middle and working-class parents, differ in their values regarding appropriate child behavior and that the difference in values across class groups are a function of occupational conditions. Kohn also points out that occupations

differ, specifically for the middle and working class, on three key characteristics: 1) the degree to which one manipulates ideas and symbols versus physical objects; 2) the degree to which a job requires flexibility, thought, and judgment versus a standardization of rules; and 3) the closeness of supervision. Kohn suggests that these work experiences then get translated into values surrounding one's beliefs regarding self-direction and conformity or internal versus external standards that determine behavior (475-477).

Value systems are created through the type of work someone does, and that occupations are usually indicators of a person's social class. Said another way, occupational needs dictate what a person values and understands as important to learn, so if a person's occupation requires critical and creative thought (or self-direction), then that person will value those types of activities. In contrast, if a person's occupation requires conformity to authority, then following the rules is valued.

As I have mentioned, my father was a stone mason most of his adult life, and my mother was a housewife, the subordinate of my father. My father's trade was geared towards manipulating physical objects over ideas and symbols; it followed a set of standardized building rules; and he worked under the supervision of a boss, who was, by the way, my mother's father. Likewise, my mother's duties as a housewife, living in a rural setting, required more physical activities than manipulating ideas and symbols; she was governed by a set of standardized rules set by the church and the males in the family; and she was a subordinate to her husband, my father, and later to my brother. Thus, Kohn's observation seems to be useful when trying to understand the motives behind my parents' attitudes about child rearing: my parents both valued physical labor over intellectual activities, as reflected in the section above about space and books; they both

valued “standardization of rules,” evidenced by their attitudes about the church and other authority figures; and finally, they each had to deal with supervision – my father to his boss and my mother to her husband.

Summing It Up

As a child I did not understand my parents’ critical attitude toward me and others, and I often condemned them in the silence of my own mind. Their lack of confidence in me was not only heartbreaking, but it was also confusing. On one hand, I had an internal belief that anything was possible if I would try hard enough; on the other hand, I had my parents, the two people who I look toward for support and guidance, expressing their belief that I was limited in my abilities. I became so confused that I started to internalize my family’s lack of confidence in me. They believed that I was odd, not right in some way, so I started believing they were right and that I should conform to their expectations. In order to conform, I had to bury my Wild Woman, my knowing soul, my instinctive nature; I had to bury my true identity and become someone whom I am not. According to Estes, a woman without the “Wild Woman” – “a knowing soul” – is “without ears to hear her soultalk or to register the chiming of her own inner rhythms [. . .], her inner eyes are closed by some shadowy hand, and large parts of her days are spent in semi-paralyzing ennue or else wishful thinking [. . .]. Without the Wild Woman, a woman is silent when she is in fact on fire” (7-8). Mary Pipher would agree with Estes, asserting a woman who suppresses a part of her identity, trying to become someone whom she is not, denies parts of herself. Pipher claims, “To totally accept the cultural definitions [. . .] and conform to the pressures is to kill the self” (44). Denying one’s true identity does “kill the self,” or as Estes says, the “Wild Woman nature.” This type of

behavior – trying to be someone a person is not and/or hiding parts of oneself -- often damages that person’s self-image, hence, sense of self-worth, causing that person to feel like a misfit -- silencing that one’s voice. No voice equals no identity. Or as Pipher suggests, to silence someone’s voice is to deny that person’s existence, or in other words to kill that person (44).

Without my “Wild Woman,” my ability to hear and recognize myself, I started to “dry up”; and for a while, I became voiceless, lifeless, and depressed. I felt as if I had nowhere to belong. I *almost* resigned myself to live in the “black hole” that my family had carved out for me. But my image of a limited life gnawed at me, reminding me that “baby talk with the girls in the ugly, concrete park and an exhausted husband uninterested in child rearing” (Lubrano 40) was not my cup of tea.

Conclusion: Chapter Two

As far back as I can consciously remember, I questioned, mostly within the silent confusion of my own mind, oppressive social standards. Not being allowed to express myself in meaningful ways as a child just did not make sense to me. As an adult writing this dissertation, I understand the reasons why I questioned the status quo; the pain of feeling secondary, of not having a voice in my family was stifling to me, so stifling that if I did not speak out, if I did not denounce the lifestyle of my family of origin, I would have gone mad. As I said in the first few lines of this dissertation, “It was not a choice between going and staying, but between going, sane, and staying insane” (Gilman 25). I left home in 1971 at age eighteen to embark on a journey that would take me across the terrain of peaks and valleys that would eventually lead me back to the halls of academia.

During the mid-1980s, at the peak of my confusion and in the valley of my lowest point and before the thought of returning to school entered my head, I came across several quotes from famous thinkers of our time that inspired me to examine my attitude towards life. Strangely enough these quotes were situated at the beginning of each chapter in a book called *Skiing Right*, a text used to prepare people for their full-certified ski instructor exam. The first quote that caught my eye read as follows: “Our loudest critics will be those who are bitterly afraid and internally torn in their own struggle for a meaningful fulfillment in life” (Abraham 76). At first I was offended by this quote, but it intrigued me because I knew I, just like most of the members of my family of origin, was one of the “loudest critics,” and this realization did not please me. The other quote that helped me begin to analyze and criticize the influences of my culture on my beliefs is also one of my favorites: “Understanding one’s own magical mystery is one of the teacher’s most important assets if he [or she] is to understand that everyone is thus differently equipped” (Abraham 85). When I first came upon this quote, I pondered it, wondering how understanding the self would lead to the understanding of others. The quote spoke to the “Wild Woman” deep inside of me, but I could not understand it completely, nor could I see its relevance. I sensed that the two quotes were somehow related, but I just could not make the connection at the time. It was like hearing a song in my ear, but I was not able to sing it. So I listened. I listened to the stories of others, and of my own. And the closer I listened, the more I began to hear. I started to realize, through time and close examination, how I got to be me. How I got to be me derived from a combination of events, some brought on by fate and some by design. Whether it was by fate or by design is not the important thing here; the point I am trying to make is that

through examining and questioning the things I believed to be true, to be innate, I started to understand myself. Once I started to understand myself, I became less fearful of, less threatened by, ideas or ways of doing things that were different from what I perceived to be the norm. The key word is *perceived* – I could see that my beliefs were a matter of perception. I became less critical about myself, and in turn, less critical of others who were different from me. In short, understanding myself gave me confidence and allowed me to see myself in a different light, to see myself from a different perspective, which allowed me “to understand that everyone is thus differently equipped” (Abraham 85), helping me to “read the world” and not to be one of the “loudest critics.”

As I began to “read the world” and realize the differences in myself and others, I also started to see how my family of origin had influenced my value system and how I saw myself. At this time, I also realized, as Audre Lorde asserts, in her essay “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” “my silences had not protected me,” and started to ask myself the questions that Lorde suggests each woman should ask herself: what is it that I needed to say?; and what are the tyrannies I have “to swallow day by day and attempt to make my own, until I sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (79).

I started to uncover the many layers of socially constructed family influences. I also started to realize how my school experiences up to that point reinforced not only my parents’ beliefs, but these experiences were also the product of a socially constructed system that kept people in their place in their oppressive social class. As I gained confidence in myself, I started to believe that I had something worthwhile to give, and I wanted to share my newly found confidence with others. I wanted to tell my story so that others could see themselves within my experiences and triumph over their oppressive

state of living. I wanted the world to know that there was more than one way to look at a situation. It was at this time in my life that I realized in order to accomplish all that I wanted to do, I would have to face my greatest fear, my fear of failing, and return to school. I knew in my heart that “transformation of silence into language and action” was through education.

In the next chapter I will discuss my experience as a female student from a working class background and how these experiences have influenced the way I see education as a student and as a faculty member in the academy.

CHAPTER THREE: GOING TO CLASS

“Schools should not be organized for teachers to teach, but for children to learn.”

(Briggs McLean)

Introduction to Chapter Three

In this chapter, I will discuss my experience as a female student from a working-class background, how this experience has influenced the way I see education as a student, and how my home-life influenced my educational process.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I did not miss the company of books nor a room set aside for intellectual activities as a child, nor did I understand the impact of not having books or a place for study on my perspective about education. Maybe if my family of origin had encouraged intellectual activities such as reading, writing, and reflecting as I was growing up, I might have had a more positive outlook about school. But my parents did not stress a formal education, especially for my sister and me. Because they did not stress the positive aspects of “claiming an education,” it was hard for me as a child to see the benefits of going to school. I did not like school as a child. School frightened me from the start; I remember my first day of school and how terrified I was to leave home.

The Bus Stop

I'm six years-old, and it's my first day of school. I'm scared, but I dare not confess this fear to my older brother who is in charge of me as we walk about a mile down our country road to the bus stop. The morning is cool, so I tighten my sweater around my neck. I notice the pale, yellow sunlight streaking through the mist that rises from the fields that line the road. As I clench my lunch box to my chest, with the Walt

Disney Technicolor picture of Aura and her three fairy godmothers, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, I turn around to make sure my home is still there, searching the scene for the figure of my mother. But I can barely see the house, let alone my mother. “Where is she,” I wonder. “What if I never see my home again?” I reach down to make sure that the thin piece of rope with a two-by-six inch cardboard-like paper is still hanging around my neck. I’m told not to remove this tag because it identifies where I live and the bus I am riding to and from school. My brother tells me that if I lose this tag, I will be left at school to die. “To die,” I hear echoing through my head.

I look up at my brother, but he is preoccupied with his buddy Wayne who has joined our walk to the bus stop. Wayne and my brother are calling each other names, like “sissy” and “girl,” while laughing and pushing each other. They have no space for me. To them, I am just an annoyance, a pesky little sister, and a girl. To my brother and his friends, girls have “cooties”; they’re “stupid,” and do “nonsensical” things. I watch them jab back and forth at each other, while I wonder what is going to happen to me today, wondering if I will ever see my mother again. I’ve never been on a bus. In fact, I have never been away from home without at least one of my parents. I am frightened. And I am silent. Thoughts race through my head: “What happens if I cannot find the right bus when it’s time to go home? What happens if no one knows who I am or where I live?” I do not speak these thoughts to my brother because he would just ridicule and tease me.

Once on the bus, my brother tells me to sit in a particular seat near the front of the bus. I obey. He and Wayne continue on to the back of the bus.

Now I feel totally alone. I slide across the seat to the window and press my face against the cold glass. A tear falls down my cheek, and I hold my lunch box and my ticket close to my heart as the bus pulls away from the stop.

I do not recall what happened after my bus left the stop. Nor do I remember arriving at school or entering the classroom for the first time. In fact, most of my early school experience is a blur. Snapshot images here and there pop into my mind's eye -- a dimly lit hallway, a green and white checkered tile floor, standing single file in a lunch line of girl, boy, girl, boy -- but nothing too substantial, just fleeting, hazy images. What I remember, however, about my early school years is the feeling of being out of place, out of step with what appeared to be, at the time, the rest of the class.

Leaving home to enter first grade, without at least one of my parents, going to a place I had never been, was terrifying. My parents did not prepare me for my first day of school nor did they seem to take my fear of starting school too seriously; they did not drive me to the school building or introduce me to my first-grade teacher; nor did they take me to the first-day orientation for beginning students (all things that I would do years later for my daughter so that she would not experience the same discomfort when entering school for the first time). When I expressed my concerns about starting school, my parents just laughed and said that I would be all right, adding that my brother rode the bus to school for the last four years and never seemed to have a problem and that he always returned home unharmed. Although my parents offered these words as a means of reassurance, their words did not eliminate my fear of leaving home to go to school.

Soon after my first day of school, my fear of leaving home turned into a fear of failure, of not succeeding in the strange, new world of school. Richard Meyer, in *Stories*

from the Heart: Teachers and Students Researching Their Literacy Lives, tells a story about his first-grade reading experience and how that experience caused him to dislike reading. Although Meyer's purpose for telling his story is not to show his difficulty in school due to his social class and/or gender, nor is it to reveal how that experience influenced his attitude toward school, I mention his story because it reminds me of my personal story. Both of our stories speak of the conflict between home life and school life and how this conflict led to feelings of being out of place, of being different. More often than not, I could not see the connection between my life at home and my life at school. I do not remember feeling like I belonged, and I always seemed to fall short of my teacher's expectations.

As I remember it, most of the teachers who I experienced throughout my elementary and secondary school years only added to my insecure feelings; to me, they seemed insensitive, overbearing, and intolerant. As far as I can remember, none of my public school teachers took the time to understand my needs as a student; instead, they were impatient, disrespectful, and indifferent. The unpleasant attitude and lack of concern that these teachers displayed may have been caused by poor training and/or ineffective teaching practices more than social class differences. Regardless of the cause, these teachers impacted my life in such a way that I became fearful of not being able to meet their arbitrary standards of education, and this fear would stay with me for many years, coloring my perception of teaching and education.

In addition to my teachers, another factor that influenced the way I viewed education was the attitude of my parents and how they handled each situation, or I should say how they did not handle each situation. My parents never questioned the teachers or

the school system. My parents made it perfectly clear that if the teacher was upset with me, it was my fault, and that if I did not excel in my studies, I was the one to blame, i.e., I was just not smart enough. End of story. As mentioned in the previous chapter, not questioning authority is a common characteristic of the working class. My parents' lack of questioning the arbitrary standards set by teachers reinforced my feelings of fear and entrapment. These feelings have stuck with me throughout my adult life, influencing how I see myself as an academic. The following stories are a few of the salient stories that haunt my memory about my early educational experience.

Part 1: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School

Mrs. Brown, my second grade teacher, seems to dislike children. I say this because she is always screaming at the class or someone in the class. Today, Mrs. Brown is hovering over me, groaning something about my writing. She grabs my hand, and in a frustrated tone she tells me I am doing my cursive writing all wrong while she squeezes and forces my hand up and down the lined paper: "This is how you write a W! Now quit slacking and pay attention. Practice! Practice! Practice! If you do not get this right, you will never accomplish anything worthwhile in your life."

Feeling stupid and out of place, I say to myself, "I am trying."

* * *

Miss Book, my fourth grade teacher, is standing in front of my desk with her hands on her hips, clamoring something to the class about the way I speak. She is correcting my use and pronunciation of words. She tells the class, while looking at me, never to use "ain't" and to say "wash," not "warsh." In my mind I am thinking about my parents and grandparents and how I hear them using the word "ain't" and saying

“warsh” instead of “wash,” so I am confused, wondering why my use of these words upset Miss Book. She says that using the word “ain’t” and pronouncing the word “wash” as “warsh” shows a person’s lack of intelligence, hence, lack of education and “good” character. While still speaking loudly enough for the whole class to hear, Miss Book tells me that she has written a letter to my parents that informed them that I am not good in English, and so she, with the support of the school administration, has decided to put me into a remedial class to “improve” my English skills so that I will succeed in life. I am confused and embarrassed. I want to stand up for myself, but my parents tell me that the teacher is always right, and that I am not supposed to question her. My parents add in a stern tone, “If the teacher says that you are misbehaving, you will be punished when you get home – no questions asked!!” So I say nothing.

** * **

I am in my seventh-grade reading class, and the class is discussing a story. I cannot recall the title or author of the story. I cannot even remember what the story was about. But what I do remember is that I want to be a part of the class discussion about the story. I use the word “discussion” loosely in this context because the discussion is more a question and answer session with Mrs. Pitzer, the teacher, asking questions that she believes have one specific answer. I am so excited that I can hardly contain myself; I am on the edge of my seat, waving my hand as high as I can without standing on the desk (showing this kind of excitement in class is something I rarely do). But to my dismay, Mrs. Pitzer does not call on me until she asks a question for which I have no response. I do not remember this question, but I do remember Mrs. Pitzer calling on me and the smug expression on her face when I say, “I don’t know.” So she calls on Richard, who

sits in the back corner of the room. In order to see him, I turn in my seat, lifting myself just enough so that I can see around the fat girl behind me.

BANG!!

I feel the vibration of something hitting the top of my desk. Startled, I turn suddenly to see Mrs. Pitzer standing at my desk. All I see are the orange and green vertical stripes of her dress that curve around her stomach. I hear the high-pitched tone of her voice. But I am not sure why she is screaming. It takes me a few seconds to realize that her screams are directed at me. She is reprimanding me in front of the whole class for not paying attention. I am in disbelief and challenge her assertion by saying, "I am paying attention – I raised my hand for the questions I understood." My rebuttal is met with fury. She jerks me out of my seat by my arm and pulls me to the rear of the room, demanding that I stay there until the end of class. Humiliated and confused, I heed her demands.

After the bell rings, signaling the end of class, Mrs. Pitzer, in an angry voice tells me to come to her desk where she is sitting. Staring at me, she says in a calm, low voice, "You, Elaine, will sit in the back of the room for the remainder of this year -- And I just want you to know that being cute is not going to get you anywhere."

"What?" I say to myself, "Cute? What does cute have to do with any of this? Why are you picking on me? I was trying to participate! I turned in my seat so that I could see who was talking! I did not mean to disrespect you!" But, of course, I do not say any of this in fear of what might happen next. I leave the room in silence.

For the remainder of the school year, I sit in the back corner of the room, in the last seat in the last row, excluded from all class discussion. I do not raise my hand nor try

to participate in class out of the fear of being humiliated in front of my peers. To add to my feeling of alienation, Mrs. Pitzer does not address me in any way after that day. To her, I am invisible.

What do these stories hold in common besides the fact that they happen to be a part of my past experience with the public educational system? They speak of fear, of alienation, of not fitting in. I have searched my memory for some positive recollections of my early school experience, but positive memories do not exist. By the time I reached fourth grade, my fear of failing became feelings of contempt for those who placed me in a world where I felt I did not belong. Are my past school experiences representative of someone from the working class? Or do most children experience the same types of feelings as I did? There is no way I can know for sure. What I do know, however, is that these three stories are symbolic of what I remember about my public school experience, and, as mentioned, my parents did not question the behavior of any of these teachers. Furthermore, my family of origin did not promote nor encourage intellectual activities, such as reading, writing, and reflecting, as I was growing up. And this fact, which I addressed in chapter two, is also related to their working-class background. Perhaps, if my parents had questioned the behaviors of these teachers, and perhaps if my parents encouraged and practiced intellectual activities at home, I might not have felt so out of place at school. At the time, I did not understand these feelings of being different and not living up to the expectations of others. I was conditioned to believe that there was something inherently wrong with me that prevented me from fitting into the school system. I grew resentful about everything and everybody who made me feel out of place, who made me feel small and insignificant, who made me feel like I was the problem.

The feeling of being an outsider is never easy to accept, especially when one is a child. I do not recall a defining moment when I started feeling like I was an outsider. But I have a vague memory of feeling out of place, of being a misfit, in the second grade. By the time I reached sixth grade I realized that the world of school was not my world. I rebelled in the silence of my mind, setting myself above those with whom I could not compete on equal ground. I started telling myself that I was better than them and could accomplish just as much as, if not more than, the people who criticized me. The problem with my belief was that when I could not accomplish the same things, in the same ways, as my teachers expected and/or like other students, I started blaming myself for not being good enough, instead of recognizing how my social class and gender influenced the outcome. I felt my “otherness” and resigned myself to the seeming fact that I was, indeed, the problem.

Analysis of Part 1: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School

My feelings of being misplaced, of not belonging are not unique; in fact, many school-age children, especially girls, from working-class backgrounds feel out of place at school. Diane Reay and Stephen Ball point out, in their article “‘Spoilt for Choice’: The Working Classes and Educational Markets,” that there is “a long history of academic writing which, through the development of theories of alienation or resistance, positions schooling as a space where the working classes feel out of place or imprisoned” (93). Reay and Ball use the research of people like Henry Giroux and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron to support their assertion, adding that the relationship of the working class to education is a relationship “fraught with dilemmas and contradictions” (92), and as a result, many working-class people, both students and parents, have to deal

with the conflicts inherent in viewing schools as, in Bourdieu words, “not for the likes of us” (Reay and Ball 91).

The “dilemmas and contradictions” that cause working-class people to feel out of place at school is due, in part, to a conflict between home life and school life; home life and school life have different values. Unlike at school where students are often encouraged to strive to “better” themselves through intellectual endeavors, dreaming of one day becoming a teacher or an astronaut, at home, my parents stressed survival, not hopes and dreams. I could not talk to my parents about my dreams for the future; to them, hoping and dreaming about the future was daydreaming, and “daydreaming was a waste of time.” Therefore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, if I dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, for example, my parents discouraged that thought. My parents, as Alfred Lubrano points out about most working-class people, were more concerned with the day-to-day needs of the family, and believed that “bookish kids [were] weak” (55). Perhaps this negative attitude about “bookish kids” was also another reason my family did not own many books. According to my parents, my brother, sister, and I, did not need school; therefore, we were not expected to go to college. We only needed to learn the lessons that my parents had learned through life. These lessons were simple, but somewhat different for males and females. All my brother had to learn was how to “get a job and understand that [he could not] depend on anyone else for [his] survival [. . .]. All [he] needed to do was 9-to-5 work, and to be at church on Sunday” (Lubrano 35); this lesson changed slightly for my sister and me insofar as we were to be in church on Sunday, but our focus was on finding a “good” man like my father. My sister and I only had to worry about keeping a job until we got married.

Another part of the reason that I, like so many other working-class people, had trouble relating to the educational system, and thus felt out of place at school, was rooted in a belief in one set-in-stone, universal educational standard. James Collins suggests, in his article “Hegemonic Practice: Literacy and Standard Language in Public Education,” that the ruling classes’ values seem to be seen by members of the working class as “universal,” that is, natural and self-evident” (236) when it comes to literacy (232). In other words, Collins would say that as a member of the working class, I internalized middle-class standards for education as the natural order of things, which in turn took away any meaning in my own terms. Because public education consistently portrayed a value system that was set by the upper and/or middle classes, as a member of the working class, I internalized the upper and/or middle-classes’ values as the correct and proper way of seeing a situation and performing in a certain way. Hence, as a member of the working class, I discounted my own experience and strived to uphold the values of the ruling classes, thus, giving my power to the ruling classes. This giving up of my power without question relates to the “invisible force fields” of power that Zweig talks about in *The Working Class Majority*, and that I mention in chapter two in reference to my parents giving up their power without questioning authority, insofar as “invisible force fields of power are built into the structures that hold society together” (Zweig 12); they are arbitrary standards that go unnoticed and are internalized and believed to be innate standards that cannot, and in many cases should not, be changed. The significance of Zweig’s idea about “invisible structures” at work is that when I failed to question and/or think and act critically, I gave up part of myself, making me, and my ideas and ways of doing things, less important, causing me to feel out of place. The conflict between social

class standards was compounded because I am a female, and because educational standards tend to uphold a male-centered, ruling-class experience.

Just as social class contributes to the feeling of not belonging, gender can also contribute to the feeling of being misplaced in the educational system. Ruth Triplett and G. Roger Jarjoura suggest, in their article “Specifying the Gender-Class-Delinquency Relationship: Exploring the Effects of Educational Expectations,” that school recreates gender differences as well as class differences “through gender-based curriculum and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes through communication of teachers’ expectations, particular classroom practices, and school rituals” (292). According to Triplett and Jarjoura, these above mentioned practices, and other practices that devalue the experience of female students, cause a female to feel not good enough, making her feel as if she does not fit in.

Likewise, Myra and David Sadker believe that gender bias exists within the public school system, making it nearly impossible for girls to identify with the educational material, thus, making girls feel out of place and inferior. In *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls*, Sadker and Sadker tell their readers that although many teachers like to believe that they have eliminated gender bias in their classrooms, “hidden sexist lessons” still exist: teachers passing over girls and calling on boys to speak in class, teachers giving boys more one-on-one time, and teachers not taking the time to explain why women are missing in most books, such as history and science course books. Sadker and Sadker point out that “each time a girl opens a book and reads about a womanless history, she learns she is worth *less*. [italics mine] Each time the teacher passes over a girl to elicit the ideas and opinions of a boy, that girl is

conditioned to be silent and to defer” (13). “To be silent and to defer” means one does not have a voice. And no voice equals invisibility. That is, “to be silent and to defer” carries the message that what a person thinks or has to say is not worth thinking or saying because that person lacks the ability to think and act rationally, logically, and/or critically. Girls do not speak because they internalize a set of standards that do not represent their experiences and, consequently, judge themselves by these standards. This idea of judging oneself in terms of someone else’s arbitrary educational standards, whether these standards are derived from social class and/or gender issues, is a common theme in much of the literature that tries to explain the issues surrounding gender and/or class. Carol Gilligan’s research is one such study.

Although Gilligan’s study focuses on the misjudgment of women’s moral development, it can help clarify what happens to females from working-class backgrounds who judge their experiences, and/or themselves, in terms of male experiences and/or middle or upper-class values. Let me explain. Gilligan’s premise is that women’s morality has been judged wrongly and been misunderstood because women have been measured by standards set by the experiences of men, and, consequently, women fall short in their moral development when judged by standards that are not their own. Gilligan argues in *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* that women and men do not have the same cultural experiences and thus do not, and should not, develop in the same way; Thus, according to Gilligan, “a problem in theory [becomes] cast as a problem in women’s development, and the problem in women’s development [is] located in their experiences of relationships” (7). Citing Virginia Woolf, Gilligan points out, “It is obvious [...] that the values of women differ

very often from the values which have been made by the other sex [...] yet, it is the masculine values that prevail.” Gilligan goes on to say, “As a result, women come to question the normality of their feelings and to alter their judgments in deference to the opinion of others” (16).

As I said, Gilligan’s ideas about gender can be applied not only to gender issues but also social-class issues surrounding the educational system. Not only is the educational system designed to uphold gender roles, but it is also designed to uphold social-class roles. Applying Gilligan’s ideas about gender issues to social-class issues can help illuminate such a design. Standards set by the educational system uphold the ruling-classes’ standards, standards that are foreign to working-class people. But, as Reay and Ball and Collins point out, working-class people are made to believe that these standards are “natural”; hence, when members, especially female members, of the working class enter school and are not able to perform to these standards, instead of seeing the conflict in these values and/or understanding that these standards are arbitrary, they blame themselves for not being good enough and/or smart enough to meet the challenges set by the school system. As a result, working-class members, especially female members, question themselves and their abilities and “alter their judgments in deference to the opinion of others” (Gilligan 16).

bell hooks suggests that girls internalize these standards because these standards are not only reinforced in school but also in the girls’ families of origin and religious institutions (*The Will To Change* 23). Although most of my teachers in the primary and secondary school were females, they seemingly upheld sexist practices as portrayed in the above anecdote. Without careful research, there is no way of knowing for sure

whether or not these teachers had internalized an arbitrary set of standards, but one might draw the conclusion that these teachers, too, had internalized a “set-in-stone” universal educational standard that reflected the experiences and needs of the ruling classes and of men. I say this because I do not remember any of my public school teachers ever questioning the standards set by the school system. This is not saying that they did not question it, but it is plausible because they did not make this information available to the students, and as far as I can recollect, they did not make it available to the parents either, which implies that these teachers did not question educational standards.

My most salient memories of primary and secondary school consist of stories like the above-mentioned stories in this chapter that reveal feelings of being different, of being stupid, and of being humiliated. My early school experience taught me not to trust myself because I was incapable of making sound decisions. My second-grade experience with writing taught me that my writing skills were below average; therefore, I was not going to succeed in the future if I did not master the set standard of cursive writing (which by the way, I still haven't). My fourth-grade experience with the use of language taught me that I did not speak properly, so I was not going to succeed in the future if I did not change my dialect to fit school language (I'm still working on this one). By the time I finished the sixth grade, I disliked and distrusted most of my teachers, which made the course work, school in general, even more tedious and difficult.

Part 2: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School

Mr. Brunner, my sixth-grade teacher, has left the room. Karen, the girl who sits next to me, and I start to talk. We are sitting in the back, right-hand corner of the room. The back of the room is where the girls sit. The boys sit in the front and are playing catch with an eraser from the chalkboard. One of the boys misses the catch and the eraser hits me on the side of the head. Without looking and as I continue to talk to Karen, I pick up the eraser and toss it to the front of the room just as Mr. Brunner enters through the doorway. He immediately points his finger at me as says, "YOU -- OUT IN THE HALL!!" I'm stunned. Breathless. I slowly move toward the door and into the hallway. Mr. Brunner's face is red and he's shouting, "EXPLAIN WHAT I JUST SAW." So I tell him my version of the "Eraser Story." He pauses, glaring into my eyes, then turns and calls for the five boys who are directly involved in the eraser game to join us in the hall. Mr. Brunner asks the boys to explain their version of what happened. One of the boys speaks up, verifying my story and the other boys agree with his interpretation. Mr. Brunner stands emotionless for a moment; then, he announces that I am to receive a paddling because I was the only one who he saw throw the eraser and that the boys were to watch and take notice of the consequences of my poor behavior. I am wearing a dress because girls were not allowed to wear pants to school, so I am cautious not to expose my underwear as I bend over to receive my punishment. I am cautious because my mother and grandmother constantly tell me to sit "like a lady" so that I do not show anyone my underwear. But Mr. Brunner grabs the back of my neck with one hand and forces me to bend over so that my bottom is exposed. He pulls back his other hand that is holding the paddle and strikes me several times. I am devastated and humiliated, but

have no course for retaliation, so I suck it up and try to hold back the tears, but the tears come anyway.

* * *

I am sitting in a tenth-grade remedial English class, and Mrs. Kay is diagramming sentences on the board. My back is against the rear wall, and I am slouching behind Bobby so that Mrs. Kay cannot see me. I do not want to be called on to answer one of her ridiculous questions, like “What are the five forms of verbs?” Or “What are dangling modifiers?” Mrs. Kay is saying something about adverbs, something about how they describe verbs and that verbs show the action in the sentence and that they (adverbs) go on this line right here (pointing to one of the diagonal lines). But I am confused – I cannot see the difference between adverbs and adjectives, and I do not see the importance of placing all these words in a diagram that break down the parts of speech. I think to myself, “How is placing all these words on these silly lines going to help me at home, in my ‘real’ life? When am I ever going to use this stuff? How is it going to apply to my life after I graduate from this prison?”

* * *

*Mr. Deal, my twelfth-grade English teacher, is sitting cross-legged on his desk in the front of the classroom. He is wearing his brown tweed sports jacket without a tie. I am sitting in the first seat in the center row. As Mr. Deal talks about George and Lennie, two characters from *Of Mice and Men*, I survey his brown, leather Hush Puppies, and wonder if he chose his outfit or if his wife helped him. I survey his face. His greenish eyes are alive, flashing with life and vigor as he explains the plot of the book. His auburn hair has a hint of silver around his temples, and the lines in his face make him look*

distinguished. I think to myself, as he is speaking, "I like this man. He seems interested in what he is doing. And he seems as if he cares about his subject." Then, I remember how I tried to read this book, and how every time I would start, I would find my mind wandering off to different places: I would remember my horse and how he needs to be shod; or how angry my mother was with me that morning for forgetting to make my bed; or how I had to help my grandmother pick the grapes for jelly; or about my plans to get married after graduation. Mr. Deal moves from where he is sitting and my attention is drawn back to the moment. I notice that he is talking over my head; he is not looking at me. I study his movements and try to recall a time when he has looked at me, spoken directly to me. But I cannot remember such a time. I realize that I am invisible in this class. A wave of feeling insignificant overtakes me; I quickly remind myself that my invisibility is for the best, that it really does not matter whether I am seen and/or heard because I really do not belong in school and that in a few short weeks I will graduate. I tell myself these things as a defense, as a way to neutralize the insult and the frustration of being somewhere that I do not belong.

By the time I entered the junior high school, I decided that school was not for me. My feelings about school expressed in these three short stories are probably not unlike many adolescents who feel school is a waste of time and not for them. But as with the first three stories in "Part 1," these three stories are representative of what I remember about my junior and senior high school experience. And I believe that my family of origin's lack of interest in and respect for formal education magnified my dissatisfaction with school insofar as I believe my parents' attitudes about school influenced my attitude about school. As mentioned in chapter two, my parents owned few books, and the lack of

books in the home of my youth reflects my parents' attitude about the importance of reading. Reading is one of the major skills taught in schools. However, I did not like to read – a fact that I probably would not admit (given I hold an undergraduate degree in Literature and that I am writing this dissertation, both of which imply that I should like to read) if Robert Meyer had not confessed that he did not like to read as a child. Meyer attributes part of his disinterest in reading to his emotion of feeling different, out of place, with the characters in his first grade reader (5). Perhaps like Meyer, one of the reasons I learned to dislike reading was that I, too, could not identify with the characters in my first-grade reader, and possibly not being able to relate to these characters reinforced my feelings of being different and not fitting in. This feeling of being different caused me not to want to read because I was unable to see the relevance and importance of reading in my life. However, although I understand students who can relate to school material have an easier time learning that material, I believe my lack of interest in reading, and consequently with education, extended from more than just the discomfort I might have felt while reading about Dick, Jane, and Spot's adventures in my first-grade reader. Along with my discomfort with the teachers, my parents' attitude about education in general, which is partly reflected in their use of space and their lack of ownership of books, had a significant impact on my perception of reading and education. In fact, I believe my parents' overall working-class attitude about education directly impacted the way I saw myself as a student and how I approached my primary and secondary school education.

My parents' belief, mentioned in chapter two, that I was incapable of reading on my own outside of school was reinforced by a school system that labeled me as an

underachiever, as lazy, and as remedial. Although I did learn to read in the first grade, just like Meyer, in spite of my feeling unsafe and “wanting to be home” (Meyer 7-8), the learning experience of reading did not bolster my confidence as a student or as a person. Many times my teachers would make the comment on my report card that I was not working to my full potential even though I knew I was trying my best to meet their arbitrary standards. No one in my recollection ever acknowledged my efforts or considered that my lack of academic performance might have been related to other factors, such as my social class.

I was labeled remedial by the school system, and my parents seemingly accepted that label as a reinforcement of their belief that girls were not as smart as boys; therefore, my parents believed that they did not need to waste their time and money educating me. This is not to say that my parents did not scold me if my grades fell below a C, which they did from time to time. However, neither my father nor my mother would take the time to investigate the reason I was not performing “A” work in school, nor would they take the time to help me overcome my problem areas. All they would do is yell at me for a minute or two -- screaming, “You are an embarrassment. Jennie and Beverly (children of my parents’ closest friends) were on the honor roll this term. What’s wrong with you? You either bring up these grades or we’ll sell your horse.” But they never sold my horse even though my grades did not change. My parents’ lack of concern and involvement with my school performance also sent the message that school was not *that* important for the life I was to lead as a wife and mother.

Moreover, my parents’ attitude about questioning authority influenced the way I saw myself as a student, and as an individual. They did not allow me to question or talk

back to my teachers because my parents believed that they, themselves, should not question authority figures. There were many times when I felt that my teachers were being unfair and unreasonable and felt that my parents should speak up and question the teachers, but they never did. For example, my parents did nothing about the incident with my sixth-grade teacher, and blamed me for throwing the eraser. And after the incident with Mrs. Pitzer, I told both my parents what happened that night at the dinner table. But they said I was overreacting and to just sit quietly in class from now on. Just as my parents did not question the teacher, I was not to question my parents' decisions.

Analysis of Part 2: Snapshot Images of Feeling Out of Place at School

Even though my parents did not question or consider social class as a factor in how I related to the school experience, many studies show that social class and school performance are directly related. Triplett and Jarjoura, whom I mentioned in reference to gender-bias curriculum, suggest that although parental encouragement plays an important role in a child's expectations and aspirations of school achievement, school performance and social class positions are also linking factors (292). Public school systems are designed to uphold social-class positions, and social class has independent effects on that child's performance. Likewise, Terry Dean believes that a student's social class greatly influences how that student will perform in school. Dean states, in his article "Multicultural Classrooms, Monocultural Teachers," that school performance of students seems to be determined by several factors; two of these factors are class origin and socio-economic mobility. Dean goes on to say that members of the "working class [. . .] must struggle to acquire the academic culture that has been passed on by osmosis to the middle and upper classes. The very fact that the working class [. . .] must laboriously acquire

what others come by naturally is taken as another sign of inferiority. [Students] work hard because they have no talent. They are remedial” (107). The lessons in school did not come easy for me; I did struggle, and at the time it seemed that everyone, including me, viewed my struggle as a “sign of [my] inferiority.” Dennis Gilbert asserts that parents who stress obedience over questioning authority are preserving the values of the working class, and helping to keep their children in it (121). Since my parents did not question authority, they did not think to question how my lack of academic performance might have been related to other factors, such as our social class. My parents’ belief concerning questioning authority figures was a lesson about silencing my voice, keeping me invisible and in my place.

The attitudes of my parents and the school teachers were disheartening to me. Their combined judgment taught me to be ashamed of myself academically. Estes asserts that when a young girl psyche’s is wounded early in life, she:

[. . .] begins to believe that the negative images her family and culture reflect back to her about herself are not only totally true but are also totally free of bias, opinion, and personal preference. The girl begins to believe that she is weak, ugly, unacceptable, and that this will continue to be true no matter how hard she tries to reverse it. (171)

By the time I was eleven years-old, I had lost interest in books and started to convince myself that my parents and teachers were right; I was an incompetent student and school was beyond me. In a way, my parents and teachers were correct. Analyzing my behavior from my perspective today, I would say that I stopped applying myself in school for several related reasons: even when I did apply myself to the best of my ability, I was

accused of not trying; thus, I was afraid, afraid that there was something wrong with me and could not proficiently perform the intellectual tasks that were presented; and by not trying my best, I was quietly rebelling against a system that did not allow me my own voice. The tragedy in these reasons, as Mike Rose points out, is that I had to “twist the knife in [my] own gray matter to make this defense work” (29). And I did “twist the knife.” As I said, I stopped trying: I rarely did my homework or studied for a test; while in class, I shut out the monologue of most of my teachers by daydreaming; and/or I would simply not go to school, claiming I was ill.

Estes would assert that my behavior, my shutting down, refusing to participate in school, was a way for me to go underground, so to speak. It was a way to protect my psyche from those aspects of culture that wanted to tame the “Wild Woman” psyche (172), in other words, a way to protect myself, my natural psyche, against those aspects of culture that wanted me to silence my voice, suppress my desires, and conform to an oppressive set of standards. Likewise, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo would suggest that my behavior was a defense mechanism against the “hidden curriculum,” a curriculum that is concealed within the pedagogical and student evaluation practices in schools that aims to “work against the students and their interests [and] that negates their histories, cultures, and day-to-day experiences” (121), keeping a social structure in place with the ruling classes in control and the working and poor classes enslaved (122). The “hidden curriculum” of schoolwork is implicit preparation for relating to the process of economic production; that is, differing curricular, pedagogical and student evaluation practices, emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and

thus contribute to a child's development insofar as how that child relates to the process of the workplace, thus helping to reproduce class structures.

In *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*, Jean Anyon demonstrates how the "hidden curriculum" works. She observed five elementary schools where student bodies differed in economic backgrounds. She found that students from contrasting social classes were being exposed to different forms of teaching. Anyon's observations reveal that these students were already being groomed to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. Anyon shows this reproduction of class structures by demonstrating how certain pedagogical practices and student evaluations groom students to take on vocational jobs such as factory workers, secretaries, and retail clerks; while other methods of teaching and evaluating prepare students to take on professional jobs such as doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. For example, according to Anyon, students from working-class backgrounds are groomed to take on vocational jobs that require a person to follow the rules and not question authority figures. Pedagogical practices involve following steps of a procedure that are usually mechanical, involving rote behavior and little or no decision making or choices (197-198). On the other hand, students from upper-class, or what Anyon calls "Affluent Professional" and "Executive Elite" school backgrounds are groomed to take on professional careers that require independent and innovative thinking (203). Pedagogical practices involve problem-solving techniques that help to develop students' analytical intellectual powers, asking them "to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality" (205).

As a child I did not understand the “hidden curriculum” and how it worked to keep social classes in place, nor did I understand how this system of education affected how my teachers, and my parents, saw me as a student, nor did I understand how this system affected how I saw myself as a student. But it did. Even though I did not understand the “hidden curriculum,” i.e., how lessons in rote learning were keeping me in my social class, I did understand enough to realize the contradictions between what and *how* my teachers and my parents were teaching me. And these contradictions were confusing me as a child: “Do I believe the lessons of school or the lessons of home?” Both my home life and school life taught lessons in conformity, about following the rules and not asking questions, but my home experience negated my school experience and my school experience negated my home experience. My home life required me to be physically active while at play and helping out with family chores. In contrast, school required me to sit still and listen while performing intellectual activities such as reading, writing, and math (all things that were not practiced and were devalued at home). Both home and school wanted me to conform to their ideas of what was best for me; school and home silenced my voice, giving me very little control over myself and my future. My parents limited my career options to housewife and mother, emphasizing my role as “care-giver,” deeming it as important and necessary. My teachers, like my parents, offered me limited options for careers, suggesting that I become a secretary or file clerk in an office (which is rather ironic since a secretary’s language skills are supposed to be good, and my teachers told me that my language skills were lacking and needed to be improved). According to my teachers, I was lazy -- an underachiever – remedial.

Remedial. I was labeled remedial by the school system. The language of my home was negated by my teachers, and the language of school was not used at my home. Because the language of “school” was deemed “better” by my teachers, and because I spoke the language of my home at school, I was treated as if I was “remedial,” and as if there was something drastically wrong with me because of the way I used, or did not use, language. As Rose points out about students who are labeled “remedial,” I, too, was made to feel as if I had some kind of defect or disease that needed to be cured. Rose states that although the word remedial was applied, at first, to students with neurological problems, the label quickly moved beyond the description of those students to encompass students “who were from backgrounds that did not provide optimal environmental and educational opportunities” (209). My home life did not provide “optimal environmental and educational opportunities,” as evidenced by my parents’ attitudes about intellectual activities.

Although I did not understand the full meaning of the word “remedial,” I did understand that being labeled “remedial” was something of which to be ashamed. And I was ashamed of myself as a student and felt like a misfit at school. Although I wanted to be more than a “housewife” or a “file clerk,” I understood the lessons of home (lessons in cooking, cleaning, and caring for others), but I did not understand the lessons at school (lessons in speech, phonics, grammar, and punctuation). And as I mentioned, I did not like to read. I did not, nor did my parents, understand how our social class influenced our use of language or how the dominate class promoted its use of language as the better, more intelligent language. Freire and Macedo tell their readers that people cannot understand language until there is an understanding of social class. Social class and

language are interwoven: “a language is developed [and] used in the comprehension and expression of the world by the groups that speak it.” Freire and Macedo claim that “all languages are valid, systematic, rule-governed systems, and that the inferiority/superiority distinction is a social phenomenon,” and they remind their readers that the ruling class has the power to define the world, that it has the power to “pronounce that the speech habits of the subordinate groups are a corruption, a bastardization of dominant discourse” (53). It is this idea of “corruption and bastardization of dominant discourse” that remedial students, like me, are expected to overcome, but have a lot of trouble overcoming because the language of home is more than just a set of grammar rules; the language of home is about the life of the family and about intimacy as Rodriguez would say. To denounce and leave the language of home for the language of school would have meant that I had to denounce and leave my home life for school life, and as a young school-age child and adolescent, cutting my ties at home was not something I was prepared nor ready to do. At the time it was much easier and more beneficial for me to condemn the school system, especially when my family of origin saw no real benefit in formal education – particularly for girls.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

I am in my eleventh grade homeroom when Mrs. Kumrow, a kind-hearted teacher, asks us, the students, to write down one thing we like about ourselves – what we believe is our best quality. I am mortified. I do not know what to write. I do not believe I have any “best” quality. I silently fret. I just need one thing, but cannot think of anything. I look about the room. Students are getting up from their desks and handing Mrs. Kumrow

their slips of paper and leaving the room. I am still worrying, searching my mind for something to write down as my best quality. Finally, I write: “my legs.”

In the above story, I am about seventeen years old. At the time, I believed that the only value I had was my outward appearance. Unlike school, my parents seemed to believe that a person’s, especially a female person’s, outward appearance was of the utmost importance. Although my parents did not seem to be too concerned about my academic achievement, they were very concerned about my physical appearance because they believed that a woman’s success and value was determined by her physical beauty. In fact, my parents would often compare my sister’s and my physical appearance with other female children, deciding who was the “cutest” (I do not recall my parents ever comparing my brother in this way). According to my parents, a woman’s beauty would help her marry the *right* man – i.e., a man who worked hard, got his hands dirty, and made a lot of money. “You better find yourself a good man who makes a lot of money,” was one of my parent’s favorite things to say to me as I was growing. I do not recall my response to this piece of advice from my parents, but I do remember feeling disappointed with my limited options. Equating a woman’s appearance with her success in life caused my parents to obsess over the way I looked. My mother would consistently fuss over my hair and clothes, saying that this dress or that hairstyle did, or did not, look good. If an outfit or hairstyle did not look good to either of my parents, I was forced to change it before leaving the house.

I am about eight years old, and a woman with whom my mother works has given my mother a box of hand-me-downs that no longer fit this woman’s daughter. Among the drab looking slacks and shorts is a pink and white, Dotted-Swiss dress with a four-inch

ruffle at the hemline. I think it is the most beautiful dress I have ever seen, so I rush to put it on and marvel over myself in the floor-length mirror located on the door of my parents' bedroom. My mother walks into the room, and before she can say anything, and without me noticing the expression on her face, I proclaim with excitement, "I love this dress!! I'm going to wear it to school!"

This is when I notice the scowl on my mother's face as she retorts, " No! That dress looks ridiculous on you – it's too big and it's too fussy. Take it off, now!" I take off the dress, but I do not see what my mother sees and hold onto my belief that I look gorgeous in this dress. I believe that I look so gorgeous that a couple of days after my mother tells me to take off the dress and put it away, I put on the dress and model it for my Aunt Nell, who seems to be as excited as I am about the dress. So I decide to wear it the day my Aunt Nell takes me to visit my mother at work for the first time. My mother works as a secretary for the New Castle Credit Bureau, and when she sees me enter the office wearing this dress, her sparkling, bright eyes and wide turned-up smile turn to squinted, dark eyes and clenched teeth. She rushes at me, pulls me into the hall, and starts to quietly scold me, "How could you embarrass me this way? I told you that dress looks ridiculous on you – wait until I get you home." As my mother is scolding me for wearing "The Dress," I'm thinking how beautiful it is, and how my Aunt Nell agreed with me when I put it on for her, so I'm wondering why my mother thinks the dress is ugly. My mother is disappointed and angry with my aunt and me, and I am upset because my mother does not like how I look. When we return home, I am forced to take off the dress and give it to my mother. I never see "The Dress" again.

My mother and my father always wanted me to be “cute” and polite, and evaluated me by these attributes. To go along with the “perfect” exterior, my mother coached me on “lady-like” manners, “Don’t slouch! Sit up straight with your knees together. Say please. Say thank you. Don’t talk back, and most of all, don’t cause friction and don’t complain.” My parents’ attitude taught me that my self-worth was measured by, first and foremost, what I looked like and how well I portrayed “lady-like” behaviors. Acting like a lady meant silencing my opinions, politely yielding to the needs of others, especially to the needs of males, and expressing goodwill without complaint. Evidently, my parents believed that acting in these “lady-like” ways made a woman more beautiful, hence, more desirable. In the movie *The Joy Luck Club*, An-mei tells her daughter Rose Hsu that Chinese women are taught to swallow their own, and others, sorrow without complaint. Women are not to complain about anything; they are to be seen and not heard, and they are to take care of others before taking care of themselves. Although I am not Chinese, I was also taught to swallow my sorrow, and the sorrow of others, without complaint. I was taught that my worth was determined, for the most part, by how well I could master the ability to subordinate myself -- or act like a lady -- and how pretty I looked.

Analysis of Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

My parents’ belief that a woman’s value is determined by her physical appearance and her ability to subordinate herself is not a new concept, nor are they alone in their thoughts, nor does their belief appear to be restricted to the working classes. Many, if not all, women are, and have been, exposed to these types of beliefs that determine their value. Mary Pipher, in her book *Reviving Ophelia*, asserts that *all* girls go through a

“rigorous training for the female role” before and during early adolescence. The rules for this training, according to Pipher, are “be attractive, be a *lady* [italics mine], be unselfish and of service, make relationships work and be competent without complaint” (39). Pipher claims that in early adolescence females learn how important appearance is in defining social acceptability. They learn just how much “attractiveness is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for girls’ success” (40). According to Pipher, we, the people of the United States, live in a look-obsessed, media-saturated, “girl-poisoning” culture. She states, “American culture has always smacked girls on the head in early adolescence. This is when [girls] move into a broader culture that is rife with girl-hurting ‘isms,’ such as sexism, capitalism and lookism, which is the evaluation of a person solely on the basis of appearance” (23). Pipher claims that these “isms” create a split between a girl’s “true” self and the self that the culture prescribes as what is *properly* female.

Naomi Wolf also discusses, in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, the social pressures, the cause and effects of these pressures, on all women to conform to a set standard of physical beauty. Wolf asserts “Every generation since about 1830 has had to fight its version of the beauty myth” (11). The “beauty myth” was fueled by the Industrial Revolution, according to Wolf, and was, and still is, “a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement” (10). According to the beauty myth, there is one set standard of women’s beauty, a standard that objectively and universally exists:

[. . .] a standard that women want to embody and men want to possess
women who embody it. This embodiment is imperative for women and not
for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological,

sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (12)

However, the beauty myth is just that: a myth. Beauty is not universal or changeless, nor is beauty biological and/or sexual, nor is it a function of evolution. Wolf believes that the beauty myth is a "currency system," which exploits women's physical appearance to make money and gain power, and like any economy, it is determined by politics, a politics that keep a male dominance intact (12); this system is composed of "emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression. The beauty myth is not about women...it is about men's institutions and institutional power" (13).

Although the phrase "beauty myth" was not coined until 1991 when Wolf published her book, the idea behind the phrase is centuries old. And for centuries women have been speaking out against an oppressive system that has set standards of beauty for women. Laura Cereta, writing on this topic in 1487 and 1488, suggests that women are more than their bodies and should denounce standards of outward beauty for loftier endeavors such as virtue, honor, and education. Cereta claims that obsessing with one's outside appearance is "sinful" behavior, impeding a woman's honor and virtue. She states, in "Letter to Augustinus Aemilius, Curse against the Ornamentation of Women," that "virtue excels the brilliance of beauty" (493), and that Women "should seek the adornment of honor [. . .] and [. . .] should pursue this life mindful of [their] mortality" (494-5). And in "Letter to Bibulus Sempronius, Defense of the Liberal Instruction of Women," Cereta says:

[W]omen have been able by nature to be exceptional, but have chosen lesser goals. For some women are concerned with parting their hair correctly, adorning themselves with lovely dresses, or decorating their fingers with pearls and other gems. But those in whom a deeper integrity yearns for virtue, restrain from the start of their youthful souls, reflect on higher things [. . .] compose their thoughts in wakeful hours, their minds in contemplation, to letters bonded to righteousness. For knowledge is not given as a gift, but [is gained] with diligence. (497)

I find it intriguing that Cereta is speaking out against issues of her day that are still a problem for women today. Although Cereta seems to be more worried about a woman's honor, virtue, and "sinful" behavior (aspects that appear to be deemphasized in today's culture), she seems to recognize the dangers of defining a woman by her physical appearance. Though their stories are somewhat different, Naomi Wolf, Mary Pipher, and Clarissa Estes address the current system that produces and perpetuates arbitrary standards of beauty, revealing the damaging effects of these standards on today's women, much like Cereta was seemingly trying to do in her day.

My point here is that beauty standards are not restricted to one time period or culture; thus, I am not alone in the struggle against arbitrary beauty standards for women. From my perspective, all women, regardless of their social class, living in the United States are exposed to these standards if they turn on a television, pick up a magazine, and/or drive down U.S. route *whatever* and look at the advertisements on the billboards that line the highways. Moreover, many people today seem aware of the harmful effects of these standards, especially the effects on women who are obsessed with trying to

uphold these standards. Regardless of this knowledge, however, these standards still exist and are reinforced by mainstream culture. But again, my point here is not to prove or disprove that a beauty myth exists, nor is it to explain the reasons behind the continued exploitation of women through reinforcing arbitrary beauty standards. My point is to examine and explain how my social class influenced my understanding of the “beauty myth,” and how that understanding affected how I saw myself as a child, and how my self-image affected my idea about education.

Although determining a woman’s value by her appearance is not restricted to one social class, working-class people seem to be more prone to believe this concept than people from the upper and middle classes. This is not to say that people from the upper and middle classes are not exposed to the beauty myth, nor is it to say that some women from the ruling classes do not believe the myth. I am saying that people from the ruling class tend to critically question cultural standards more than people from the working classes; hence, upper and middle class people have a greater opportunity to understand the subjective nature of the myth. The different attitudes that exist between social classes about questioning the myth, or any cultural standard for that matter, have to do with value systems. According to Robert Hughes and Maureen Perry-Jenkins, people from the upper and middle classes value autonomy while members of the working classes value conformity. Utilizing the work of Melvin Kohn and Urie Bronfenbrenner, Hughes and Perry-Jenkins conclude that because of these diverse value systems, people from the ruling classes are more apt to question authority than people from the working classes. Furthermore, people from the middle and upper classes tend to put greater emphasis on reading -- thus read more and are more educated -- than members of the working classes;

consequently, people from the ruling classes have more exposure to different perspectives on various ideas and concepts than people from the working classes (177-178). Having more exposure to ideas and concepts helps a person see other options, and seeing options helps a person question the validity and credibility of anyone who, or anything that, claims a “one way only” of looking at a situation.

As I said, when I was growing up, cultural standards, for the most part, went unquestioned. My parents were not in the habit of questioning authority figures; as they did not question their use of space or lack of intellectual activities, my teachers, or my school performance, they did not question beauty standards. My parents, like many other working class people, believed in conformity, and conformity meant one did not question – one just did what one was told. Although I did question certain standards, such as the standards that placed more importance on males than females, I did not question the “beauty myth” standard, resulting in my trying to make myself into someone I was not. Of course, just like so many other girls, I did not “measure up.” I was always falling short in some way, no matter how hard I tried: I was too fat or too short; I did not wear enough makeup; or I wore too much makeup. When I did not “measure up,” I believed that it was my fault, not the system’s fault. Since I was taught by my parents that anything a person got was earned through hard work, I tried harder. It was my responsibility, my career, to look good so that I could find that “good” man who my parents insisted I needed to find.

I suppose my parents were adamant about my appearance and “lady-like” behavior because they truly believed that finding a husband was my best, and only, option for a career. To my parents, education was not “real” work. They did not value education, especially for women. Lubrano states, “Many working-class people [. . .] saw

little need for college. The guys were encouraged to make money in construction and similar tough fields, while the women were expected to find men and breed” (13). Like many working-class people, my parents saw little value in education because they believed, in part, that a man could get a good paying job without an education (just as my father and grandfather had done), and that a woman should marry and have children.

Like my parents and grandparents, I believed that school was not for me because school did not seem to be a place where I belonged. I did not identify nor make connections with the course work, and because education in general seemed not to have any useful purpose in my life (it did not teach me how to find a husband), and because I was told that I was to “find a good man and get married,” I tried to convince myself that my goal in life was to marry and have children. Understanding that I had to find a “good” man, and that I was going to have to compete with other eligible, more beautiful, women than me, I internalized what my parents, and my culture, told me and put most, if not all, my efforts into looking “good,” ignoring my studies and putting away my hopes and dreams that did not match my family’s hopes and dreams for my future.

Like many teenage girls my age, I daydreamed about my wedding, my own home and how I would furnish it, and the man I would marry. But I had other dreams too, such as traveling the world and joining the Peace Corps, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. In fact, I spent more hours in my “other” dreams than the dreams of a domestic life. These “other” dreams brought me many hours of pleasure, wondering and imagining what it would be like to visit and/or live in a foreign land. Sometimes my grandmother, who emigrated from Italy in 1900, and I would daydream together about traveling to her birth place that was located “just south” of Florence, Italy, so that I could meet the family

whom I had never met. Most of the time, though, I would daydream on my own: sometimes I would dream about living on the Serengeti, practicing veterinarian medicine on the indigenous wild life; and at other times I would dream about living high in the Rocky Mountains as a forest ranger. But, as I progressed through my teenage years, my “other” dreams, dreams that did not consist of getting married, did not seem attainable to me. In my mind, these “other” daydreams became purely fantasy, never to be realized. Gradually, I started to lose interest in things that I once enjoyed: I lost interest in riding my horse, in spending time with my friends, and in daydreaming about my future.

Simone de Beauvoir would explain the loss of my dreams by claiming that I, as an adolescent, realized that men had the power and that my only power would come from consenting to become a submissive adored object (341). Pipher would say that something happened to me as an adolescent girl, something that caused me to become fragmented, something that caused my voice to “go underground – [that caused my] speech [to become] more tentative and less articulate” (20). Pipher cites Alice Miller in saying that a lot of adolescent girls deny their true selves and assume false selves to please their parents; Pipher adds to Miller’s observation by suggesting that not only do girls hide a part of themselves in order to meet their parents’ approval, but also the social pressures to conform play a role in the split between a girl’s true, authentic self and the false self she must portray in order to meet cultural standards. Pipher says:

This pressure disorients and depresses most girls. They sense the pressure to be someone they are not. They fight back, but they are fighting a ‘problem with no name.’ One girl put it this way: ‘I’m a perfectly good carrot that everyone is trying to turn into a rose. As a carrot, I have good

color and a nice leafy top. When I'm carved into a rose, I turn brown and wither. (22)

Replacing my hopes and dreams with the hopes and dreams of my family caused me to become the brown and withered rose.

Looking back on this part of my life is like looking through a dingy window; the reasons, I silenced my dreams are foggy to me today, but as I write these lines I recall something happening to me, something that made me feel insecure and unsafe. I had a choice, as Pipher suggests, I could be myself and follow my dreams, or "[I] could be loved. If [I] chose wholeness [or being myself, I would be] abandoned by my parents. If [I] chose love, [I had to] abandoned [my] true self" (36). Abandoning my "true self," or the "Wild Woman" part of me as Estes would say, caused a part of me to die. Was I trying to please my parents and other members of my family? Probably. Was I trying to conform to social pressures? More likely than not. Did I internalize everyone else's beliefs and believe that what I dreamed about in the quiet of my mind was silly and worthless? Probably yes. What I do know for sure, however, was that this insecure and unsafe feeling would last for many years to come. It would stay with me through my marriages, the birth of my daughter, and my return to school as an undergraduate student. It would stay with me until I discovered, or rediscovered, my voice.

I am not sure exactly when I realized that the standards of beauty were "myths." As with my other realizations, the realization of self and the realization of perspective, for example, my realization of the beauty myth happened over time and through many lived experiences. This is not to say that I completely understand everything there is to know about the self, about perspective, and/or about the beauty myth because I believe, like

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, that it takes a lifetime to know, to understand, the human spirit (18). I can say, though, that my undergraduate and graduate experiences have helped me with these realizations and have helped solidify many gut feelings I have had, feelings such as those I mentioned in chapter two about the role perspective plays in interpretation, and how context affects perspectives, and feelings about my own self-worth, my own intellect, and my own beauty. But as I said, these realizations happened over time – a slow process.

The Four Pillars: “Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence”?

When I entered college for the first time in 1987, at age thirty-four, my fear of school -- of not fitting in, not being “good” enough or smart enough -- that I experienced as a child and adolescent resurfaced and stayed with me all the way through my undergraduate work. What amazes me most about my fear of failing during my undergraduate work is that in spite of maintaining a 4.0 GPA, I still believed, truly believed, that I was going to fail. Every time (and I mean *every* time) I wrote a paper, handed in an assignment, and/or took a test, I thought I was going to fail. Sometimes I would laugh at myself, telling myself:

“You go through this every time you hand in an assignment or take a test. Get over it. You work hard, and it has paid off in the past. When are you going to gain enough confidence in your abilities?”

But my self-motivational talks did little good. I still obsessed over my work. I audio taped *every* lecture (just about all my course work for my undergraduate degree, with the exception of six credits – two classes – were taught traditionally, i.e., professor stands in front of the class and lectures); then, I would spend hours upon hours

transcribing these taped lectures, word for trivial word, in notebooks. Once the lecture was transcribed, I would read through the notes several times, highlighting and making annotations in the margins of each notebook. By telling myself I was a failure, I could intellectually understand the sabotage I was doing to myself and could not stop my fear of failing even though I was trying my hardest. I was a fish out of water, so to speak. My working-class background did not prepare me for academic life, and as a result, no matter how much success I accomplished, I always lacked confidence.

Looking back on this undergraduate experience now, I can see the similarities between my primary and secondary school and my college experience. Even though I did not realize it as I was earning my degree, I was placed in a university system that upheld the same basic belief as my public school experience: teacher/professor knows all – memorize this stuff, spit it back out on a test, and don't ask too many questions – conform – my-way-or-the-highway-method-of-teaching. Just like in my early education, my voice was silenced and my ideas did not count. And if I could not produce what the professor wanted, then I would fail. The only things that were really different between my early educational and university experience, besides the scheduling of classes and the absence of ringing bells to signify the beginning and ending of classes, were that I was older and lived on my own with my daughter, had years of experience in a high-stress job with no authority over my work life, and realized that without a college degree I would be stuck in a job and in a frame of mind in which I did not want to stay. I was determined to change my life, to denounce the life of my family of origin and to accomplish “something” beyond my wildest dreams; I was going to go to college to earn an undergraduate degree, but I was not going to stop there. I was going for the “gold ring” --

I was going to complete a Master's and a Ph.D., no matter how impossible or improbable it seemed to my family and to me at the time. And at the heart of all these reasons was my father's voice. My father, like so many working-class people as I have mentioned, believed in the power of hard work. He used to say, not to me directly, "A person can accomplish anything he (and my father meant "he") put his mind to. All he needs to do is work hard enough and not give up." Since I did not believe, unlike other members of my family, that men were the only ones who could accomplish great things in life through hard work, I failed to hear the pronoun "he" in my father's words and believed his words to be true for all people, including me. All these reasons play a part in helping me put aside my fear of not fitting in, putting aside my fear of failing, and focusing on my goals.

Even though I seemed to work past my fear of not fitting in and failing (I was enrolled in college despite my fear), and even though I achieved academic "success" throughout my undergraduate work (I carried a 4.0 GPA), I was still filled with fear. I did not trust myself as a student, and I was trying to mold myself into someone else's idea of who I should be, by fulfilling all the requirements without questioning my professors. This is not to say that I did not have questions, because I did. Nor is it to say that I believed that the methods of teaching mostly utilized during my undergraduate work were effective because I realized that these methods were only teaching students, including me, not to trust themselves and to conform to standards set by others. However, I did not have the confidence and/or courage to speak out against this system of teaching. In fact, I did not want to speak out against this system because I believed that this system represented what it really meant to be an educated person. Here again, I was internalizing an arbitrary standard of education, just like I had done during my public school

experience, believing it was “universal and natural,” except this time I was not rejecting it – I was embracing it.

In a sense, my undergraduate work reinforced my public school experience, insofar as it reinforced the idea that I knew very little about the world of academia and that I would have to trust and rely on my professors to pass their knowledge on to me. In order to succeed in this system, I had to silence my voice while in school. I had to make my professors’ voices, my voice. Mary Field Belenky et. al. would say that I was playing the role of the “Received Knowledge” knower: that I felt that I “could not generate facts and ideas through reflection on [my] own experience [and] depended on authorities to *tell* [me] what was right and wrong.” In part, Belenky et. al. would be accurate in this assertion insofar as I did feel that I had to rely on my professors to “generate facts and ideas” and that I did have to depend on them for “what was right and wrong” (39). However, I thought this way *not* because I did not believe I, too, could “generate ideas and facts” (as I believed during my public school experience), but because I wanted to “get it right” so that I could maintain my GPA and graduate with a degree in literature. I had ideas and interpretations about the course materials that differed from my professors’ ideas and interpretations, but I was afraid to express my thoughts for fear of failing the course (anything less than an “A” equaled failing to me). In order to maintain my GPA and graduate with honors, I believed that I had to relinquish my voice to the voice of my professors. Estes would say I was trying to wear someone else’s “red shoes,” instead of my own handmade ones (219). That is, I was trying to live a life designed by someone other than myself in order to experience the fullness of academic life. The belief about relinquishing my identity echoes back to what de Beauvoir says about realizing that

“others” have the power and that my only power would come from consenting to become a submissive adored object (341). In other words, I believed that if I wanted to be considered an academic, I would have to put away my own handmade “red shoes,” conform, and wear the “red shoes” made by someone else.

However, Estes states, “The loss of the handmade red shoes represents the loss of a woman’s self-designed life and passionate vitality, and the taking on of a too-tame life” (219). Entering the university as an undergraduate student, as I said, I felt as if I had to suppress my own voice and take on the voice of others. At the time I did not see how my working-class background, nor my gender, had prepared me to subordinate myself to the standards set by others, but it did. And of course, because I was a ‘carrot’ trying to be a “rose,” I stayed brown and withered. That is, until I started to trust myself as an intelligent woman and speak in my own voice. Speaking in my own voice meant speaking my own mind, expressing my own thoughts and not someone else’s. Virginia Woolf suggests in “Professions for Women” that speaking in one’s own voice means “telling the truth about [one’s] own experiences as a body” (369): speaking one’s own thoughts and not the thoughts that others expect one to say. I believe the desire and need to trust myself intellectually and to speak in my own voice was germinating under the surface throughout my adult life, and it sprouted and started growing during my graduate studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). Something happened at IUP that changed the way I saw myself as a student, as a scholar. But, like all my other epiphanies, this change did not happen all at once.

“What is this? I never heard of such a thing as putting desks in a circle during class time. This is a graduate course and placing desks in a circle seems juvenile, like a

waste of time.” I say to myself with an air of skepticism and arrogance as I position my desk in the circle to join the other students in the classroom. This is the first class for my Master’s in Teaching English at IUP, and I am nervous, unsure of myself, and wondering about the legitimacy of the professor’s request to move our, the students’, desks so that we face each other. As I am setting up my audiocassette recorder and taking out my notebook in preparation for a lecture, I look around at the students sitting at each desk and realize the cultural diversity within the classroom. I’m ready to begin taking notes, and waiting for the professor to start lecturing (still wondering why we are in a circle), but she asks us to introduce ourselves, saying who we are, where we are from, and why we are here. “Oh god! Tell me she not serious. I never did anything like this before,” I anxiously think to myself. But she is serious. And the introductions begin: the first student introduces himself, and I learn that he is from Indonesia; then another student introduces herself and I learn that she is from China; then a third student reveals he is from India; and a fourth reveals she is from Argentina. The class is relatively small, consisting of nine students, and all but two students, another woman and I, are from somewhere other than the United States and speak English as a second language, which makes it very difficult for me to follow the dialogue in class. But this language barrier does not seem to bother the professor. I say this because she is asking a question and wants us to discuss it as a group. I sit on the edge of my seat, focusing my eyes on and leaning towards whoever is speaking in an attempt to understand what that person is saying. But for the most part, I do not understand, yet I am captivated by the experience. I do not take the time to understand why I am captivated, but I am captivated just the same.

The professor is saying something about the next class and that she is glad we are here. Surprised, I look at my watch and notice it is after 9:00 p.m. and think about how the time went by so quickly. I put my recorder and notebook back in my backpack and realize that I did not record nor take any notes. I exit Leonard Hall and walk toward the parking lot next to the HUB, looking up at the sky, gazing at the brilliance of the half moon. A cool breeze touches my face, and I feel light hearted, and I catch myself smiling. I'm thinking, "What an intriguing class, but what was it all about? I mean, I got to meet some very interesting people and learn a little about where they're from and why they are here at IUP, but what about the course material? What will we be tested on? Oh, well, maybe it will be different next week."

When I first started my course work for my Master's in Teaching English at IUP, I was skeptical about the relaxed atmosphere of the various courses I was taking. I had an image of what a classroom should look like, an image that was reinforced by my undergraduate experience. But my classes at IUP did not look like my preconceived image: the image of a professor standing in front of the room, lecturing to the students, and the students diligently taking notes. No. The IUP classroom did not look like this. The IUP professors did not stand in front of the room imparting information to the students; instead students were expected to express and discuss their ideas and questions about the day's reading topics. In fact, not only was there dialogue in these courses, but also the students seemed to control the dialogue in the classroom. Students, along with the professors, were deciding what was important to discuss and how that information should be interpreted. This format of teaching in a university setting was new to me, and although I found this way of teaching stimulating and thought provoking, I did not trust

myself as an intellectual, nor did I trust the other students as intellectuals, so I questioned the legitimacy of what was being taught.

After completing several courses over a semester or two, I started to realize and value the importance of this student-centered approach to teaching. As I said, this realization did not happen over night; little by little I started to hear my *own* voice, alongside the voices of others, during class discussions and see myself as a serious academic. I was not just participating in class discussions because participation was required or was I merely completing assignments because they were required, as I did during my undergraduate work. Now, I was participating because I had something to say, something that *I* felt was valuable to the class discussion, and I was completing assignments that revealed something meaningful to me. I could see the connections between the course material and my lived life. The most meaningful assignments asked me to analyze myself through the course readings; these assignments asked me to tell *my* story and analyze that story by using the course readings. These assignments, like most of the class discussions, asked me to tap into the knowledge I had gained through living my life and to synthesize this knowledge with the course material, validating my lived experiences and me as an educated person.

The most salient of these self-evaluating, narrative assignments was an autobiography of how I learn to learn. We, the students, were asked to write a narrative story about how we learn to learn and to incorporate the ideas from some of the people we read during the semester. When the professor announced the assignment to the class, I thought to myself, “How ridiculous. What am I going to get out of this assignment?” Nevertheless, being the dutiful student, I approached the assignment seriously. Gian

Pagnucci states, “[. . .] learning [. . .] who you are is all about the stories that form your life [. . .]. My beliefs, my values, my tastes, and my biases are all linked to the stories of my life. And thus, as I write my own story, I come to understand better what motivates me, what drives me, what predisposes me to certain kinds of philosophical stances” (71). As Pagnucci suggests about understanding oneself as one writes his or her story, working through my story, recalling my most salient learning experiences and comparing how I learned a particular lesson with what the experts had to say, I started understanding my beliefs, my values, my tastes, my biases, and, most of all, myself as a learner. I started to see the importance of writing my story, the value of a student-centered classroom, and my worth as a scholar. Through writing my narrative, I started uncovering how I learned best, and once I could see how I learned best, I could see that my optimal learning environment was not my classroom experience of the past. In other words, once I understood how I learned, I realized that most of my school experience, both public school and university, did not provide this type of atmosphere. Understanding this discrepancy between my style of learning and learning environments, I started understanding why I had difficulty throughout my formal educational experience -- why I felt like a misfit in the classroom. And through my own story, I started realizing that my experience at IUP was providing me with the opportunity to discover what worked best for me as well as discovering what works best for me might not work best for someone else. As I said, assignments like the autobiography, along with student-centered class discussions, helped me gain confidence in myself as a student, a scholar, and, later on, as a teacher.

Analysis of The Four Pillars: “Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence”?

I did well academically during my undergraduate years. I was asked, not directly, to conform, so I tried. Following the rules and conforming to what I thought was expected of me was something my parents tried to instill in me as a working-class member, and my attempt at conforming to the traditional, or what Freire called “the banking,” concept of education paid off in terms of “making the grade.” However, I felt like a fish out of water during this time, and I spent many hours laboring and stressing over my course work, never trusting my abilities as a student. In spite of all the discomfort, however, I believe my undergraduate experience taught me not only the course material, but also it taught me a number of other lessons. In the traditional classroom setting I learned, first and foremost, that someone else had the knowledge, and all I had to do is listen (and/or read) and memorize that knowledge; I learned about the canons, especially the canon of literature and about all the *important* works; I learned to write critical analysis papers that followed the ideas and beliefs of my professors; I learned that my professors were intellectuals who spoke very well, especially in front of students; I learned to take really good notes (so good that I still use them today when the opportunity arises); and I learned that no matter how frightened I was or how much confidence I lacked, I could still apply myself and do well in this system of teaching if I was willing to silence my voice and conform. And my feeling of not fitting in was reinforced by the traditional classroom setting because even though I learned all these above mentioned things, I was still me, and the “me” in me struggled to adapt to a system that was foreign to me, to a system that was trying to mold me into someone else, to a system that denounced my lived experiences and denied me my own voice.

The fact that I did well and that I felt out of place in the traditional university classroom is not surprising, considering my working-class background. As I have said, conforming and not questioning authority, giving up one's voice, is a salient characteristic of someone from the working class. Lubrano states, "Children of the working class are brought up in a home in which conformity, obedience, and intolerance for backtalk are the norm" (10). Once again, my parents upheld conformity to authority and expected their children to be obedient and not talk back. The lessons my parents tried to instill in me as a child, the lessons of conformity, obedience, and silence, seemed to make sense to me as an undergraduate student because I wanted to succeed, and in order to succeed, I thought I had to look like one of "them." However, trying to make myself into someone who I was not brought on more insecurity.

I felt insecure in the university setting because I did not see myself as an academic; I did not see myself as an academic because I was not taught how to be an academic. As a child and young adult, I was not encouraged to participate in intellectual activities. Like a lot of families from working-class backgrounds, my parents saw college as a waste of time and money, "a hideout where lazy – or at least misguided – progeny burrow to retreat from the real work of life" (Lubrano 32). I do not remember anyone ever showing me how to read critically or take effective notes. As a working-class member, I was taught the value of physical labor, not mental labor, and that lived experience is a person's greatest teachers. Gathering and evaluating information, reading, taking notes, and reflecting on what was read, asking questions, and finding answers and then turning those answers into questions are all aspects of academic life, aspects that were difficult for me to manage because I was raised to believe these types of activities

were a waste of time. My family taught me to learn by doing in a physical sense. In contrast, my undergraduate classroom required that I sit still, listen to lectures, absorb the information, and “never trust the evidence of [my] own senses” (Belenky et. al. 191). Moreover, I was raised to value loyalty and community between family members and friends and to work together to accomplish a goal; in contrast, the traditional classroom emphasized competition between students and to be wary of others and not to share ideas. This discrepancy between my working-class background and the academy caused great discomfort for me because I was used to learning by doing, not by sitting and/or listening; I was used to cooperating with others, not competing against them. But as I said, I was determined to complete my degree, so I worked hard, telling myself *their* way was better than *my* way. But having to work harder caused me to see myself as different, as inferior to my professors and other students, causing me to feel like a fish out of water, like a misfit.

Although I felt like I was all alone, I am not the only person who has struggled with feeling out of place in a university where most of the professors upheld traditional methods of teaching. Belenky et. al. state that in their sampling of female students, most women lacked confidence in themselves as thinkers because of the method of teaching that denounces the value of lived experiences (191-193). Illustrating this point, Belenky et. al. tell an anecdotal story about a female student whose professor condemns her first-hand experiences as untrustworthy, claiming that she, the student, should “never trust the evidence of her own senses.” Belenky et. al. go on to say that stripping away this student’s way of knowing and failing to offer a substitute was devastating for this young woman: “‘I remember feeling small and scared,’ the woman says, ‘and I did the only

thing I could do. I dropped the course” (191). Belenky et. al. conclude that the conventional kind of learning that this young woman’s professor was advocating was not just painful, it was also crippling for this woman, as it is for many women (193). Just like many other women, especially women from working-class backgrounds, my confidence in myself as a “knower” was weak at best, and denouncing my “way of knowing,” of making sense of the world through “first-hand experiences,” and offering very little in return reinforced my feeling of insecurity and feeling out of place during my undergraduate years.

Like my undergraduate experience, my graduate experience at IUP taught me the course material, but unlike my undergraduate experience, my graduate experience showed me how to trust myself as an intellectual, reinforcing that I, too, was capable of producing knowledge. During my graduate work, unlike my undergraduate work, canons were scrutinized. I wrote critical papers in graduate school also, but these papers asked me to synthesize, or compare and contrast, *my* ideas with the ideas of other scholars. During my graduate course work, I had very little use for in-class note taking because through the student-led discussion and the various assignments, I was able to understand and make the information my own. I did not have to memorize the material because I understood the material in a way that I could apply what I learned to my discipline and to my life. I still had to work hard just as I did during my undergraduate experience, but I did not have to silence my voice or take on the voice of anyone but my own. And most of all, I no longer felt out of place in the classroom because not only did I speak in my own voice, but also my own voice was accepted and respected as an important contribution to the class as a whole, just like all the other students’ voices in the class.

So what happened at IUP? The professors opened up their classrooms, turning the limelight from themselves to their students. The professors involved their students in class discussion, instead of having monologues (better known as lectures), and they designed assignments that helped the students connect their lived experiences with the course materials. This type of teaching format is beneficial to students, especially females. Belenky et. al. assert, “For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites for success in the classroom” (194). Opening up the classrooms in these ways did several things: (1) involving students in a class discussion sent the message that students had something to contribute to the course material, (2) that the students’ interpretations were valuable, and (3) that there was more than one “truth” or way of interpreting the material. This type of student-centered teaching also, and maybe more importantly for someone like me from a working-class background, created a sense of community between students and professor; Lubrano points out that one of “the core values of the working class is being part of a family, a union, or a community” (20). And this type of student-centered teaching allowed the students to actively participate in class.

bell hooks asserts in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* that education should teach us how to restore a sense of connection between people, both inside and outside the academy, that teachers should “make the classroom a place that is life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership” (xv). In short, the student-centered classroom that I experienced during my graduate course work at IUP not only gave me as a student a sense of belonging to a family, but it also respected me as an intellectual person, gave me hands-on experience, and validated my lived experiences.

Conclusion: Chapter Three

By the time my master's work was completed, I had gained enough confidence in myself to continue my education, enrolling in the Rhetoric and Linguistics, now known as the Composition and TESOL, Ph.D. program at IUP. I was a confident student, confident in what I knew to be true and secure in the knowledge that what was true for me was not necessarily true for all people. I not only believed in myself as a student, but I also believed that I was ready and well equipped to go into a classroom as a teacher. In the next chapter, I will examine my life as a working-class academic from a working-class background: I will examine my life as an adjunct instructor, as a doctoral candidate, and as a single mother, uncovering how each of these various aspects overlap and affect how I see myself as an academic.

CHAPTER FOUR: “THE FOX AND THE HOUND”

“Caught between the longing for love and the struggle for the legal tender.”

(Jackson Browne)

Introduction to Chapter Four

Chapter four discusses my experience as a working-class academic from a working-class background. I will examine my transition from student to adjunct English instructor, and how my position as an adjunct from a working-class background influences how I see myself as a “legitimate” member of the academy. I will also discuss how my responsibilities at home affect my experience as an adjunct English instructor and how my adjunct position in the academy affects my experience at home.

New Beginnings: A Story from the Academy

It is mid-July, 1998. I am stretched out on the chase lounge in my side yard. Not a cloud in the sky. My skin is tingling as it soaks up the afternoon sun. My eyes are shut, but my mind is racing, fretting about the interview I had the day before with a local branch campus of a major university. I’m arguing with myself:

“Don’t get your hopes up. They’re not going to call you.”

“Stop it! Don’t think that way. Think positive – think -- I will get the job.”

“You’re a fool to think that you will be offered the job. Who do you think you are? The university will see that you do not belong, that you are an imposter.”

“All my hopes rely on this job. I’ve worked so hard. Stop being so negative! Think positive – Think -- I WILL get the job. The job of a lifetime, the job of my dreams.”

“The job of my lifetime” and “of my dreams” was an adjunct position teaching composition classes for the university where I had earned my undergraduate degree.

Throughout my undergraduate studies, I daydreamed about teaching. I believed, like many other people who teach, that I had something to offer students, and I wanted to share that “something”; I wanted to share a different perspective, a perspective that challenged traditional beliefs. Throughout my graduate studies at IUP my gut feelings how students learn were confirmed. And this confirmation boosted my confidence so that more than ever I wanted to be in the classroom where I could, like Leila Christenbury claims that most teachers want to, “touch the future” of the students who populated my classes (7). Now, with a master’s degree in hand and work on my doctorate beginning, I had the chance to fulfill that dream, except fulfillment was not up to me. It was up to the committee who interviewed me for the position. I vacillated between believing and not believing I belonged in a teaching position at a university, so I fretted over whether or not I would be offered the position.

My insecurity about belonging is not unlike that of other academics from working-class backgrounds. Sandra Gardner suggests in “What’s a Nice Working-Class Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?” that many people, especially women, from working-class backgrounds feel out of place in the academy. Gardner believes that this insecure feeling extends from, what she refers to as, “internalized oppression.” Internalized oppression, according to Gardner, is the “incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society” (51); a person from a subordinate group believes the dominant group believes that people from the subordinate group are inferior in some ways. Hence, as Gardner suggests, internalized oppression is likely associated with feelings of inferiority, and that these feelings strongly affect how academics from working-class backgrounds see

themselves and their place in the university. Many academics from working-class backgrounds have internalized middle and/or upper-class standards as universal and natural. Since working-class people do not have the same experiences as people from the middle and/or upper classes, and since the working-class experience is “defined as ‘less than,’ inferior, subordinate” by mainstream American society, working-class people, who lack privilege and power, become the “other,” “the outsider whose experience is ignored, devalued, or erased.” And, according to Gardner, given the middle-class assumptions and values that permeate university life, academics from the working class are continuously aware of their differences, causing them to feel out of place (51).

In her article “A Question of Belonging,” Joanna Kadi also reveals feelings of not belonging in the academy. Discussing how her “internalized oppression,” or what she calls her “conquered self,” affected her image of university life as an undergraduate student, Kadi states that because she felt like a misfit, because she had internalized a “belief system” that justified “oppressive experiences,” she lasted only four months “at one of Canada’s oldest and most prestigious universities.” In short Kadi left the university because she felt out of place, “I don’t belong here,” she thought (92). Like Gardner, Kadi, and so many other people from working-class backgrounds, I had internalized an image of what a “real” academic looked and acted like. I did not look nor act like that image, and as a result I had difficulty seeing myself as a faculty member of a university and felt that others would see my “true” identity and prevent me from entering the “sacred grove.”

However, another part of me, a more confident part of me, believed that I did belong. I had worked very hard and had accomplished so much, moving from a high

school graduate to a graduate student working on a Ph.D. To borrow the words of Sara Smolinsky, the protagonist in Anzia Yeziarska's book *The Bread Givers*, "Nothing had ever come to me without my going out after it. I had to fight for my living, fight for every bit of my education" (218). I wasn't about to give up on myself, even if that meant I had to battle my own insecurity, which at the time I believed was totally an effect of my own inabilities, i.e., something wrong with me.

Regardless of all my self-doubt, and to my delight, I was offered the adjunct position and would begin that fall, teaching two freshman composition courses. I was not only beginning the final phase of my goal, working toward a Ph.D., that I had set for myself when I first started college in 1987, but I was also beginning the career of my dreams at the place of my dreams. I was ecstatic, believing that I was on my way to the place I had only fantasized about for many years. I believed that starting this part-time position would help me gain valuable experience teaching at the university level, which in turn would help me obtain a full-time position as an Assistant Professor of Composition. At the time, I still believed in the value of hard work that my working-class background had taught me; I believed that if I worked hard and long enough, I would finish my Ph.D. in a timely manner, and I would be offered a full-time position with the university. I did not understand the politics of the academy and its attitude towards adjunct instructors, nor did I consider how my social class and/or gender would influence my thinking and add to the difficulties of completing my goals.

A Fly in the Ointment: Stories from the Academy

It's September 1998, around 3:50 in the afternoon. I am sitting in a conference room at the university where I teach, waiting for the other faculty members to arrive and my first departmental meeting to begin. The room is dimly lite. There are no windows and only one door leading into the room. The gray walls make the room feel closed in, almost suffocating. A small but sturdy woman enters the room with a cafeteria cart, filled with Pepsi, Seven-Up, bottled water, and cookies. As she starts placing these items on a table, I start a conversation with her:

"Hello, how are you?"

"Hi, I'm fine I guess."

"You guess?"

"Oh, I'm fine. But after I finish here, I have to go back to Chambers Hall to help set up a buffet. I was supposed to get off early today. Now I probably will not get home until after 6:00 p.m."

"Do you have special plans for this evening?"

"Yes. It's my son's sixth birthday, and I promised him I would take him to Seabase."

"Seabase?"

"Seabase is like Chuck-E-Cheese but for younger kids."

"Oh, I see. I'm not familiar with it but I do know Chuck-E-Cheese. My daughter was in love with Chuck-E-Cheese." We both laugh.

I glance down at the memo that requests all English faculty members to attend this beginning of the semester meeting. I check my watch: it reads 3:55 p.m., the meeting

is to begin in minutes. But the woman from the cafeteria and I are the only two in the room. My thoughts race: "Am I in the right room? Where is everyone?"

"Am I in the right room for the English meeting?" I ask.

"Yes. You can help yourself," she response, pointing to the refreshments.

"Thank you. Where is everyone?"

"Oh, don't worry. They'll be here. They all seem to file in at the last moment," she says with the confidence of someone who knows.

"When did you start today?" I ask.

"Eight this morning," she replies as she finishes setting out the last of the soft drinks. "There. That looks like everything. Well, nice talking with you. See ya later."

"Yes, it was nice talking with you also. I hope you get home in time to take your son to Seabase." She smiles a crooked smile and nods her head in agreement. Then she leaves the room, and I am left in silence, sitting by myself once again. My mind starts questioning whether or not I want to be in this room, whether or not I want to participate in this meeting. I say to myself, "Do I really want to be sitting here when everyone else walks in? What will I say when they arrive? The invitation requests ALL faculty members attend this meeting, and I am a faculty member. But what will I say to them?"

* * *

[The names in the following story have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.]

It's mid November 1998, and I have invited Yvonne, at her request, to my house so that she can meet my daughter, Nicole. Nicole has just returned from a year-long stay in Tanzania. Yvonne wants to talk with Nicole about Nicole's adventure because Yvonne

had encouraged me to encourage Nicole to pursue this quest. And now Yvonne is interested in hearing what Nicole has to say about the trip. Yvonne was a visiting professor who taught Eighteenth Century Literature during my undergraduate studies. I am very proud and honored to have her as a guest in my house. I have the utmost respect for her: she is a Yale graduate, has published numerous articles and books on women and literature, won the Guggenheim award for her paper on bees, lives part-time in London and part-time in Findleyville, Pennsylvania, and is a mutual friend with one of my undergraduate professors who I greatly admire and respect, and who is now one of my colleagues at the university where I teach. In short, Yvonne is everything I believe a “real” academic should be. During my undergraduate work, she seemed to take me under her wing, so to speak; we had wonderful discussions about academic life and the plight of women. But, even though I have many fond memories of these conversations, I am nervous having such an accomplished person in my house, and I am afraid that I will not have enough intelligent things to say. So I invite James, the mutual friend, and his wife Marie to join us for the afternoon. James has also invited his mother, Martha, to join us because she is visiting from Oregon, where she chairs the English Department at the University of Oregon. Martha has recently returned from Ethiopia and also wants to talk with Nicole because Nicole spent time in Ethiopia during the year abroad.

In preparation for this small, afternoon gathering, I spend hours cleaning my house and preparing snacks for my guests, snacks like my famous blue-cheese ball, hummus and pita bread, vegetable tray with spinach dip, and broiled shrimp wrapped in bacon. The day is damp and overcast. The light from the windows make the room dreary, so I light some candles, placing them on the mantle, bookcase, and end tables. I light a

fire in the fireplace. I arrange the snacks on the cocktail table in front of the sofa, making sure there are enough appetizer plates and napkins. I adjust the side chairs, making sure that when my guests sit down they can reach the snacks with ease, yet have enough room to pass by the table without bumping it. I step back so that I can take in the scene. Everything seems perfect; the soft, yellowish flicker of the candles and the warm glow of the fire have created a cozy, intimate atmosphere, and the snacks look delicious.

My guests arrive.

Yvonne is the first to arrive, and after an introduction, she and Nicole begin a conversation. Nicole is gracious, as always, and eager to talk about her stay in Tanzania. As they talk, I serve them drinks, asking if there is anything else they would like. After a few minutes pass, James, Marie, and Martha arrive. James introduces me to his mother as his former student (which I am) – he does not mention the fact that we now work together. Once all the initial greetings have been made and everyone is seated, I make sure that everyone has something to drink and that they are helping themselves to the refreshments. Yvonne has moved to the right end of the sofa so that she and Nicole can continue their conversation. James tells Marie, who is sitting in a chair near the left of the sofa, that I am working on my Ph.D. Marie tilts her head with interest and asks me what university I am attending. I hand her a glass of cranberry juice and take a seat next to her on the sofa. When I tell her I am going to IUP, she simply says, “Oh,” then turns her attention to Yvonne, asking her a question about clothing in the 18th century. Marie, like Yvonne, is an 18th Century Literature professor, and earned her Ph.D. from an Ivy League university. Marie is now an associate professor at a small, private college in the area. Yvonne turns her attention to Marie, answering her question, and they start a

discussion about the article Marie is writing on 18th Century women's clothing. Martha asks Nicole a question about her travels to Tanzania and Ethiopia, as James alternates his attention between the conversation of Marie and Yvonne and the conversation between Nicole and Martha. I am trying to listen to both conversations, while jumping up from time to time to fill someone's glass or replenish one of the plates of appetizers. I am playing the part of what I consider to be a "good" hostess. I am making sure everyone is comfortable and has enough to eat and drink. Time passes, and I notice that the scene has changed. James and Martha have joined the conversation of Maria and Yvonne. Nicole seems to be listening to what is said, but she does not participate in the conversation. I continue to serve my guests, while listening to their conversation. I do not attempt to join the conversation, and no one seems to notice that Nicole and I are not participating.

When I started my career as an adjunct English instructor, or lecturer as I am sometimes labeled, I felt like the timid "new-comer" or, at times, the submissive former student. Considering that I was the "new-comer" and former student (I earned my undergraduate degree at the university where I was employed as an adjunct) it might be understandable why I was nervous about my first department meeting and about the visit of my undergraduate professor and his family (now many of my professors were my colleagues). However, even though these stories took place almost ten years ago, like many other academics from working-class backgrounds, I am still uncomfortable holding conversations with tenured and tenured-track faculty members, finding it easier to talk with various working-class staff members, as these stories from the academy show. This tendency extends, in part, from my feeling of not belonging, which is an extension of my

working-class background insofar as my class background allows me to identify with these staff members, but did not prepare me for a scholarly life. In her essay “Writing and Teaching with Class,” Valerie Miner blames her feeling of not belonging in the academy on her working-class background, asserting that her background did not provide her with the social skills, among other things, needed to participate comfortably in academic life; thus, she finds “it easier to make friends with clerical workers or low-level administrative staff than with other faculty” (81). And Donna Langston claims in “Who Am I Now?: The Politics of Class Identity” that she often has “a feeling of not belonging in meetings, committees, and socials” because of the conflict between the academy and her working-class background (72). The excuse of “not belonging” because of my social class background works as a way of explaining why I felt uneasy years ago as a new-comer and student, but does not seem to be an adequate explanation today. The key word here is “adequate.” This is to say that I do believe that my background continues, and will continue, to influence how I see myself as an academic, and I believe my background as a member of the working class and my experience as a working-class academic have helped me understand the needs of many of my students from diverse backgrounds. To totally blame my uneasiness around tenured and tenured-track faculty on a lack of understanding the academy because of my social class background would be a mistake. For me today, it is not as much a lack of understanding the protocol of the academy or the fear of full-time faculty that makes me uncomfortable as it is the conflict between social class beliefs.

Let me explain. I have been a member of the adjunct teaching faculty in a university setting for almost ten years now, and this feeling of not belonging, or feeling

out of place, is no longer just an effect of my not understanding university life. On the contrary. My experiences as an adjunct and lecturer have awarded me the opportunity to observe the inner-workings of three local universities and one college, exposing me to a variety of course curricula, administrative procedures, and student bodies. As an adjunct and lecturer I attend department and senate meetings at each of these institutions, even though I have little or no voice – I can speak, sometimes, but cannot vote. I am not claiming to know everything there is to know about these four institutions, but my exposure to the academy has shown me that my feeling of not belonging is not solely caused by my lack of knowledge about the academy or my internal feelings of insecurity. My exposure to the inner-workings of the various institutions where I work has revealed other factors -- factors such as a hierarchal system that labels me as a lecturer and/or adjunct faculty and all the repercussions of that title. Valerie Miner reminds her readers how the ranking order of teaching faculty helps uphold an oppressive hierarchal system, while simultaneously revealing the negative attitude about the “lower level” teaching positions that causes those members to feel inferior in the institutions where they teach. Miner states, “Lecturers are paid less and teach more than tenured-track faculty [. . .]. Although lecturers are valuable troops, they have little power within the institution and cannot vote in the faculty senate” (82). Less pay, more teaching responsibility, and no voice all reflect the invisibility and negative attitude towards adjunct faculty members. To demonstrate this point, Miner tells a story of a tenured professor who was in charge of “Title Nine” issues at her campus: the University of California, Berkeley. Miner states:

I was attending a meeting for faculty involved with women’s studies, the tenured professor in charge of Title Nine issues was explaining in how she

worked to support assistant professors in their struggle for tenure, to increase the number of women professors on campus, and to improve their status. Innocently, I asked what her office did for lecturers. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘lecturers? We don’t have anything to do with lecturers. We only deal with faculty. (84)

“*We only deal with faculty.*” What am I if I am not faculty? Yet, the attitude that adjuncts and lecturers are not faculty reflected in Miner’s story is the attitude reflected at the various universities where I teach. My story about my former undergraduate professor, and now colleague, visiting my house subtly demonstrates this attitude. As the story reveals, James does not introduce me to Martha, his mother, as his colleague. He merely introduces me as his former student even though we, James and I, are teaching for the same university in the same department, teaching some of the same courses. We are friends and often share our teaching experiences with each other, as well as discuss a variety of other scholarly topics. Nonetheless, he introduces me only as a former student, which is *still* something he does today when introducing me to someone even though James and I have been teaching at the same university for over nine years.

I am not sure why James does not include my faculty status in his introductions of me. Perhaps he is proud of the fact that I was his student and wants to share that information with others when he introduces me to someone he knows, but I often wonder why he does not include my faculty status. I ask myself, “Is he embarrassed to say that I am a member of the part-time faculty? Or is it that he does not recognize me as a faculty member because of my adjunct status?” Of course without asking him, the answer to these questions is next to impossible for me to know for sure, causing me to rely on my

own perception. However, as mentioned above, according to Miner, who claims that adjuncts are not seen as faculty members by tenured and tenured-track faculty, it is possible that James does not see me as a faculty member because I am an adjunct.

In addition to James not acknowledging me as a faculty member, Marie turns her attention away from me and starts a conversation with Yvonne after I told Marie that I was attending IUP, a state university, for my Ph.D. Yes, it is true that my guests all knew one another, and the fact that they were friends was the very reason I invited all of them to my house for this small gathering. However, I find it noteworthy that Nicole and I were not participants, nor did we attempt to participate, in the conversation. I cannot speak for Nicole, but I remember feeling intimidated by my guests' topic of discussion, so intimidated that I could not even think of questions to ask about their topic. I believe that my failure to participate in the conversation and Marie's response to my attending IUP are also direct consequences of social class differences.

Perhaps if I was not intimidated by the credentials of my guests, I would not have been intimidated by their topic of discussion and would have been more assertive and joined their conversation, but as I said, I was intimidated by their positions in the university and by their Ivy League degrees. And when Marie changed the subject and started another conversation with Yvonne, I interpreted Marie's behavior as her disapproval of my attending IUP, and my interpretation of Marie's behavior added to my insecurity about not being smart enough to participate in a conversation with my highly educated guests. So I silenced my voice that day.

Why did I interpret Marie's behavior as disapproving? I was ashamed and embarrassed because IUP was a state university, not Ivy League. State universities had a

stigma attached to them. State universities were viewed, at least by the people who I knew, as “party” schools, as schools where students went when they were not serious about their education or when a “better,” private school did not accept their applications, or when the students could not afford the tuition of a more prestigious school.

Confirming my preconceived beliefs about state universities, and adding to my shame and embarrassment that day, James had advised me as an undergraduate student not to go to IUP, or any state university for that matter, for my graduate work, claiming that the degrees earned at these institutions were not taken seriously by “genuine” scholars because degrees from state institutions were inadequate -- “watered-down” degrees. But despite his recommendation, I enrolled at IUP because of its location (it was close to home) and my inability to afford the tuition of a private school. So when Marie turned her attention, I interpreted her behavior as her disappointment and dissatisfaction in my choice of schools. I felt as if I had done something wrong by attending IUP because I did not take the advice of James, who was the authority figure. I was ashamed and felt unworthy to participate in a conversation with my scholarly friends for whom I held much respect and admiration. And my lack of confidence in myself and my shame are examples of “internalized oppression” that Gardner suggests come from the subordinate person’s belief that the dominant person, or persons, believes that the subordinate is inferior in some way. In my mind that day, I was the subordinate.

Analysis of A Fly in the Ointment

I realize that there may, or may not, be reasons for what transpired that day between my guests and me that are beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, our behavior, as I said, can be linked to interrelated factors that are rooted in social class differences, differences that create a hierarchal system that subordinates a group of people just because that group of people do not share the same experiences as the ruling class, a system that creates a “us-verses-them” frame of mind.

Factor one: All of my guests, James, Marie, Martha, and Yvonne, are tenured faculty, and I am not only James’ former student (a fact that by tradition subordinates me to him), but also I am an adjunct. Adjuncts are notoriously seen as the “peripheral” workers who occupy subordinate positions within the university. Michael Kuchera and Steven Miller state in “The Effects of Perceptions of the Academic Job Market on Adjunct Faculty: An Identity-Theory Analysis” that the higher educational system fragments faculty into “status groups,” which places the adjunct faculty in subordination to the tenured and tenured-track faculty (240). Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay, in the introduction to their book *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, also bear witness to the hierarchal system within the academy, adding that this hierarchal system is based on a number of aspects, one being social class and another gender. Tokarczyk and Fay assert, “Academia has a class structure: its hierarchy of professors, assistant professors, and part-timers is not solely a ladder based on merit, but a track based on a number of gender, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic factors” (7). In other words, a person’s gender, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic situation often determine what rung of the ladder he or she will occupy more than how well a

person performs his or her job. Donna Langston reveals that the hierarchal system of the academy places most academics from working-class backgrounds at “the bottom of the academic heap” (68), or in other words, they end up as adjunct faculty.

According to the view of Kuchera and Miller, Tokarczyk and Fay, and Langston, all mentioned above, I was and am at the “bottom of the academic heap” as a member of the adjunct faculty. I will discuss how my working-class background perpetuates my position in the academy later in this chapter. What I want to suggest in this context is that maybe I might not have been the only one who had internalized the traditional standards of the university as universal and natural. My guests, also, may have internalized these standards of the university hierarchal system, and that with this internalization they, just like I, “naturally” did not see me as their equal, partly because of my adjunct teaching status and partly because I was attending a state university and not an Ivy League one. Again, this internalization would help explain why I did not assert myself and join in the conversation, and it also would help explain a possible reason why my guests did not attempt to include me, nor my daughter, in their discussion.

What I find particularly intriguing is the fact that there were only six of us, sitting in my living room, which by the way was arranged in such a way that it invited intimate conversation. Yet, my daughter nor I made an attempt to join the conversation, as I said earlier, and James, Marie, Martha, and Yvonne made no attempt to include Nicole and me in their conversation. Were my guests intimidated by Nicole and/or me as I was intimidated by them? Without asking them, there is really no way to be sure. But I believe that my guests felt comfortable in my home. I say this because they appeared very relaxed and open as they smiled, laughed, and socialized with each other. I remember

feeling quite content and proud that day to have such distinguished guests in my house, and I was honored to play the role of their host. And I played my part well because that was what I was taught to do by my family of origin – to be of service to others by making sure my guests’ needs were met – which is a characteristic of my working-class background.

Factor two: The school a person attends most often reflects that person’s social class. All of my guests that day graduated from Ivy League universities, and I was, and am, attending a state university. The students at Ivy League schools most often come from the ruling classes, whereas the students at state universities most often come from the working classes. According to Tokarczyk and Fay, Ivy League schools are private institutions designed to education the “elite faculty of letters,” and the state schools are designed to educate “a service-oriented faculty of technical and vocational education.” Graduates from Ivy League schools hold most of the tenured and tenure-track faculty positions in these state schools while adjuncts and lecturers are most often from less privileged schools or state institutions. Because of this divide, according to Tokarczyk and Fay, many faculty members, especially humanities faculty members, remain entrenched in the thinking of private institutions, which work to uphold “ruling-class ideologies that work to cover up, even as they produce, the tensions that undermine our vocational efficacy” (15). Many of these Ivy League graduates who are teaching in state universities are teaching working-class students, and even though many of these professors might be attempting to open up their classrooms to their students, these professors are, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuating dominant class values. Hence, the cycle continues. By perpetuating dominant class values, consciously or

unconsciously, professors send the message to their students that these values are the values which the student must try to uphold and that these values are the one “correct” set of values. The example that follows is representative of my experience as an undergraduate and demonstrates how dominant values are perpetuated.

Although I do not know everything about James’s childhood experience, I do know that we come from different social classes. His parents were both tenured professors who published numerous articles and books in their disciplines, who chaired English departments at highly respected universities, who traveled the globe with their children – visiting and working in far away places, like England, France, Germany, India, and South Africa -- and who discussed Shakespeare’s literature at the dinner table. My parents, as I have already said, were not college-educated; in fact, my father never finished high school. My father was a stone mason and my mother a housewife, who sometimes worked as a clerical worker. My world traveling consisted of a one-hundred mile radius from my place of birth (once a year my family would travel to Erie, Pennsylvania for a day or visit my dad’s hunting camp, which was located just outside Warren, Pennsylvania, for a weekend – we didn’t even subscribe to *National Geographic* -- and I was twenty-three before I saw the Atlantic Ocean). And the conversations that my family held during dinners were mostly about the difficult day my father and/or mother had or how my parents were going to make ends meet that month.

As I said, James graduated from an Ivy League university and was one of my undergraduate professors. He encompassed many of my preconceived qualities of an university professor: he dressed a tweed sports jacket and bow tie; he talked with an air of dignity, carefully choosing words and forming sentences; he was extremely confident in

the way he spoke and carried himself; he was a vibrant lecturer; he always had a complicated answer to students' questions; and he seemed to have vast knowledge of other subjects besides his chosen discipline. In short, James looked and acted the part of my image of a college professor, which I had internalized mostly through watching television. He portrayed these qualities so well that I asked him to be my academic adviser, which he graciously accepted, because I wanted an adviser who could "properly" guide me. And as my adviser, although I wanted to major in literature *and* writing, James advised me to focus on literature and minor in French because literature was for serious scholars, and French was the language of a serious literature major. James also said, "All literature majors know, or learn, how to write because that's what they do – they write about literature." Therefore, according to James, I did not need additional writing courses. Since I believed in the words of James as the one "universal truth," and since I wanted to be a "real" academic, I focused on literature and French, instead of writing.

James also advised me about what graduate schools I should attend and which ones to avoid, overtly stating, as I mentioned, that I should stay away from state universities because the degrees earned at these institutions were not adequate degrees. Following James' advice, I applied at a number of private graduate schools in the area and, to my delight, was accepted into the graduate program in Literary and Cultural Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. However, I declined my seat because of financial difficulties and could not afford the tuition, even with student loans. As mentioned in chapter one, income does not necessarily indicate social-class rank, but it often is a reflection of a person's social standing; most often with power comes wealth, but wealth does not guarantee power. I have neither wealth nor power insofar as the academy is

concerned. The fact that I could not afford the tuition at Carnegie Mellon University was directly related to my working-class background. As members of the working class, my parents could not afford to keep a trust fund or an educational fund for their children; even if my parents had money to set aside, the likelihood of them saving for education was very slim, considering how they felt about education in general. Remember, my parents wanted me to find a “good” job with the utility company until I could find a “good” man to marry.

Another factor that can be related to my working-class background is the fact that I only applied to universities close to home. As mentioned in the last chapter, Alfred Lubrano points out that one of the core values of the working class is being a part of a community, or family, “which engenders a strong sense of loyalty” and commitment (20). At the time I was applying to graduate schools, my daughter was living with me and working on her undergraduate degree. Although James would often suggest that I apply at graduate schools in different states, even different countries, saying that Nicole was an adult and could take care of herself, and even though the thought of attending a school in a different place sounded intriguing to me, I had a stronger need to stay put, so to speak, and to maintain the home for my daughter and me. From my perspective, part of my responsibility as a parent was making sure that my daughter *always* had a place to call home. If I would have left the area to work on my graduate studies, I would have broken my commitment to my daughter. And breaking my commitment was not something I could do in good conscience.

Even though I recognized that I had made the choice to decline my seat at CMU and stay in the area, James’s words stayed with me, causing me to believe that the

education I was receiving at IUP was inferior in some way to that of a private, more expensive school. The validity of James' words is not what I want to prove or disprove in this dissertation; what I want to point out is the impact his perspective had on my perspective. I want to acknowledge that I believe James had only my best interest at heart and advised me in the way he knew best. However, our experiences throughout our lives have been different, thus, awarding us different ways of seeing the world. But I believed his perspective was the one universal truth and, hence, "better" than my perspective; furthermore, I believed that he thought his perspective was the one universal truth and, hence, "better" than my perspective, so I tried to make myself into someone who I was not, someone I could never be.

Because I held, as I believed James held, his life's experience was more valuable than mine, I wanted to be a scholar like him. However, no matter how hard I tried, I could never be like him. Our experiences were too different, thus, had given us different ways of seeing life, different ways of seeing the world. There was a time, not too long ago, that I saw these differences as one being inferior to another, and saw James' position as more worthy than mine. I was inferior because I believed that his experiences were better than mine. I believed his experiences made him a "better" scholar than me, better in the sense that I believed the knowledge he gained through his lived experiences, which include his Ivy League education, was better than the knowledge I gained through my lived experiences. My view of valuing James' experiences over my own is, as Gardner says, an internalization of dominate values that causes a person to feel inferior. These values are grounded in the American social class structure that views the various social classes unequally, and since, as Gardner asserts, "the working class is to be defined as 'less

than,' inferior, subordinate" (51), I saw my experience of life as "less than" because, as mentioned above, I had internalized a set of standards that did not acknowledge, nor respect, my experiences. Thus, the cycle continues – dominate values are perpetuated.

Summing It Up

As I said in the last chapter, once I started understanding the arbitrary value system of the academy, I started realizing that my life experience, which included my education at a state university, was not inferior, just different. I started believing in my own intelligence, realizing that I, too, had something to offer the academy and the students who enroll in my class. Langston states, "[. . .] education is not a measure of intelligence [. . .]. Education, though, does give one privilege. Those little initials behind one's name (M.A., Ph.D.) bring a lot of benefits and status. The ability to gain those letters is predominately a reflection of class background" (66). As mentioned in the last chapter, my graduate studies at IUP helped me uncover the arbitrary value system of the academy, yet even though I understand the prejudice, my understanding does not change my situation. I thought, like many other academics from working-class backgrounds, my education would award me entrance into the "scared grove" as a legitimate member of the academy, but it hasn't. And, according to Langston, the likelihood that it will is very slim, even with a Ph.D. Langston points out that academics from working-class backgrounds have more obstacles to overcome, working with less money, less sleep, and less support than other academics, and this all adds up to less of a competitive edge (66). Add a shrinking job market where hiring part-time help is the trend and where faculty are fragmented into "status groups" according to where they earned their degrees, which is directly related to social class, my chances of being hired as a tenured-track faculty

member are low. However, without a Ph.D., I am pretty much guaranteed that I will not land a full-time position, tenured or non-tenured-track. So I continue to pursue my degree in spite of all the obstacles before me.

The Winds of Change?

As I mentioned in chapter one, I was thirty-four when I entered academia, and I struggled to stay. when I started my undergraduate work I was working a full-time job as an assistant administrator in mortgage banking and raising my nine-year-old daughter as a single parent. My job barely paid the bills, so there were times that I had to either work overtime at the current job or take on part-time jobs just to make ends meet. When I had to take on additional responsibilities at work, or take on an additional job, I would usually miss classes and end up dropping those classes. I used to joke with friends that my education was my new hobby, something that I did in my “spare” time. I would assert, “I’m getting older whether or not I continue with my education, so I may as well continue – what do I have to lose?” Although only nine, my daughter was very supportive of my quest to educate myself; we would often spend our evening, when I wasn’t working or in class, studying together, and when I would have rushes of guilt for not spending enough “quality” time with her, she would always reassure me that I was doing the right thing for both of us (by the way, I find myself in this same position today with my grandchildren, and my daughter still reassures me I am doing the right things for all of us). I did not really believe that I would ever finish my undergraduate degree until one day, seven years after entering the academy, I realized I had earned sixty undergraduate credits. Once I realized that I had reached the halfway point, I decided to take the plunge, as

some of my college degreed friends had encouraged me to do, and quit my full-time job, enrolling as a full-time student in the fall of 1994.

Langston asserts, “Access to higher education is very limited for poor and working-class students. Education under these conditions is only an option if one takes out loans that have to be paid back” (65). Borrowing money was my “only option.” Like many people from the working class, I did not have a trust fund or a college fund, so I borrowed money to complete my undergraduate and master’s degrees, and to start my Ph.D. work. Borrowing money for my education was stressful for me; I say stressful not because I did not want to complete my degree, but because I was not used to owing money that I did not have. My parents taught me never to overextend myself financially and only to buy what I could pay for with cash. But if I wanted an education, I had to take out student loans, loans that would eventually become larger than the mortgage on my house. And this fact was extremely stressful. I would wake up in the middle of the night, in a cold sweat, worrying about how much money I owed and how I would pay it back. The amount of the loans was staggering to me, but then I would remember how much I hated my job with the bank and would remind myself that if I wanted something better for myself and my daughter, I would have to get past my fear of owing money and keep focused on my education. In other words, the fear of staying in the place of my past was greater than the fear of having student loans and owing money to the United States government.

The money from these loans gave me the ability to focus on my education so that I finished my undergraduate degree two years after I enrolled as a full-time student. Bottom line: it took me nine years to complete my undergraduate degree, which

according to Langston is not unusual for a non-traditional, working-class person; in fact, it took Langston twelve years to complete her bachelor's (65). In addition to helping me focus on my bachelor's degree, these loans helped me to remain a full-time student as I earned my master's degree and finished the course work for my Ph.D. By the end of the two years that it took to complete my course work for the doctorate, I had exhausted my loans and could not borrow anymore money. As mentioned, I started teaching composition classes the fall after I graduated with my master's, but I only taught two sessions so that I could gain teaching experience. Now that I could not borrow anymore money, I would have to teach more classes in order to make ends meet.

At first I only had to add three classes, which brought the total number of classes that I would teach each semester to five. Studying for my comprehensive exams and teaching five, three-credit courses a semester was overwhelming to me at the time. I was used to teaching two classes at one university while attending classes for my doctorate; but now I had to teach five classes and travel between three schools while at the same time preparing for my comprehensive exams and writing a proposal for my dissertation. So not only was I working on my education, but I was also responsible for more students, thus more student papers, resulting in more course preparation and class time. And instead of leaving home to teach two or three days a week, which gave me time on my "off" days to work on my own education, I was leaving home five days a week, oftentimes not returning home until after 7:00 p.m. or later. With the added responsibilities of teaching more classes as an adjunct instructor at three different universities and my responsibilities at home, my own education started to decelerate;

instead of completing my comprehensive exams in a semester or two, like most of my peers, the exams took me two years to complete.

I completed my comprehensive exams in the summer of 2002, and shortly after, while I was preparing the proposal for my dissertation, life happened; that is, something happened that caused me to almost give up my dream, my future, my way out.

“The In-Two-Minds-Mother”: A Story from Home

It’s a Saturday in late November 2002, and I’ve been sitting on the sofa reading, and taking notes for my dissertation proposal. The phone begins ringing, and I notice that the fire needs another log and that the light coming through the window is a haunting gray. I make my way past the stacks of students’ papers sitting on the floor, waiting to be read and evaluated, and pick up the phone on its fourth ring, just in time so that the answering machine does not have to go through its prompt:

“Hello.” I hear the fuzzy, static sound of a bad phone connection and a weak and trembling voice. I cannot make out who it is on the other end; then I realize it’s my daughter.

“Mom,” she sobs.

“What’s wrong? Why are you crying? What’s happened?”

“I’m sorry. I know you are busy, but I need help.”

“What’s wrong?” I insist because I fear that the man she calls her husband has done something to hurt her. I fear this because he has a history of drug and alcohol abuse and slashes out at others when he is on one of his binges.

“I did not sleep last night because Damiana was up most of the night vomiting. She has a fever of 104 and now I am sick. I’ve been vomiting all afternoon.”

I can hear the baby crying in the background and her so-called husband yelling, but cannot make out what he is saying because of the noisy phone connection. “What’s Lee saying?” I ask.

“I don’t know. He’s upset because the baby’s crying...”

Anxious and frustrated, I cut her off in mid-sentence, “But you’re sick! Is he helping?”

“No...”

I cut her off again, “What do you mean – NO?”

“No. Please. Mom. I need help.”

I hear the anxiety in her voice, so I gather my wits and calmly ask, “What do you need, Nicole?”

“I don’t know.” There’s a pause; then she continues, “I need to rest. I am so sick.”

I can hear in her voice that she needs more than rest but will not ask, so I say, “I’ll come...”

She cuts me off, “NO. You can’t.”

“Why? What do you mean, ‘I can’t?’” Lee is still screaming. He’s ordering Nicole to get off the phone and screaming something about “the bitch on the other end”; I hear him call Nicole a cunt and demand that she quiet the baby. His indignant behavior is more than I can handle. I have witnessed his abuse toward my daughter on different occasions but have respected my daughter’s wish not to get involved. But today is the epitome of his poor behavior and I fear for her and the baby’s safety. So I am compelled to pry a little further, “Has he been drinking? Are you and Damiana safe?”

“Yes and no.”

“What do you mean yes and no? Yes, he has been drinking and no, you are not safe?”

“Yes.”

“Can you talk?”

“No.” There is silence between us and I can hear my daughter quietly sobbing.

“Come home,” I insist as I stare at my notes for the proposal and the stacks of papers on the floor.

“What do you mean, come home?”

“You and Damiana can live with me until you can get back on your feet.”

“But I’m pregnant.” There’s another moment of silence.

“Pregnant? You’re pregnant?” I gasp as I try to digest what she has revealed.

“Yes.”

“Come home,” I proclaim with confidence as I continue to stare at my notes and stacks of students’ papers, “We’ll do what we have to do. We’ll figure it out. Just come home.”

Time passes. Fast forward to today.

In forty-five minutes my daughter and her two small children will arrive home, and I will have to stop writing. Why? Because the minute they arrive, the children will want to see me, spend time with me. My daughter is a single mother and needs my help and support with the children. And besides, I have a strong desire, a strong need, to be a part of their young lives. They will not stop growing while I finish my dissertation. And I do not want them to grow up, remembering me as the grandmother who was always too

busy. Yet, for the most part, I am the grandmother who is too busy; I'm either teaching, preparing to teach, and/or working on my dissertation. My daughter is in school, trying to finish the degree that she started before she had her first child, and works part-time jobs as a massage therapist, so that she can someday support her family on her own, but for now I have taken on the financial responsibility of our family. Since I am now financially responsible for four people, I must teach at least nine classes during the fall and spring semesters in order to make ends meet. During the summer term, I must teach at least five classes in order to keep everything going. My schedule is overwhelming, but I feel as if I have no other choice. That is, I cannot "kill the essential angel (there [is] no one else to do [my] work); [and I] would not – if I could – [kill] the caring part of Woolf's angel." Now, when I should be focusing on writing my dissertation, "my hands and being [are] at other (inescapable) tasks" (Olsen 38) such as preparing for classes, reading student papers, caring for my grandchildren, and cooking dinners. Such is the life of a working-class academic.

Over four years ago my daughter needed help. She needed *me* to help her, and I did. Taking on the responsibility of a family of four meant that I would have to take on more responsibility at work and at home, so I did. Even though I knew the difficulty that this additional responsibility would cause, I believed I could handle it. I believed that I could teach nine classes a semester, play the part of the surrogate second parent, and finish my Ph.D. I wasn't sure how I was going to do all of this, but I was determined to do it just the same. This was not the first time in my life that I had to struggle against impossible odds, and my working-class background taught me how to work hard and work together, especially during tough times. Carol Tarlen tells her readers in "The

Memory of Class and Intellectual Privilege” that her working-class background taught her that solidarity was “more than just an ideology or a tactic, it is an everyday action” (26). Tokarczyk and Fay point out that Paul Lauter says that “the working class stresses group affiliation rather than the individual,” as the middle and upper classes stress, and that the belief in solidarity is a “deep-seated value” of the working class (13). And Alfred Lubrano also asserts that working-class people believe in solidarity, adding that “the heritage of struggle, as writer and working-class academic Janet Zandy puts it, develops a built-in collectivity in the working class, a sense of people helping each other – you’re not going it alone, and you have buddies to watch your back” (19). And so we were, and are, “buddies,” my daughter and me, “going it together” in our struggle to survive as working-class women: my daughter as a single mother of two, trying to educate herself as a mid-wife while working part-time as a massage therapist and caring for her two small children; and me as an adjunct instructor and doctoral student, trying to educate myself while working at part-time teaching jobs at four institutions while caring for my family.

My Schedule: My Life as a Working Class Academic

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Schedule: The alarm sounds at 3:45 a.m. I do not turn on the lights because I do not want to wake my daughter and her two small children in the next room. I stumble down the stairs to the kitchen to make coffee. While it’s brewing, I feed the cats, then, head to the basement to clean out the litter boxes and start a load of laundry. Back to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. I have 20 minutes before I have to start my morning dressing ritual, so I sit in the dark for these twenty minutes, trying to gather my thoughts as I drink my coffee. After dressing, I feed the dogs and take them for a short walk. I leave the house at 6:00 a.m., stopping by the local diner for a

quick bite to eat and to review the day's class notes. I teach five classes on these days: three classes at a university in Uniontown, two classes at a university in Greensburg, and one class at a college in Latrobe. I must leave Ligonier at 7:00 a.m. in order to arrive in Uniontown at 8:00 a.m. My first class is at 8:30 a.m., I teach three composition courses back-to-back. I leave Uniontown by 11:30 a.m. and arrive in Greensburg at 12:15 p.m. My next class isn't until 4:00 p.m., so I have some time to read and evaluate student essays and/or the readings I assigned for that day, and review class notes. I eat a sandwich at my desk around 2:00 p.m. while I work. At 5:15 p.m. I head to Latrobe to teach my 6:30-9:15 p.m. class (Mondays I teach a freshman composition class, on Wednesday I teach a research composition class, on Friday I head home at 5:15 p.m.). After this class, I head home. It is now around 9:45 p.m. I enter the house quietly so that I do not wake the children. I'm exhausted. But I have to feed the cats, take the dogs out for their last run for the evening, and collect my books and notes for the next day. If the kids wake up (which many times they do), we, the kids, Nicole, and I, spend time talking about our day, and I usually read the children a short story before tucking them into bed. I go to bed and repeat the morning ritual the next day.

Tuesday and Thursday Schedule: (starts just like Monday, Wednesday, and Friday): The alarm sounds off at 3:45 a.m. I do not turn on the lights because I do not want to wake my daughter and her two small children in the next room. I stumble down the stairs to the kitchen to make coffee. While it's brewing, I feed the cats and head to the basement to clean out the litter boxes and start a load of laundry. Back to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. I have 20 minutes before I have to start my morning dressing ritual, so I sit in the dark gathering my thoughts as I drink my coffee. After dressing, I feed the dogs

and take them for a short walk. I leave the house at 6:00 a.m., stopping by the local diner for a quick bite to eat and to review the day's class notes. I leave Ligonier at 7:00 a.m. arriving in Greensburg at 7:35 a.m. My first class is at 8:00 a.m. I leave this university and arrive at my next teaching destination, located in Greensburg, at 9:30 a.m. My first class is at 1:00 p.m., so I have time to catch up on reading assignments, class notes, and/or student essays. My next class is also at this same university and starts at 3:00 p.m. I finish at 4:15 p.m., and head to Latrobe to pick up my four-year-old granddaughter and my one-and-half-year-old grandson. We arrive home around 5:00 p.m. I prepare dinner, clean up, and entertain the children until 7:00 p.m.; then, I give them baths and get them ready for bed. Their mother returns home by 8:30 p.m. and takes over. I go to my study and collect my stuff for the next day. I'm exhausted, but I work on my dissertation for an hour or two before going to bed.

Saturdays and Sundays Schedule: I wake by 5:00 a.m. (I get to sleep in a bit), make coffee, feed cats, clean litter boxes, start a load of laundry, drink some coffee, feed and walk the dogs, and by 6:30 a.m. go to my study to prepare the course outlines for next week's classes. Since I am teaching nine classes, with six different preps, outlines take me more than three hours to complete. I take a short break to spend some time with the children; then, it's back to the study to read and evaluate student papers and to work on my dissertation. I occasionally break for dinner that my daughter has graciously prepared, go for a walk with the dogs, then, back to the study to continue my work. I go to bed when I no longer see the words on the computer screen clearly.

As I mentioned, my schedule was, and is, overwhelming to me, yet I continue to keep it, making the appropriate adjustments at the beginning of each new semester. No

two semesters are ever alike; for example, one semester I might teach three classes of the same course for one institution, which requires only one class prep for that institution, but the next semester, I might teach three different courses for that same institution, which requires three different preps. The fact that I have to teach between eight and nine classes each semester for four different schools with the same fluctuating schedule of classes and prep time requires me to be focused, organized, and flexible in order to keep track of all the different course and university/college requirements of each institution, not to mention keeping track of each student's progress within his or her respective school.

My situation as an adjunct instructor is not unlike many other adjunct instructors who are teaching a variety of English courses in the academy. Frances Ruhlen McConnel, being an adjunct herself, developed an open-answer questionnaire that she distributed to other adjunct faculty members who taught at more than one institution during a semester, revealing the commonality between their experiences. In her essay "Freeway Flyers: the Migrant Workers of the Academy," McConnel reveals many of these commonalities. Rebecca, one of the participants in the study, reveals that she teaches twenty-four classes a year, traveling between five different campuses (40); Joan, another participant, teaches sixteen courses per year, traveling between nine different campuses (44); and George, yet another participant, teaches fifteen classes a year, traveling between five different schools (45). Regardless of their teaching load and the number of different campuses that these adjuncts taught at, they all revealed the difficulty in organizing their schedules and prep times from semester to semester. They all recognized that one of the major problems with teaching at a variety of campuses is that each institution is different, each has different course requirements and different student bodies: "There is a super problem teaching at a

variety of campuses – all are different. You have to readjust your thinking [. . .]. It takes an extra effort to adjust your teaching [. . .]. There are enormous differences in preparation, knowledge, motivation, time available” (43).

One might think that with all of these classes, and with all of the responsibilities that go along with teaching these classes, that the financial reward might be a little more than just adequate for an adjunct instructor, but it is not. Even though I have, and am working on, advanced degrees, and even though I teach the equivalent of two full-time, professional positions (I spend between eighty-five and ninety hours per week working at my job – teaching classes, evaluating student papers, preparing to teach, and traveling between institutions), I barely make enough money to keep my family of four. And since my daughter’s part-time job barely covers her car and childcare expenses, I must continue to keep my schedule so that I can pay the utility bills and mortgage, buy groceries and shoes for the kids, and maintain the upkeep on, and buy gasoline for, my car so that I can travel between the four institutions where I teach.

Maintaining my hectic, unstable schedule leaves very little time for other activities, yet I have responsibilities at home and my doctoral studies that both require my attention. So I grin and bear it, so to speak, hoping that one day all my hard work and determination will pay off in the form of a full-time position at one of the universities where I teach or at some other institution of higher learning. However, in order just to be considered for one of these full-time teaching jobs, I have to complete my Ph.D.; without a Ph.D. most universities and colleges will not even grant me an interview, let alone offer me a full-time job. Case in point: two of the universities where I teach, over the course of the last several years, added two full-time faculty members to their departments to teach

composition courses, courses that I have been teaching for these institutions for almost ten years. But because I do not have my Ph.D. completed, so I am told, I am not even granted an interview, even though I teach two or three courses of composition each semester at these schools, and even though several members of both hiring committees have written me “glowing” letters of recommendation for full-time teaching positions that I applied for at other universities.

Completing my doctoral studies in order to become a full-time faculty member, and a legitimate member of the university, and keeping my extensive teaching schedule is a vicious and exhausting cycle. I find myself caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place, or what Tokarczyk and Fay call a “Catch 22” situation – between advancing my career by completing my Ph.D. and maintaining the financial stability of the day to day life of my family. Both are vitally important. Finishing the degree would help me insofar as I would be eligible for a full-time teaching position (eligible is the key term here because finishing the degree does not guarantee a full-time position as mentioned above), and a full-time position would offer not only more financial security, but would also help ease my hectic schedule insofar as I would only be employed by one institution. Yet for me to stop teaching in order to focus on my studies is next to possible. I need the income generated by my crazy schedule so that I can support my family. How is it possible that I am composing this document if I have such a heavy teaching load? The answer is simple: I borrowed more money so that I could take some time off from teaching in order to finish this dissertation. Fortunately, I was able to take out a loan against my home in order to cover living expenses while I attempt to finish this dissertation. However, these funds are limited, limiting my time to focus on my studies to

the summer months of 2007; then, the payments for this loan, and the student loans, will start, and I will have to teach additional classes in order to make these payments. And the cycle continues. In short, I am following the path of a working-class academic who comes from a working-class background.

Fourth Down and Ninety-eight Yards to Go

Many scholars who write about the working class assert that working-class people are taught that nothing comes to them without hard work. As a member of the working class, I can verify that this sentiment is true for me as well. However, today my belief in the power of hard work and determination to obtain one's goals is tainted by the reality of social class inequalities. I still believe, to a certain extent, in the power of hard work and perseverance, but now I realize that it takes more than just hard work to succeed. Along with hard work and determination, it takes a good support system, i.e., people who understand and encourage one's quest; it takes money and time – lots of money and time. Alfred Lubrano states, "Statistics show that there are people who worked just as hard, but were unfortunate enough to have been born on the 2 yard line and not the 42" (11). By "2-yard line and not the 42," Lubrano means that people born on the 2-yard line have 98 yards to attain their goals compared to people born on the 42-yard line who only have 58 yards to achieve their goals. This is not to say that someone born on the 2-yard line cannot succeed, but success is harder, and less likely, than someone who is born on the 42-yard line. For someone from a working-class background, those born on the 2-yard line, success takes money that they usually do not have; success takes more time and effort than someone from the middle and upper classes, who are starting on the 42-yard line, because working-class people have to learn the things that seemingly come natural

for people from the middle and upper classes (10-12). In short, Lubrano is saying that people fortunate enough to be born into a middle or upper-class family are more likely to be better prepared, are more likely to have the “right” connections and a good support system in place, and are more likely to have an educational and/or trust fund that pays for their college expenses so that they can focus on their studies and not worry about working at unrelated jobs, which in turn offers more time to focus on their education. The opportunity to be better prepared, have a better support system, and the availability of more time and more money have more to do with social class rank than hard work and determination, and they afford a person a better chance for success in the academy.

What does it mean to be a working-class academic from a working-class background? As stated in chapter one, to be working class means, using Dennis Gilbert and Joseph Kahl’s definition, I sell my labor for wages in order to stay alive and do not own the means of production. I am one of those people who work for wages but have little or no power over my work life, but earn enough money to support myself without government assistance, sometimes *passing* as middle class (because of my education and the common misnomer that the United States is mostly middle class). As also mentioned in chapter one, Michael Zweig claims that the job a person does is a strong indicator of that person’s social-class ranking; the more control a person has over his or her work life, the higher the social rank (*The Working Class Majority* 15). I reside at the bottom of the heap as an adjunct/lecturer in the academy. As an adjunct I have very little, if any, control over my work life. I have very little control over the scheduling of classes that I teach; I may accept or decline an offer to teach a particular class, but I do not have the ability to designate which classes I prefer to teach and at what times I prefer to teach them;

moreover, if the enrollment is low in one of my scheduled classes, the university cancels that class at the last minute so that I usually cannot fill that time slot with another teaching assignment, but the university does not compensate me for that lost income. I also have little or no voice, as mentioned, in the institutions where I teach, nor do I receive full-time benefits, such as health care and a retirement plan. Yes, some people might say that I am from the middle class because I have a college education and hold a professional job, but the rub here is that I have little or no power in my “professional” job and in the institutions where I teach, making me a working-class academic from a working-class background.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NEXUS

“And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” (T. S. Eliot)

Introduction to Chapter Five

When I first realized that I could research and write my dissertation in narrative form, I was ecstatic with the thought that I could leave traditional notions of content and form in the past and gather all my creative powers to form an original research document as a story while answering my research question: What can scholars in the field of composition learn about the influences of social class and gender from my narrative, a woman from a working-class background who teaches writing courses as an adjunct faculty member in the academy? The thought of analyzing myself as a member of the working class and the academy seemed like a piece of cake, so to speak. However, as I started writing, I soon realized the difficulty of this endeavor. Writing my own narrative left me gazing into a network of stories I would construct and reconstruct as months of drafting went by. At first, I wanted to include every event that I could remember, but as I moved through the revision process, I was stunned by the issues that started to arise, such as which events and details to include and which ones to leave out, and how to present myself as subject and as researcher. These issues caused me to think about just how much I really believed in telling my story, and if I really believed that the narrative approach to research would, indeed, get to the “truth” and answer my primary question.

For the months that followed, working under a strict time schedule, I faced issues, both personal and professional, in the researching and writing of this document. Most of these issues arose through revisiting my past. Each time period from my childhood

recollections of home and school to my recent past as a graduate student and adjunct faculty member presented experiences that were sometimes difficult to write about, such as my experiences as a child at school and at home. Furthermore, the emotional appeal and the reasoned appeal was a difficult scale to balance. I believed that any good story evokes feelings, but balancing the objective and subjective took on new dimensions with the issue of making the private public. Through writing this dissertation, I have learned that writing my narrative is not a “piece of cake”; it is a challenging undertaking and a demanding research methodology. As I was saying, balancing the objective and the subjective was difficult at times while researching my life as an academic from the working class. This last chapter is no exception as I reflect on what I have learned through researching and writing this dissertation.

In the following sections, I will discuss what I have learned about the relationships among the female gender, working class, and academia. I begin with recapping the framing structure and major issues that this dissertation uncovers. Then, I reexamine my parents’ attitudes about education, offering a different perspective about why they did not promote intellectual activities when I was growing up and propose a recommendation that would help alleviate the tension between home and school. I also make the connection between using the backdoor as a main entrance to my home and using the metaphoric backdoor to the academy, offering solutions to this concern. Next, I discuss what I have learned about the internal and external conflicts between being an academic from a working-class background and the academy. I propose a few suggestions about how an academic from the working class might deal with this state of tension created by the internal and external conflicts. In the section that follows, I talk

about what I have learned from using the narrative approach as my methodology and call for further research. I conclude this chapter and this dissertation with a discussion about how writing this dissertation has offered me a deeper understanding of self and my situation as an academic from the working class, and present my closings comments about the effectiveness of storytelling as a legitimate research methodology.

This closing chapter places me in a new position of my journey as an academic from the working class, marking my efforts to acquire the appropriate credentials so that I can enter the “sacred grove” as a legitimate member of the academy. Entering the graduate program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1996 was a turning point in my life that I have illustrated in narrative. The completion of my doctoral degree has been a long and exhausting journey with many peaks and valleys. Regardless of the obstacles cast before me, the desire to finish my Ph.D. never died. This, too, is represented in narrative. Throughout my academic career, I have been searching for my “pack.” My hope is to obtain the credentials and take my place as a valid member of the universities and colleges where I teach. I will discuss this idea in more detail later on in this chapter. For now, let me reveal what I have learned through researching and writing this dissertation.

Recapping: Then and Now

In chapter one, I suggested that my narrative would generate a portrait of a single life, my life, and offer one interpretation or reinterpretation of that life. I believe the narrative of my experience as an academic who teaches composition classes in a university setting has provided one example of what it is like to be a female academic with a working-class background. I believe that this picture has revealed various aspects

of the working-class academics' experiences in the academy that could help the field of composition, and teachers in general, not only better understand the experiences of teachers from working-class backgrounds but also how these teachers relate to their students and other faculty members. My story is a story based in the past, written in the present, and changing even as I write these words. This crisscrossing of the past, present, and future presents a shifting perspective because it is put down in story form. Stories never remain the same with each read. In fact, stories can change as readers, including the writer, retell the story. With this idea in mind, I will expand those ideas presented in chapter one and review what I have gathered from this research.

What can scholars in the field of composition learn about the influences of social class and gender from my narrative, a woman from a working-class background who teaches writing courses as an adjunct faculty member in the academy? In order to explore and answer this question, I outlined my story into four central organizational periods of time that framed my story as an academic from the working class:

- The Use of Space and Ownership of Books
- Primary and Secondary Educational Experience
- Undergraduate and Graduate Educational Experience
- The Adjunct Faculty/Graduate Student Experience

As a narrative, my study has tried to answer my primary question by delving into my memory to examine the issues that emerge from the four periods listed above. The salient idea to surface from writing this dissertation is that being an academic from the working class creates a state of tension, and that this condition is shaped by the following partial list of issues that have surfaced throughout this study:

- The working-class attitude about education
- The conflicting value systems of school and the working-class home
- The belief in arbitrary educational standards
- The working-class attitude about not questioning authority
- The lack of money
- The lack of professional and social support groups
- The feeling of being out of place and inferior

As these issues surfaced from the various stories that I related throughout this dissertation, my intention was to deliberately mirror the sense of tension I experienced as a child, as a student, and as an adjunct instructor from the working class by supporting these stories with other scholars from working-class backgrounds who have researched and written about this topic. My memory and the works of other academics from the working class hopefully have revealed what it is like to be an academic from the working class. I have written this narrative in a way that echoes my lived experience. My hope is that this study will provide an access point for the readers to enter my story and not just read about it.

Addressing my primary question, my story has revealed the Catch-22 situation of an academic from the working class, and I would now like to take the time to elaborate and theorize about the state of tension that emerges, in part, out of the list of issues mentioned above.

“Calling Home”

The conflicting value systems of home and school create a state of tension with which an academic from the working class has to contend. Telling my personal narrative for this dissertation, especially the parts that reveal my educational experiences juxtaposed against my home experiences, has exposed this tension, reaffirming and reinforcing my core belief in a student-centered approach to teaching, and causing me to see how my working-class background has influenced not only how I see myself as an individual, but also how I see myself as an academic. For example, I now see how my parents’ attitudes about intellectual activities and the lack of books affected how I viewed reading (and school in general) as a waste of time. Just as my parents did not value school-life, school did not value my home-life. As a student, I was caught between two worlds. I also see how a “hidden curriculum” perpetuated my confusion, causing me to feel disconnected from the course material being taught. It is quite possible that my parents felt this same tension between home and school during their own school experience, which could account for their attitudes concerning education.

Furthermore, Triplett and Jarjoura suggest that along with occupational conditioning, that I mentioned in chapter two, parental aspirations for children are strongly related to both parents’ educational level (292). My father never finished high school, and although my mother did, and in fact finished a two year degree at a local business school, she was subordinate to my father, and as a result did not, or would not, usurp his authority over the family. That is to say, if my mother disagreed with my father about education, if in fact her experience with school was a positive one, she would not, and did not, express herself overtly in a positive manner, perhaps, because if she did she

would have negated my father's experience, making his experience less important than hers. And her belief, which is a reflection of the beliefs of her parents and influenced by her religion, is that the husband had authority over the wife. This belief in the male as head of household is endorsed by the religion to which my parents prescribed. And according to this convention, a woman is not to question the authority of males, especially her husband. If my mother would have negated my father's authority, she would have been in violation of not only the family code, but also the code of her church.

In addition to not questioning authority, the feeling of alienation, of not belonging, might have helped create my parents' apparent lack of interest with education, and in turn they transmitted their feelings toward me. More likely than not, my parents' home cultures were devalued by the school system they attended as children. Thus, perhaps my parents judged themselves, in reference to education, by the ruling class standard that Diane Reay and Stephen Ball and James Collin, all of whom are mentioned in chapter three, suggest that working class people do. If my parents internalized the ruling-class standard of education to be the only model, but their experiences in life were different from those of the ruling class, my parents would not have been able to relate to the set standards in the same way that someone from the ruling class would. My parents would have seen themselves as not living up to these standards, and in turn felt inferior, or subhuman. Perhaps, then, this feeling of inferiority coupled with the belief in not questioning authority caused my parents to feel threatened by education. This theory would help explain my father's discomfort with my mother's reading and would also help explain why my parents did not promote a formal education. If they felt uncomfortable because they could not live up to the demands of the educational system, they may not

have expected, nor wanted, their children to accomplish something they could not accomplish. As mentioned, distrusting and fearing education is a common characteristic of many working-class people. Lubrano claims that many working-class parents reject education because they fear they might lose the respect from their educated child, and because they fear they might lose their “ultimate authority should they have to recognize the superior knowledge of a child” (32). Since my parents did not question authority, they did not question, as far as I know, their feelings of discomfort concerning education and perhaps blamed themselves for not being “good” enough.

One solution to the conflict between home and school is the use of a student-centered approach to teaching because the student-centered classroom helps eliminate the discord between home and school. This approach to teaching relies on what the students, as well as what the teacher, brings to class. In a student-centered classroom, students are encouraged to participate in ways that are meaningful to them, asking them to weave what they know about the world through their lived experiences with the course curriculum. Asking students to weave their experiences with school material not only sends the message that the students have something of value to offer the class, affirming their home experience, but it also opens the door for new discoveries, new connections, and new possibilities. All of these attributes add up to helping students alleviate self-doubt and perceive themselves as valuable members in the classroom and as learners. As I have mentioned, throughout most of my educational experience, I felt like a misfit, like I was not as smart as my peers. Participating in student-centered classrooms in graduate school taught me the value of myself as a learner, as a prospective teacher, and as an individual. And telling my story has helped me to reaffirm and reinforce this belief.

Along with the conflict between home and school, my research has revealed the Catch-22 situation of an academic from the working-class teaching composition courses in the academy. I would now like to elaborate and theorize about this state of tension that emerges, in part, out of the list of issues mentioned above.

Guess Who's Knocking at the Backdoor?

Another discovery I have made through researching and writing this dissertation is how my working-class background influences which door I use to gain entrance to my home and to the academy. Let me explain. My parents purposely designed and built their home so that the driveway wrapped around to the back of the house in such a way that it completely avoided the front entrance and made it difficult to access the front door. After analyzing the use of space in chapter two, I realize that the front door of my home today is also inaccessible, and the main entrance is through the back door, which opens into the great room, so that when anyone enters the house, the first thing he or she notices is the relaxed feel of the great room and its extension -- the kitchen. What is particularly intriguing about the main entrance to my home is not only the similarity to my parents' home, but also the symbolic usefulness it provides as a metaphor for entering the academy.

One could say that I, an adjunct instructor from a working-class background who is trying to complete a Ph.D., am using the "backdoor" of the university to gain entrance. As mentioned in chapter two, backdoor entrances are generally used by service people who work for and are the subordinates of the people in upper and middle-class homes. Housekeepers, gardeners, electricians, plumbers, and dog walkers are all examples of service people, or people from the working class, who would use the "service" entrance,

or back door; however, in a working-class home, the back entrance is often the main entrance, welcoming friends and family. Interestingly enough, composition courses are noted as service courses, or courses that are not as important as other courses, such as literature, and are treated as less important. Consequently, composition courses are taught mostly by “service” people, i.e., adjuncts and teaching assistants (TAs), in the academy.

James Slevin recognizes, in “Depoliticizing and Politicizing Composition Studies,” the subordination of composition courses in the academy, suggesting that the fact composition courses are taught by part-time faculty and TAs, for the most part, reflects the subordination of writing in the academy (2). Susan Miller also recognizes the subordinate position of composition courses. Miller asserts in “The Feminization of Composition” that composition is seen as inferior and is feminized because it is looked at as “women’s” work. Miller uses Freud’s Mother-Maid theory to argue that the view of lower status female identity, including “both its critique of dominance and submission and its view of historical requirements imposed for the sake of survival and tradition,” is embodied in composition courses. Miller asserts that the field of composition mirrors traditional women’s roles, pointing out that composition courses are mostly taught by women, women who hold mostly part-time teaching positions. Miller also states that “composition teaching and research is not something ‘regular’ (i.e., powerful, entitled, male-centered theoretical) faculty do,” claiming that women occupy the lowest hierarchical status by virtue of their association with composition teaching itself – “typically characterized as elementary teaching – service tied to pedagogy rather than theory” (42). Tokarczyk and Fay also claim that composition courses are devalued within the academy and that the “majority of adjunct, lecturers, and composition faculty are

women” (16). They state that one of the reasons composition courses are devalued and why these courses are usually taught by women is because composition classes are seen by the academy as “service” courses (16-20). Teaching composition courses in higher education is seen as a “service” job, just like housekeepers, gardeners, electricians, plumbers, and dog walkers are seen as “service,” or working-class, jobs.

I find the subordination of composition courses particularly interesting given the fact that several composition classes are required for all students, across all disciplines. This is not saying that I do not understand and recognize the history of composition and the conflict between literary studies and composition because I do. However, this conflict between these two disciplines seems a bit childish to me: one side (literary studies) claiming to be more valuable than the “other” side (composition studies) seems like cutting off one’s nose to spite one’s face. I believe that both disciplines hold important places in the academy and that these places are not necessarily separate from one another. But proving this point is not my focus in this dissertation. What I want to point out in this context is the fact that requiring all students to take several composition courses indicates the importance of writing across the curriculum. Part of the foundation of an educated person is that person’s ability to express him or herself in written form; a person, in part, is generally judged by how well he or she uses language in written form. Composition classes are designed, at some level, to help students express themselves more effectively in writing. That most, if not all, disciplines require students to express themselves in written form and that one noted mark of an educated person is that person’s ability to write effective prose should be an indicator of the high importance of composition classes. However, most universities and colleges still treat composition classes as service

classes, as classes at “the bottom of the academic heap” (Langston 68). And these same universities treat the faculty who teach these composition courses like service employees, or secondary citizens, who have no legitimate place within the academy. As I have said, faculty who teach composition classes are generally part-time and/or TAs who receive less pay, who occupy inadequate, if any, office space, who receive no benefits, who have no voice, and who use the back door to gain entry into the academy because they are denied the key to the front door; they are not recognized as “real” faculty members. They are the working class of the academy, or said another way – they are the “Laborers in the Knowledge Factory.”

Some solutions to the above concerns consist of paying part-time faculty a living wage with the inclusion of health and retirement benefits; providing adequate office space with access to up-to-date technology; granting the privilege to vote in senate meetings, and having a voice in the development of the curriculum. All of these recommendations, if implemented, would amplify the value of the faculty members who teach “service” courses by offering these faculty members a key to the front door, or said another way, recognition and respect, from the top down, as “real” faculty members by the institution where they teach.

The Rub

Being a “Laborer in the Knowledge Factory,” I have silenced my voice many times in the academy. One such time happened shortly after I started teaching at the university level. I had just graduated with my Masters Degree in English and just started my doctoral studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) when I was hired as an adjunct instructor at a branch campus of a major university in western Pennsylvania.

Naïve to the hierarchal system of the academy, I attended department meetings. During these meetings, I sat quietly and listened to every word. Most of what was said was foreign to me: the ideas, the language, and the protocol. I felt like an intruder. At the time, I did not connect my lack of understanding with class or gender differences. I felt that this lack of understanding was caused by my lack of intelligence, so I was afraid to speak because I felt that I had nothing worthwhile to offer because I felt like I did not belong.

From doing this study, I now realize that my feelings of inferiority and of not belonging are a result of years of cultural conditioning that caused me as a member of the working class to accept a set of arbitrary educational standards as being natural. Joanna Kadi would say that I had experienced many events that chipped away at my self-confidence, causing me to believe that “I did not belong” in academia (93). Kadi would insist that my fears were a result of social class differences, that the university was designed “to make working-class people feel like we don’t belong” (92). Even though my graduate studies were showing me an alternative way of thinking about teaching and the academy, a way that made more sense to me, I was working in a university that upheld traditional beliefs (which means that many of the professors who taught composition courses did not seem to be too interested in pedagogical developments in the teaching of writing). So I watched and I listened. As time went by, I began to try to imitate those faculty members who best fit the “Ivy League” constructed image of a professor. I observed how they conducted themselves in meetings and in the lunchroom. I observed a few of their classes with the hope that I would learn how to be a *real* academic by making

their style of teaching my own. But their way of teaching was not my way of teaching, so I could never seem to get it just right.

For example, the professors I observed stood behind the podium, lecturing on the do's and don'ts of "good" writing; they seemed to know everything and always had a well-organized response to all questions. I did not like using the podium; standing behind it made me feel separated from the students. I believed that utilizing the students' knowledge by forming small groups and asking open-ended questions was a more effective way to teach and to learn. I also knew that I did not know everything, and did not have trouble admitting this to my students; consequently, I did not always have a well-organized response to questions. Nevertheless, I tried to become the prototype of professors I felt met the standards of a *true* academic. However, the harder I tried fit in, to be someone who I was not, the less worthy I felt being in any teaching position. I finally stopped trying to become the ideal professor once I realized the arbitrary educational standards set by an oppressive hierarchal system.

Trying to conform to the pressures of the academy, just like when I tried to conform to the pressures of my family of origin, did in fact "kill the self" for me; that is, trying to be someone who I am not caused me to lose confidence in myself. I felt unworthy, inferior. I silenced myself, fearing that I did not belong, fearing that I would be ridiculed by those whom I perceived to be *real* academics, and most of all, fearing that someone "important" would discover my true identity and force me to leave the career I so love: teaching. Fortunately for me, I enrolled in a graduate program that acknowledged and helped me see the arbitrary standards set by the academy. And through my process of education, which has been reaffirmed through writing this dissertation, I realized that I

was not the problem. The system of belief that upholds a hierarchal system is at the heart of the problem. I have learned through telling my story that my position as an adjunct instructor of English is directly related to my working-class background and gender. However, knowing this information has not changed the situation. I am invisible at the institutions where I continue to work. I, like so many other adjuncts, have no voice in the design of the curriculum, of the departments, and of the universities where I teach. No voice equals invisibility.

My female gender and my “working-class identity [seem to be] an ambiguous gift” (Zandy 1). My sex and/or my working-class background has offered me no financial security, no trust fund, or college fund to help with my education (or any living expenses), no role models (if any of my professors were from a working-class background, none of them made this information available to me as one of their students or as one of their colleagues), and little moral support or confidence in my ability to succeed in my education and career. But, on the other hand, my experience as a female and my working-class background has taught me the importance of context in building perspectives, it has emphasized the value of hard work to achieve my goals, it has stressed commitment and loyalty to others, it has reinforced my belief in community, and it has given me the courage to take risks and reach beyond my fears, something that I, and many educators, strive to teach our students in the composition classroom. In other words, the very things that seems to be in question (the values of feminism and the values of being working-class) are the very things that enable me, as a university adjunct instructor, to relate to my students in positive, constructive, and productive ways. Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay assert that academics from the working class

“learned to work hard and thus were able to get our advanced degrees under sometimes very difficult circumstances. We learned to empathize with outsiders and many of us found this helped us in dealing with multicultural, disabled, or otherwise marginalized students” (20). From researching and writing this dissertation, I have a better understanding about how my gender and my social-class background have influenced my philosophy of education, hence, the theory to which I prescribe and ultimately my pedagogical practice.

Throughout my life experience, which encompasses experiences in and out of the classroom, I have learned the harsh reality of being the outsider, the harsh reality of being judged by others who were setting and enforcing standards derived from their experiences and not mine. These standards were nearly, if not totally, impossible for me to reach. In a study concerning the performance of students from different cultures and classes in the United States, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron suggest that educational success depends to a large extent on a cultural match, and if a match is not possible, there must be respect and value toward the culture a child brings with him or her (qtd. in Dean 106). During my early educational experience, many teachers did not seem to value my cultural experience nor respect me because I did not fit their idea of a model student. My second-grade teacher told me that I would accomplish nothing in my adult life because I could not re-produce *her* standard of cursive writing, which was derived from a textbook; and my eighth-grade reading teacher reprimanded me, embarrassed me, in front of a classroom of my peers for not having the *right* answer to her question. Because of these discriminations, I felt inferior, like I was the problem; my cultural experience was not valued. However, while I was being told that I did not, or

could not, measure up at school, at home I was expected to stay active, not waste my time in idle thought or daydreaming. At home, I was given responsibilities such as working in the garden and tending to farm animals to help offset food costs, and cooking family meals and caring for my younger sister because my parents worked to pay the bills. My contribution was not only necessary for survival, but it was also acknowledged by my parents and grandparents as a vital part of family life. As I have stated, my family of origin upheld physical labor over intellectual pursuits and judged the value of a person by his or her hands, saying, “People who are afraid of getting their hands dirty are not worth their weight in dirt.” From my family of origin’s perspective, most, if not all, academics are afraid to dirty their hands.

Writing this dissertation has helped me realize the role the conflict between school and home played in creating my feelings of inferiority. Although both school and home experiences helped build and shape my character and my perspective about life, each side devalued the other; that is, the school experience did not acknowledge the home experience as valuable, and the home experience did not acknowledge the school experience as *that* important. Hence, a split within me – “one ever feels [her] two-ness, -- [a working-class female, a working-class academic]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one...body” (DuBois 132).

Shirley Brice Heath tells us in *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*:

Unless the boundaries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cultural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legitimize and reproduce communities of

townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life. (369)

I see through researching and writing this dissertation that the boundaries between classroom and community have not been broken. These conflicting scenarios of school and home existed when I was a student, and they still exist in my life as a teacher, as a scholar, and as a doctoral candidate. These two “warring ideals” have caused a split within me, a separation of sorts where I find no place to belong – one side in constant battle with the other where my voice is muffled and, at times, silenced.

Before starting this study, I believed that the reason for this limbo state of being was caused solely by my sex, i.e., being a woman. But I have realized through researching and writing this dissertation that my sex is only part of the rub. Being from the working class is another factor in this phenomenon. At the risk of sounding naïve, I believed that earning advanced degrees would grant me acceptance into university life; if I could prove myself worthy of the title “scholar” by completing these degrees, as others who come from different social and economic backgrounds have, I would gain a sense of belonging within academia and gain the respect of my family. However, I find it difficult to gain a sense of belonging or the respect of my family. And I am not alone in this situation. Many scholars who come from working-class backgrounds feel out of place in their families of origin and in the university setting.

This sense of not belonging at home or at work is one of the major issues discussed by many working-class academics. My family’s expression of dissatisfaction with my pursuing a college degree, which I discussed in chapter one, is not unlike other

families' responses to scholars who come from working-class backgrounds. Carolyn Leste Law, co-edited of *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, a book that features narratives of scholars from working-class and poor backgrounds, reflects on a conversation she had years ago with her mother, a widow who worked a number of low-paying jobs in order to keep the family going after her husband died; "Education destroys something," she told her daughter. Stunned by her mother's comment, Leste Law states, "Never had my mother spoken so eloquently before. In that statement, so absolute, so definite, so dazzlingly honest, is expressed the cruel duality of the working class in higher education, some of whom go on to become working-class academics" (Dews and Leste Law 1). Leste Law continues by saying that her education was a break, and that it did break something, "I have suffered a loss my present context doesn't even recognize as a loss; my education has destroyed something even while it has been re-creating me in its own image" (2). The "something that education destroys" that Leste Law refers to in the above passage is the loss of her voice, her identity, within her family of origin and the sense of guilt she feels from this loss. While describing her conflict between home and academia, Leste Law asserts, "I never spoke about my family at school, and I never spoke about school with my family" (Dews & Leste Law 4). The reason for this silence, according to Leste Law, is because academia is reluctant to accept her true identity as a working-class academic, and her family could not relate to her university experiences. So she stayed silent.

This sentiment of "destroying something" holds true for me as well. I was reminded of the separation from my family of origin over the 2006 and 2007 Christmas holiday seasons. Last year, 2006, my brother overtly stated, while glaring directly into

my eyes, “All those so-called *educated* people have no idea of what is most important in life.” My brother was referring to our differing opinions about religion. According to my brother, who is the head of the family since my father has passed away, his belief about religion is the only “correct” belief and my education is worth nothing. According to my brother, all my education has done is provide me with a false sense of what is important in life and has tainted my perspective about the “truth” (i.e., God); thus, as per my brother, anything I have gained through my education, my knowledge and experiences, is of no use. Hence, my voice, my beliefs, my contributions are of no value to the family, that is unless I agree with my brother’s perspective. And agreeing with my brother’s perspective in this matter would deny a significant part of who I am; it would deny my identity. I cannot agree with my brother’s perspective that things are either “right or wrong” because through my education, I have been re-created, in a sense, not to see any situation as a matter of right or wrong. I believe that “right” and/or “wrong” depends on the individual’s perspective, the context of the situation, and that individual’s social-class experience. Different perspectives often yield different beliefs: “What is one man’s food can be another’s poison.... What is good under certain conditions can become an evil or a sin under a different set of conditions” (Gandhi 450). Before I started my undergraduate degree, I was uncomfortable with the idea of the “one correct path”; however, I did not have the confidence within myself to express this uncomfortable feeling to others. My university coursework helped me realize that my sense about right and wrong being contextual was not just a silly, female whim, that many respected people, inside and outside the halls of academia, supported the idea of different perspectives.

In short, my education has confirmed my belief and has awarded me the confidence to express it. But I choose not to use this voice in my family of origin most of the time because it is rejected. And I believe my voice is rejected because it is not understood, so it is feared. Lubrano, as mentioned above, claims that distrusting and fearing education is a common characteristic of many working-class people, that this distrust and this fear is fueled by a lack of understanding, fearing that they might lose the respect from their educated child and lose their “ultimate authority should they have to recognize the superior knowledge of [that] child” (32).

A few weeks before Christmas 2007, hoping to avoid a repeat of the prior holiday, I started a conversation with my mother about my brother’s behavior on 2006 Christmas. I tried to explain to my mother how uncomfortable my brother’s attitude concerning his religion made me, and that I did not want to disrespect him or the family, and that I felt he should extend the same respect to me that I extend to him. I also reminded my mother that she, too, seemed uncomfortable with my brother’s behavior last holiday season, pointing out that she seemed to deliberately avoid joining his sermon by retreating to her bedroom. My mother agreed that she did not want to engage in the conversation because she wanted to avoid the tension that was permeating from the discussion, so she decided to hide out in her bedroom. But before I could respond to what she said, she added, “I wanted the day to go smoothly, and I realized that you were not going to agree with your brother. You know Susie, he only wants to see you in heaven and fears he isn’t going to have that chance unless you realize the ‘truth’ -- I stayed out of the way because it is his duty to address this issue with you, and because I have given up on you ever since you went back to school – I trust that God will deal with you in his own way.” My mother’s

staunch religious beliefs are founded in the conservative Presbyterian Church. After she made this formable assertion, my heart sank because I realized, as Leste Law asserted about her relationship with her family of origin, that my mother did not understand, nor care to understand, my point of view. I knew that trying to explain would make the situation worst, so I ended the conversation without dispute, without sharing how I felt about what she had just said.

In order to maintain family peace, I have silenced myself many times, just as I did as a child. However, the reason for my silence today is different from my silence years ago: years ago I silenced my voice out of fear; today, I silence my voice out of understanding. As a child I silenced my voice out of fear of being punished and/or losing the approval of my family, or as Pipher says, losing family love (36); today, I do not silence my voice out of fear of being punished and/or losing the approval of my family, but out of an understanding that I will not change my brother's nor my mother's mind just by defending my beliefs or education. Defending my beliefs and/or education would only add more friction between us, so I turn the other cheek, so to speak, and realize that they will probably never accept my position as an academic, that they will always see me as the lost lamb who left the fold.

Not only has my education affected my relationship with members of my family, but also it has not offered me a sense of belonging in the university setting, which is another issue for scholars from working-class backgrounds. James Vander Putten, an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, suggests that scholars who come from the working class fear that revealing their backgrounds will cost them the respect of colleagues and/or prevent possible promotions;

most of all, however, these academics fear they do not belong, that they are imposters, that someone will discover their *true* identity (qtd. in “Working-Class Academics Share Woes”). I can also give personal testimony to the truth in Vander Putten’s observation about identity.

I, like so many other academics from working-class backgrounds, have had frequent feelings of not belonging, as though I was not a *real* academic. All my years of study seemed like some kind of mask that hid my true identity, and if I was not careful – if I revealed aspects of myself, such as my language of home – i.e., if my working-class dialect emerged – I would be discovered as an imposter, as someone who did not belong in a faculty position in a university. Just like Valerie Miner and so many other university teachers from working-class backgrounds, “I felt like a fraud [because] I knew there was something about my talk, walk, and body language that distinguished me from my colleagues” (81). According to Miner, moving from the working class to the academy is an immigration of sorts; becoming an academic is like “moving to a country where a different language is spoken” (77). Annas also compares the experience of an academic from a working-class background to that of an immigrant, stating that academics who are confronted with a culture in which “people dress differently, eat differently, use language differently, express anger differently, perhaps don’t even use their hands when they talk, have different notions about money, privacy, creativity, family, work, play, security” often feel out of place (171). As mentioned in chapter two, although a person may appear to be a member of a particular social group, that person is haunted by voices from her class of origin, creating a conflict within that person.

Many academics suffer from a sense of being pushed and pulled between the fear of alienation and the desire to belong. Researching and writing this dissertation has shown me that my story is not unlike the stories of others' who write from the perspective of a working-class academic. Other writers, too, express the profound conflict of feeling out of place in the university and in their family of origin. They are, as Nancy LaPaglia asserts, compelled to see "in two directions, awkwardly" (177). I think Christine Overall states this feeling of being pulled in different directions best in her essay, "Nowhere at Home: Toward a Phenomenology of Working-Class Consciousness." She asserts:

The presence in the university of faculty from the working class appears to confirm the myth of upward mobility. We must buy into academia in order to get out of the working class, but in doing so we also buy into the denigration of our origins and the preservation of class inequities. In the end, it seems the price of successful escape is to be intellectually and socially 'nowhere at home.' (219)

Until recently, I believed that not being accepted into the "sacred grove" was due to something missing in me: e.g. I was not disciplined enough, not focused enough, and/or not smart enough. Because of this belief, I silenced my voice when in the company of real, or what I perceived to be real, academics. However, according to Chelsea Starr, a sociology lecturer at the University of California at Irvine, and Ken Oldfield, a professor of public administration at the University of Illinois at Springfield, who reveal the importance of sex and social class in determining a person's status within the academy, my inability to enter the halls of academia as a respected member is directly related to my sex and my working-class background: not having the "right" connections,

no support system, not knowing the rules, stereotyping and stigmas, and, most of all, limited financial support (qtd. in “Working-class Academics Share Woes”). I now understand how all these aspects play a role in my struggle to become a valued member of university life.

I have also learned through working on this study that my socially tainted perspective and/or my circumstances created by birth are not the core of the problem; it appears that the problem exists because of the belief in hierarchies within the university setting as well as within the family structure, where the people who hold the power are rich and/or male and the people who hold subordinate positions are poor and/or female. Addressing this hierarchal system, Miner quotes Marge Piercy’s, “There’s a prejudice that the lives of people who have less [are] less interesting. A prejudice that people who have less, think less and feel less” (75). Likewise, Melanie Long, Gaye Ranck Jenkins, and Susan Bracken suggests in “Impostors in the *Sacred Grove: Working Class Women in the Academe*” that there seems to be a reluctance to accept scholars, and their ideas, whose backgrounds do not follow the prescribed model: that one be (or become) upper class, white, and male. Long et. al. goes on to say:

[M]embers of the working class are considered to be stupid, uncouth, and irrational. Women are perceived to be emotional, irrational and are also frequently perceived to be less intelligent than their male counterparts. Both women and the working class lack the ability to be objective, according to the perceptions of upper class white males who continue to dominate the culture of the academe.

The type of thinking expressed in the above quote extends from the belief of a hierarchal system: that one group of people is more important than another group of people, based on arbitrary standards set by the group in power. Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay, in the introduction to their book *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers' in the Knowledge Factory*,” note that the “majority of adjuncts, lecturers, and composition faculty are women; tenured and tenure-track faculty are men” (16). A major reason for this phenomenon, according to Tokarczyk and Fay, is due to the hierarchal systems found in the academy. Supporting this point, they note a presentation in 1988 to the Modern Language Association (MLA) Presidential Forum by Dominick La Capra; he described universities “as large patriarchal families [. . .], a hierarchy that [. . .]determines who teaches the service courses and who teaches the courses geared to specializations and current research interests” (Tokarczyk and Fay 15). Tokarczyk and Fay are quick to point out that academics who teach service courses, such as composition, are usually taught by female adjuncts who attended state universities and that tenured and tenure-track professors, who taught at these state institutions, were from the Ivy or near-Ivy Leagues; according to Tokarczyk and Fay, this tendency is a major reason why middle-class ideologies not only help cover up but also help promote and uphold the hierarchal system (15-16), a system that separates and diminishes the value of the members of the subordinate group, otherwise known as the adjunct faculty, rendering these academics voiceless and confused concerning where they fit in.

Although my dissertation does not focus on the adjunct story, it is nearly impossible not to consider the adjunct position when researching academia’s hierarchy, and in turn it is nearly impossible to ignore this hierarchy when researching class

positions and the female gender. I am a female, I come from a working-class background, and I am an adjunct instructor – all of these aspects play a role in how I see myself and how I am seen in the university setting as well as in my family of origin.

The belief in a patriarchal hierarchal system is a belief that devalues a people because of their social-economic standing and their sex. This belief silences the voices of the subordinate group of people and implies that their voices are unimportant. This belief assumes that this group has little of value to offer anyone, that this group of people is less important in the world and, therefore, deserve to stay fettered to their social-economic state and remain voiceless. If people want to develop to their full potential within such a system, they must fit themselves to the mold cast by the group in power; in most cases, the group in power consists of upper-class, white, males.

The mainstream culture of the United States promotes the idea that anything is possible if a person works hard and long enough. However, I now realize through researching and writing my story the falsehood of this belief. This belief that anything is possible ignores the inescapable, disempowering status, both economically and politically, of working-class lives. Tokarczyk and Fay assert, “The chances that a woman from the working class will become an academic are slim, and those who do are highly aware of their new privileged status” (17). Long et. al. state that although a woman cannot hide the fact that she is female, she can cultivate the characteristics treasured by the academy by constructing an *acceptable façade* [italics mine]. But this idea of overcoming and constructing false faces for job security is becoming “economically less feasible as job opportunities shrink and downward mobility increases” (Zandy 1). And more importantly, the idea of constructing an *acceptable façade* causes a woman not to

accept herself for whom she is. Constructing an acceptable façade, of course, echoes back to the idea of “killing the self” and killing the “Wild Woman nature” of Mary Pipher and Clarissa Pinkola Estes, respectively, that I mentioned previously in reference to losing my identity due to family pressure. As I said, a person who suppresses a part of her identity, trying to become someone who she is not, denies parts of the self. And denying part of the self often damages a person’s self-image, consequently, damaging a person’s sense of self-worth and causing that person to feel like a misfit – silencing that person’s voice. No voice – no identity.

No voice – no identity is a major concern in the fight against oppression. If I had the power to change the world, my first act of transformation would be to eliminate oppressive hierarchal structures, which would require, as bell hooks points out in many of her publications, the elimination of competitive behavior. Subordinating a person, or a group of people because of their social class, for example, is a byproduct of competitive behavior: e.g., the belief that an Ivy League education provides a better education to its students than a state institution provides to its students. To end oppression, competitive behavior must end. Yet, even as I write these words, fantasizing about how great it would be if we, as human beings, could agree to totally transform our society into a cooperative, equality-for-all society, I realize the improbability of such an endeavor. Understanding the unlikelihood of a complete transformation, I also believe that we should never stop trying to make our world a better place to live, regardless of the odds. Change comes one step at a time, one person at a time. So what can we do as individuals to ease some of the tension and self-doubt caused by being an academic from the working class in order to help make this world a better place? Here are a few suggestions:

- Change starts with the self, with the individual. I believe, as hooks believes, if each of us as individuals could just learn to stop competing against each other, stop making each other our adversaries, and start extending love to one another, we, as a society, have a better chance to end oppression. Love, as hooks defines it in her book, *All About Love: New Visions*, is “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth. [To] truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients – care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (4 -5). But to “truly love,” or extend oneself as hooks suggests, is harder than it may appear. Before one can learn to love, before one can “mix ingredients” and open the lines for honest communications, one must know oneself. *Nosce te ipsum*: know thyself.
- To truly “know thyself,” a person needs to be honest with him or herself. But in order to be honest, we as individuals must understand who we are, and to understand who we are as individuals, we must hear our own voice. One thing that has helped me hear my own voice is writing, so keep a journal or a diary, and/or write a personal narrative. Make the writing private or make it public. Just write.
- Another way a person can learn to know oneself is through mediation. Sit in silence. Listen for your own small voice and accept what it has to say as vital and meaningful. The acts of writing and mediation can lead to the realization that one’s value is not determined by outside standards. This

understanding helps build self-esteem, helping a person realize that he or she is not the problem, that a hierarchal system that thrives on competitive behavior and devalues human life is the real problem. As self-esteem builds, a person stops doubting him or herself and starts believing in his or her own value as a human being.

- As a person begins to understand his/her own “magical mystery,” that person can begin to understand how others are “differently equipped.” This can open up the lines for open and honest communications, which in turn can offer a sense of community, instead of separateness, at home and at the universities and colleges where one teaches.
- We, as individuals, should seek out people who support and encourage us in our academic endeavors. Having a support system shows us that we are not alone, which helps ease some of the tension created by our circumstances.
- Forgive. Forgive ourselves for not being perfect, and forgive our family and friends for not understanding our unique position as a working-class academic. Academics from the working class, in a sense, have immigrated past their fear of education to seek out new territory. Just like their forefathers and foremothers, they left the safety of their homeland in search of a better life. And just like their ancestors, they have had to contend with some staggering blows of a hostile, unforgiving environment. Forgiving helps a person to let go of his or her

disappointments and opens a space for learning from lived experiences and applying those lessons for the betterment of humanity.

- A person from the working class who aspires to become an academic needs to be aware of the odds of accomplishing such a goal, but not let those odds prevent him or her from achieving his or her goals. Goals should be fueled by the hopes and the desires of that individual, not someone else's predictions. If I had listened to the "odds," to the outside world telling me the chances of what I could or could not do, I would not be writing these lines today. So, a person should stay the course and stay focused on his or her heart's desire. But, again, to understand one's heart desire, one needs to *nosce te ipsum*.

Two things we can do as members of the profession to help ease the tension for academics from the working class are as follows:

- Along with utilizing student-centered teaching methods, mentioned above, break the silence; start a conversation with all members involved in university life, including students and administrators, about the arbitrary educational standards set by the ruling classes. Acknowledging these standards overtly, by discussing and reading various perspectives about the nature of educational standards, can help demystify these standards and help break down barriers constructed by the ruling classes that keep out those from the lower classes.
- One significant idea would be to persuade all people who are involved in the experience of the academic from the working class to show

compassion for one another. Extending compassion would help develop an atmosphere of trust and openness. I believe that this would help change how the academic from the working class is valued. Compassion asks us, as human beings, to connect heart and mind in our relationships, and compassion is an emotion expressed by few people within the academy and within my family that has helped me persevere through tough times. Compassion starts at home; that is, extending compassion starts with extending compassion to oneself, forgiving oneself for not being perfect, for not being what the outside world says is appropriate. Compassion allows us as individuals and as a group to accept and appreciate ourselves and each other for who we are and from where we come. But, again, in order to extend compassion to self and to others, one must know thyself.

Changing attitudes about home and school, social class and education, and how these elements weave together, requires a change in perspective, which requires a change in consciousness, not only by the working-class academic, but also by all people who are involved in the experience of the academic from the working class. These few suggestions have helped me gain a new perspective and a renewed sense of self, which in turn has eased the tension and self-doubt created by my circumstances as a member of the working class and the academy. Hopefully, these suggestions will also help others ease the tension and self-doubt created by their positions as working-class academics.

Tell Me Another Story: A Call for Narrative Research

My story is only one story and is certainly an incomplete picture of what it is like to be an academic from the working class. More stories would help paint a more vivid

picture of what it is like to be an academic from a working-class background. With this in mind, I beseech other academics from working-class background to tell their stories.

I would like to encourage these academics to utilize the narrative form of research and to write their stories, their experiences of what it is like to be an academic from a working-class background. For example, I encourage more research in examining the relationship between adjunct faculty members and social class, with a emphasis on gender, because this harkens back to Donna Langston's assertion about most working-class academics ending up "on the bottom of the academic heap" (68), i.e., as adjuncts, and Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay's observation that most adjunct faculty consist of women from the working class (16). I believe that the stories of academics from working-class backgrounds have the potential to expose the issues and problems that are sometimes hidden and not discussed, giving way to a better understanding of what it is like to be an academic from the working class. By utilizing the personal narrative as a means for exploring the experience of an academic from the working class, challenging concerns, such as adjunct teaching, might be examined in ways that would encourage those faculty members who are typically excluded from the conversation, namely part-time faculty members, to participate.

Another reason why I encourage more academics from working-class backgrounds to tell their stories comes from another realization that occurred to me while doing this study. Through telling my story, I better understand, and thus support, Richard Myer's assertion about how "our writing is our mechanism for making sense of the many worlds in which we – with our students, colleagues, and community – live" (152). More narratives from academics from working-class backgrounds would help reveal the "many

worlds in which we live.” These types of narratives would have the potential to spark a discussion about the inequities that the working-class academic experiences and the arbitrary standards set by the university system. For example, while writing my narrative, I came to a new understanding about my friend and colleague James; this understanding has helped me realize just how much our social classes influence our behaviors and our beliefs, revealing the differences between James and me and how we conduct ourselves in the academy, especially in the classroom, as matters of social-class differences. Once I could see that our differences were a product of social class, I could better understand how arbitrary standards were implemented in the university system.

My renewed understanding of arbitrary standards helped me see how telling my story relates to David Schaafsma claims about how stories “forge history – possible worlds – out of which certain understandings are gained and curriculum is designed” (48). Thus, I also encourage stories about teaching and the curriculum from the perspective of academics from a working-class background. Juxtaposing their stories against the stories of academics from middle and upper-class backgrounds could open a space for discussing the arbitrary standards of the curriculum. For instance, by telling my story I see that the standards set by academia are arbitrary standards laid down by the ruling classes, and that these standards, more often than not, design and regulate the curriculum at the college and universities where I teach. I understand that the university system works as a hierarchal system that helps maintain an oppressive social-class structure while simultaneously trying to dismantle this oppressive configuration. But with this being said, I also realize through the telling of my story that words and ideas can, and

do, make a difference. And I believe that an effective way to express words and ideas is through our own personal narrative – making the private public.

Gian Pagnucci believes that it is through the telling of stories that “the mundane can become momentous” (105). I can give testimony to Pagnucci’s belief; through the telling of my everyday experiences, past and present, aspects of my life that rested beneath the surface were uncovered, and aspects of my life that I felt were insignificant, such as using the backdoor as the main entrance to my home, took on significant meaning. All of these discoveries helped me better understand my situation in a new light and helped me better understand myself and myself in relationship to others; the mundane has become momentous. I believe that an understanding of the details of our lives is important because it is through our understandings as researchers and writers that we philosophize and theorize. It is through our theorizing that pedagogy is created and developed.

I encourage other academics from working-class backgrounds to write their stories. As for me, one area of personal interest is to extend what I have started with this dissertation. Although this document is over two-hundred pages in length, it only scrapes at the surface of what it is like to be me: an academic from a working-class background who teaches in the academy. I am particularly interested in gathering stories from other adjunct faculty members whose social-class background may or may not differ from mine. I would like to examine these stories, focusing on social class and gender, to see what differences, if any, arise with their stories. I would also like to take a closer look at how social class affects graduate students. I am mainly interested in graduate students from working-class backgrounds and how they navigate through the difficult terrain of

academia, work, and family as they attempt to complete their doctoral studies. I believe that taking a closer look at these various aspects could help us in the field of composition grasp a better understanding about the condition of academics from the working class.

Looking East

When I went back to school to become a teacher, I wanted to offer a positive perspective and inspire students to reach beyond their fears and make their lives extraordinary. I wanted to push back against the system of education that made me feel inferior and out of place. However, as I moved through the university system, and although I had academic success in terms of making the “grades,” I was overtaken by the continued feelings of insecurity about my ability to be a “true” academic, and I was confused and disappointed about my family of origin’s attitude concerning my desire to educate myself. After starting my doctoral studies, I became overwhelmed with my responsibilities as a single mother, a graduate student, and an adjunct faculty member. Telling my personal narrative, and rethinking it as I revised, and revised, and revised, has renewed my confidence as a teacher and scholar. Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ says that the Wild Woman, a woman’s natural self, lives within and remains a part of all women and that the “trick,” or the hard part, is trying to uncover layer upon layer of years of cultural conditioning to rediscover one’s true identity, one’s true voice. She also suggests that it is through our stories that we, as women, can discover ourselves, our true voice (20-34). I believe Estes is correct in her assertions, at least for me, because through the telling of my story, I am able to hear my own voice, and hearing my voice has helped me claim my own identity, as a scholar and as a member in my family of origin. This narrative has given me the opportunity to explore my situation as an academic from the working class

and to realize that my knowledge as a graduate from a state institution is not less than someone's knowledge who graduated from an Ivy League school. And researching and writing this dissertation has shown me the value of my life's experiences as ways to connect with family members, students, and other faculty members.

Although all of these lessons learned are significant, perhaps one of the most valued lessons I have learned through telling my story is the revitalizing power of storytelling itself. Writing this dissertation has consumed my life in a way that has offered me a renewed passion for writing, for researching, for thinking, and for teaching. It has given me greater confidence in myself as an academic by uncovering layers of self-doubt that I thought I had done away with, but still remained underneath the surface. Exposing these layers has helped me reexamine my past and how it affects the way I see myself as an academic and as a member of my family of origin. I have a better understanding how my working-class background has conditioned me to see the world, and how it has influenced the role I play in the academy and in my family. Through the telling of my story, I have shown the discrepancy between a working-class household and the academy that upholds a curriculum that alienates many of its students and faculty members, especially those students and faculty members from the working-class. Reexamining my past has given me a deeper understanding of how social class plays a role in my struggle to finish my degree and find a place to belong within my family of origin and within the academy. These are some of the personal lessons I have learned that have helped me gain a deeper understanding about myself, offering me a renewed sense of self.

This self-discovery harkens back to understanding oneself in order to understand the differences of others. Through the understanding of others we, as individuals, can put aside our fears of the unknown and treat each other with the respect and dignity that we all deserve. In chapter one, I suggested that this study should allow me, as well as other academics, to better understand what each group had to offer, and see possible ways of weaving the strengths of both sides together to fortify the fabric of composition theory and practice. I quoted Sandra Gardner in saying, “Claiming one’s past can renew the self as well as stimulate intellectual energy. [O]ne’s history becomes a resource and an integral part of one’s work, something to learn from rather than deny” (55). I believe my past experiences are a resource to draw from that has, and does, help me understand the needs of my students and family members alike, and this understanding helps me to connect with these people. By claiming my past, I hope I can validate others who try to cross social-economic and gender borders, and more importantly, I hope to empower them to do the same. In short, I hope this dissertation is an inspiration for others, as it has been for me, and contributes to the noble task of eliminating oppression, while simultaneously increasing the value of the narrative approach to research as a legitimate methodology.

Yes, I realize that “my hope” is an enormous task, reaching beyond the scope of this study. My story is just one story that may or may not represent the experiences of other academics from the working class. I know that there is more work to be done in exploring the condition of the academic from the working class, and I know that this subject is a difficult and complex topic that has much more below the surface than is revealed in the pages of this text. I recognize that it will take many people both inside and

outside the halls of academia, working together, researching, writing, and speaking out in support of social equality to dismantle the hierarchal social structure that keeps many working-class people oppressed. Nonetheless, the reason I chose to take on this research project and tell my story was because I wanted to contribute a verse to the epic story of eliminating oppressive structures that value competitive behavior and devalue human life. I believe through self-exploration we, as individuals and as a group, can learn to extend love and compassion to one another, making this world a better place to live. These desires, these hopes, were, and are, the driving forces behind this dissertation.

Gian Pagnucci states, “You want to make the world a better place? Tell somebody a good story. Or make the most of a bad one” (150). Joseph Campbell says, “If you want to make this world a better place, you will have to learn how to live in it.” Although Campbell is referring to mythological stories when he makes this statement, he believes that it is through stories that a person realizes how to live in the world in order to make it a better place. Pagnucci and Campbell, and so many others’, recognize the importance of storytelling as a means to help make this world a better place to live. Stories are the fabric of our lives, and by telling and listening to each others’ stories, we can make this world a better place to live. And as I said, through the telling of my story, I have come to a new realization about myself and the power of storytelling by uncovering layers upon layers of years of cultural conditioning so that I can see myself in a different light, realizing that even though I might “look like a black bean in a bushel of green peas” (Estes 170), I am in the bushel; that is, even though I come from the working class, I am an academic. I do have something of value to offer and a place to fit in.

WORKS CITED

- Abraham, Horst. *Skiing Right: Official Book of the Professional Ski Instructors of America*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books, 1983.
- Alvine, Lynne. Class Discussion, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA. Sept. 1998.
- Anderson, Charles M., and Marian M. MacCurdy. *Writing & Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.
- Annas, Pam. "Pass the Cake: The Politics of Gender, Class, and Text in the Academic Workplace." Tokarczyk and Fay 165-178.
- Anyon, Jean. "From *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*." Eds. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004. 194-209.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Banks, Anna, and Stephen P. Banks. *Fiction & Social Research: By Ice or Fire*. Walnut Creek: Sage, 1998.
- Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. 10th Anniversary ed. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Reading from Classical Times to the Present*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1990.

- Blitz, Michael and C. Mark Hurlbert, *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1998.
- Britton, James. *Record and Recall: A Cretan Memoir*. London: Lightfoot Publishing, 1988.
- Brodkey, Linda. "Writing Ethnographic Narratives." *Written Communication*. 4 (1987): 25-50.
- Brunner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Bullock, Richard, and John Trimbur, eds. *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton Cook/Heinemann, 1991.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth..* N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1988.
- Cereta, Laura. "Letter to Augustinus Aemilius, Curse against the Ornamentation of Women." Bizzell and Herzberg 493-495.
- "Letter to Bibulus Sempronius, Defense of the Liberal Instruction of Women." Bizzell and Herzberg 495-498.
- Christenbury, Leila. *Making the Journey: Being and Becoming a Teacher of English Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1994.
- Collins, James. "Hegemonic Practice: Literacy and Standard Language in Public Education." *Rewriting Literacy: Culture and the Discourse of the Other*. Eds. Candace Mitchell and Kathleen Weiler. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1991.
- Colombo, Gary, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle, eds. *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2004.

- Dalton, Harlon L. *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Blacks and Whites*.
New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Daly, Mary. *The Church and the Second Sex*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Dean, Terry. "Multicultural Classrooms, Monocultural Teachers." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. Ed. Gary Tate, Edward P.J. Corbett, and Nancy Myers. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1981. 105-118.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Denzin, Norman. K. *Interpretive Biography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989.
- DeSalvo, Louise. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Dews, Barney C.L. and Carolyn Leste Law C., eds. *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.
- Dilks, Stephen, Regina Hansen, and Matthew Parfitt, eds. *Cultural Conversations: The Presence of the Past*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.
- *Resources for Teaching Cultural Conversations: The Presence of the Past*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.
- Donovan, Josephine. *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism New Expanded Edition*. New York: A Frederick Ungar Book, 1998.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "From: *The Souls of Black Folks*." Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt, *Cultural Conversations* 128-145.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Walter Benjamin*. London: Verso Press, 1981.

- Elbow, Peter. "Freewriting." *The McGraw-Hill Reader: Issues Across the Disciplines*, 8th ed. Ed. Gilbert H. Muller. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003. 52-55.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." *The American Tradition in Literature*. 7th ed. Vol. 1. Eds. George Perkins, Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1990. 1134-1150.
- Estes, Clarissa Pinkla. *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.
- Freire, Paulo and Donaldo Macedo. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1987.
- Gallagher, Winifred. *House Thinking: A Room-By-Room Look at How We Live*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.
- Gandhi, Mahatma. "Religion of Nonviolence." Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt, *Cultural Conversations* 449-451.
- Gardner, Sandra. "What's a Nice Working-Class Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?" Tokarczyk and Fay 49-59.
- Gerard, Philip. *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life*. Cincinnati: Story Press, 1996.
- Gilbert, Dennis, and Joseph A. Kahl. *The American Class Structure: A New Synthesis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1993.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "From *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*." *Writing Women's Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Narratives by Twentieth-Century American Women Writers*. Ed. Susan Cahill. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.
- Grant, Carl A., and Christine E. Sleeter. "Race, Class, and Gender in Education Research: An Argument for Integrative Analysis." *Review of Educational Research*, 56.2 (Summer, 1986): 195-211. JSTOR, Millstein Library, UPG. 06, June 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Gregson, Nicky, and Michelle Lowe. "'Home'-Making: On the Spatiality of Daily Social Reproduction in Contemporary Middle-Class Britain." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 20.2 (1995): 224-235. JSTOR. Millstein Library, UPG. 23, May 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. NY: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- hooks, bell. *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Atria Books, 2004.
- *Teaching Community: A pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- *All About Love: New Visions*. N.Y.: Perennial, 2000.
- *Feminist Theory: From Margin o Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984.

- Hughes, Robert Jr. and Maureen Perry-Jenkins. "Social Class Issues in Family Life Education." *Family Relations*, 45.2 (Apr. 1996): 175-182. JSTOR. Millstein Library, UPG. 23, May 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Jones, Sandra J. "Complex Subjectivities: Class, Ethnicity, and Race in Women's Narratives of Upward Mobility." *Journal of Social Issues*. 59.4 (2003): 803-820.
- Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*. Prod. Apostrophe S Productions. Mystic Fire Video, Inc., 1997.
- Josselson, Ruthellen, and Amia Lieblich, ed. *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol. 1. London: Sage Publications, 1993.
- The Joy Luck Club*. Screenplay by Amy Tan and Ronald Bas. Dir. Oliver Stone. n.d.
- Kadi, Joanna. "A Question of Belonging." Tokarczyk and Fay 87-96.
- Kohn, Melvin L. "Social Class and Parent-Child Relationships: An Interpretation." *The American Journal of Sociology*, 68.4 (Jan. 1963): 471-480. JSTOR. Millstein Library, UPG. 23, May 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Unearthing Herstory." Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt, *Cultural Conversations* 605-614.
- Kuchera, Michael E. and Steven I. Miller. "The Effects of Perceptions of the Academic Job Market on Adjunct Faculty: An Identity-Theory Analysis." *Sociology of Education*, 61.4 (Oct., 1988): 240-254. JSTOR. Millstein Library, UPG. 23, May 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Lang, Dwight. "The Social Construction of a Working-Class Academic." Dews and Leste Law 159-176.

Langston, Donna. "Who Am I Now? The Politics of Class Identity." Tokarczyk and Fay 60-72.

LaPaglia, Nancy. "Working-Class Women as Academics: Seeing in Two Directions, Awkwardly." Dews and Leste Law 177-186.

Leondar-Wright, Betsy. "Working Definitions." *Class Matters*. 2004-2005. 11, October 2005 <http://classmatters.org/working_definitions2.php>.

Long, Melanie, Gaye Ranck Jenkins, and Susan Bracken. "Impostors in the *Sacred Grove*: Working Class Women in the Academe." *The Qualitative Report* 5.3&4 October 2000: n.p. 08 September 2005 <<http://www.nova.edu/ssw/QR/QR5-3/long.html>>.

Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt, *Cultural Conversations* 78-81.

Lubrano, Alfred. *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*. Hoboken, N.J.:Wiley & Sons, 2004.

Mantsios, Gregory. "Class in America: Myths and Realities (2000)." Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 331-345.

McConnel, Fances Ruhlen. "Freeway Flyers: The Migrant workers of the Academy." *Writing Ourselves into the Story: Unheard Voices from Composition studies*. Eds. Sherly I. Fontaine and Susan Hunter. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. 40-58.

- McLaren, Peter. "Border Disputes: Multicultural Narratives, Identity Formation, and Critical Pedagogy in Postmodern America." *Naming Silenced Lives: Personal Narratives and Processes of Educational Change*. Eds. Dani. McLaughlin and William G. Tierney. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Meyer, Richard J. *Stories from the Heart: Teachers and Students Researching Their Literacy Lives*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Publishers, 1996.
- Miller, Susan. "The Feminization of Composition." Bullock and Trimbur 39-53.
- Miner, Valerie. "Writing and Teaching with Class." Tokarczyk and Fay 73-86.
- Momaday, N. Scott. "The American West and the Burden of Belief." Dilks, Hansen, and Parfitt, *Cultural Conversations* 626-639.
- O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York: First Broadway Books Edition, 1998.
- Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1978.
- Overall, Christine. "Nowhere at Home: Toward a Phenomenology of Working Class Consciousness." Dews and Leste Law 209-220.
- Pagnucci, Gian S. *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2004.
- Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Ballantine, 1994.
- Reay, Diane, and Stephen J. Ball. "Spoilt for Choice': The Working Classes and Educational Markets." *Oxford Review of Education*. 23.1 (Mar. 1997): 89-101. *JSTOR*. Millstein Library, UPG. 06, June 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

- Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. New York: Bantam, 1982.
- Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*. n.p.: Touchstone, 1999.
- Sadker, Myra, and David Sadker. *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls*. New York: A Touchstone Book, 1994.
- Schaafsma, David. *Eating on the Streets: Teaching Literacy in a Multicultural Society*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993.
- Schwandt, Thomas A. *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Selden, Raman, and Peter Widdowson. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 3rd ed. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993.
- Slevin, James. "Depoliticizing and Politicizing Composition Studies." Bullock and Trimbur 1-21.
- Tarlen, Carol. "The Memory of Class and Intellectual Privilege." *Liberating Memory: Our Work and Our Working-Class Consciousness*. Ed. Janet Zandy. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995. 20-26.
- Tickamyer, Ann R. "Space Matters! Spatial Inequality in future Sociology" *Contemporary Sociology*. 29.6 (Nov. 2000): 805-813. JSTOR. Millstein Library, UPG. 23, May 2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Tokarczyk, Michelle. M., and Fay, Elizabeth. A. eds. *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.

- Trimmer, Joseph F., ed. *Narration As Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life*.
Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1997.
- Triplett, Ruth, and G. Roger Jarjoura. "Specifying the Gender-Class-Delinquency
Relationship: Exploring the Effects of Educational Expectations." *Sociological
Perspectives*. 40.2 (1997): 287-316. *JSTOR*. Millstein Library, UPG. 06, June
2007 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Van Manen, Max. *Researching Lived Experience: Human science for an Action Sensitive
Pedagogy*. London: SUNY Press, 1990.
- Villanueva, Victor. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Urbana, IL:
NCTE, 1993.
- Ward, Peter. *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home*.
Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999
- Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. New
York: Perennial, 2002.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981
---- *Mrs. Dalloway*. NY: Everyman's Library, 1923.
---- "Professions for Women." *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*. Ed. Michele Barrett
New York: Harvest Book, 1979. 57-63.
- "Working-Class Academic Share Woes, Pointers Via the Internet." *Community College
Week* 13.13 (05 February 2001): 14-. Academic Search Premier. EBSCOhost.
Millstein Library, UPG, Gbg. PA. 08 September 2005
<<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=4103471>>
- Yeziarska, Anzia. *Bread Giver*. New York: Persea Books, 1975.

Zandy, Janet, ed. *Calling Home: Working-class Women's Writings, An Anthology*.

London: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Zweig, Michael, ed. *What's Class Got To Do With It?: American Society in the*

Twenty-First Century. Ithaca: ILR Press, 2004.

---- *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret*. London:

Cornell University Press, 2000.