The whole is in every part: A working-class woman's experiences in academia

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ABSTRACT

Reconciliation and inclusion are words that permeate throughout academia, and yet universities remain unsafe for many individuals who come from marginalized communities. Through the critical autoethnographic method, this research investigates the personal experiences of one working-class woman in a university and connects her experiences to broader sociological phenomena. Much like a kaleidoscope, identifying the patterns in one's personal stories requires that those stories are first brought into the light. This research reveals some of the ways that oppression can harm marginalized bodies, the precariousness of physical and emotional safety for working-class women, and the ways that hierarchies and social divisions are maintained within the academy. This research also sheds light on the ways that marginalized students navigate and persevere through the university system. Just as a small shift of a kaleidoscope can dramatically transform what the viewer sees, this critical autoethnographic research aims to raise the consciousness of individuals—both the researcher and readers—so that we might see our life experiences in a new way, and to use this reframing of experience to work toward social justice.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my students who have inspired me to carry out this research from the very beginning. I hope that you are able to find something in these pages that you can identify with, that gives you strength, that helps you to understand how I am positioned in the work we do together, or that helps you to make sense of this complicated academic world. I would also like to dedicate this work to my mother, my grandmothers, and the generations of working-class women who never had the opportunity to pursue a university education like I have. And finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my husband and our two children. Ron: You saw what I was capable of long before I did, and you encouraged, loved, and supported me every step of the way. Xavier and Violet: You are the sunshine of my life and your kindness, laughter, love, and silliness kept me grounded and nurtured my soul through even the most difficult days at "Mommy University." You give me incredible hope for a brighter tomorrow and I love you more than you will ever know.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (King, 2003/2010, p. 5).

When I first began my studies as a student in the Master of Education program, I had already been employed for several years as a business educator, working almost exclusively with Indigenous adults at a First-Nations, post-secondary technical institution. As a non-Indigenous person whose academic and professional background relates to her teaching areas but not to the practice of teaching in Indigenous contexts, I knew that I needed support in order to be an effective educator in the unique learning environment where I work. It was expressed to me by the many Indigenous professors, researchers, and community members that I have learned from that positionality and self-location are critical factors when working within Indigenous communities (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Kovach, 2000). Communities and individual learners need to know where you are coming from to help contextualize your message. Further to this, I began to learn of the importance of relationality in my work within Indigenous communities. Wilson (2001) writes, "Our systems of knowledge are built on the relationships we have, not just with people or objects, but relationships that we have with the cosmos, with ideas, concepts, and everything around us...it is important to think about our relationship with the ideas and concepts we are explaining" (p. 177). In other words, for me to be an effective educator, I must work to establish trust and credibility with the students I work with by being clear about who I am, where I come from, what my intentions are in carrying out my work, about the nature of my relationship with my students and the communities in which I work, and about my relationship to the knowledge that I share in the classroom.

Self-location matters because teaching and learning is a reciprocal practice whereby teachers and students learn together in a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. Each person brings their own experiences and knowledges to the learning experience to create meaning and to develop understanding and new knowledge. This is because, as Cajete (2009) writes, "Ultimately, the goal of Indigenous education is to perpetuate a way of life through the generations and through time. The purpose of all education is to instruct the next generation about what is valued and important to a society" (p. 184). Continuously locating myself and considering my relationship to the community in which I work, and the topics we are discussing,

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allows me to establish trust and to counter colonial teaching and research practices that have permeated academia. This is a practice I have developed whenever I begin a presentation as a graduate student in a classroom, or when sharing my work with other professionals. It is also a process that I begin on the first day of every new course I teach in my role as a business instructor. It has grown to be a natural part of the way I conduct myself in academia, and yet it has not always been easy for me to reveal where I come from and how I identify myself.

One challenge with revealing my identity is that until I began my graduate work I did not have the language to describe critical parts of my identity—in particular my working-class origins. For the purpose of this study, the term "working class" refers to, "families in which the main providers sell their labour power in discrete amounts of time (i.e. hourly wage) or output piecework (i.e., a set wage per piece)…in an entirely subordinate role as defined in the labour contract, [as well as] those families who do not have a regular wage earner" (Orlowski, 1997, p. 24). As I was growing up, I knew that my family did not have as much money as many of the other families in our relatively affluent neighbourhood, but I had no language to describe my socioeconomic positioning. When I begin to locate myself by stating that I grew up in the north end of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, which resides on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis, it may sound to some like a simple statement about geography, but for me it is loaded with feelings of conflict and fraudulence. The connections between class, race, and place are complex, so while I have experienced privilege by way of my race as a white settler to this land, I have also struggled with a lack of class privilege, relative to many of the people who also grew up in my neighbourhood.

When I speak of where I come from I often think that I need to clarify that my family struggled financially for much of my life. I want people to know that my parents made a conscious choice to live in a neighbourhood where we would be likely viewed as a poor relative to our middle and professional-class neighbours, but where they believed my younger brother and I would have access to good schools and a reasonably safe community. I feel I need to explain that I personally endured violence and emotional turmoil at school as I was growing up and that those struggles intensified when I entered university. I need to acknowledge also, that while I struggled in many ways growing up, I have also been the beneficiary of many unearned privileges because of factors including my light skin and my European ancestry. I want people to know the complexity of who I really am, and yet I find this difficult. In part, this is because I am

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afraid of feeling vulnerable when admitting some of the traumas of my past, and also because it seems arrogant to talk of my struggles when others come from more starkly marginalized social and financial positionings—including many of the students I work with. Finally, it is difficult for me to clearly and succinctly talk of where I come from, because in many ways I have never given it much consideration. I learned from an early age to not dwell on the difficulties from your past if you want to survive, and yet I have experienced the healing power that can come from hearing others share their stories.

Over time, I have come to see that I, in fact, have a story to tell, and that is what this research attempts to do: To tell the stories of my time as a university student, in the hope that my stories will serve others by demonstrating that those who have struggled are not alone. The sharing and analyzing of my experiences in university will help to create understanding for myself, my students, and others about the significance of these experiences and explain why I am personally motivated to promote social justice in my work as a post-secondary educator. I believe that many of the challenges I have endured, particularly in my attempts to navigate academia, are a microcosm of the broader themes of oppression and violence that exist in universities—and in society more broadly. My goal in sharing these stories is that I might help others to view their own university experiences in a different way and offer hope to those who may have experienced similar struggles to the ones that I have endured.

Rationale: Grounding Research to Lived Experience

When I first began university as a seventeen-year-old girl I was eager, ambitious, but also scared. Academia was a new and unfamiliar world for me. Aside from my older brother, no one in my family possessed a university degree so navigating the unwritten norms of academia was something I had to endure largely on my own. I decided early on that I would attempt to pass as an insider—someone who appeared to others like they belonged in the academy. The academic world has always been an intimidating space to me. The large stone buildings of the campus— while beautiful—stand tall, hard, and cold in a patterns that might make sense to those who are familiar with them, but to an outsider can seem rather maze-like. My initial physical impressions of the university are in line with the many experiences I have had in the university. While academia can be alluring, in that it seems to offer the promise of something beautiful—a good life, a career, enhanced wisdom—it can also be a system that is impersonal, rigid, and difficult to navigate. Much of this may stem from the historic roots of academia, which derives from a white,

Western, upper-class, and patriarchal legacy. Hooks (2000), for instance writes that Stanford University was founded on the vision that everyone—regardless of gender or class—should have the opportunity to learn, and yet "[The founder's] vision was seen by many as almost communist. The fact that he was rich made it less threatening. Perhaps no one really believed the vision could be realized" (p. 33).

For me, navigating this unfamiliar terrain often meant not asking professors how to efficiently scour through textbooks to identify key points, how to prepare for writing papers, or how to study for exams. It also meant seldom asking for help from teachers, counsellors, or others within the institution who might be able to lend support with managing the stress of school, work, and personal demands. Diversi and Moreira (2009) explain how this kind of a performed identity is, "forever mutant and relational, adapting to the contextual pressures of making oneself feel worthwhile—by saving face, advancing images of the self that one perceives to be advantageous" (p. 20). In my case, I thought that by asking too many questions or confessing that I needed help would mean I would be viewed by my teachers and peers as an outsider who did not belong, for insiders would already have the answers to those questions. Truthfully, there was so much that was beyond my awareness or comprehension that knowing the right questions to ask would have been difficult—if not impossible—even without the shame. As hooks (2000) attests, "if you do not know that something exists, you do not know to ask about it" (p. 61-62).

Overall (1998) elaborates on some of the specific challenges that working-class students face by describing them as having,

> No one [to] explain...how to communicate with professors...how to dig obscure information out of the library, which extra-curricular activities would be useful, what magazines and journals to read, how to handle [oneself] at social events, or where to find a summer job that would complement [one's] studies... (p. 119).

These are among the many dilemmas I have faced as a post-secondary student, which for a long time went unnamed because I was unaware of how things could or ought to be. These challenges are reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the cave, in which he describes prisoners who are shackled in a cave for their entire lives and unable to see anything but shadows on a wall. These individuals are unable to comprehend a world of beauty and light beyond the cave, and even if they were to catch a glimpse of such a world they would still believe that the shadows were the

reality. Similarly, having grown up unaware of the possibilities and knowledge that lie within the university it was impossible for me to comprehend—especially as a teenager—that these institutions could be anything but a training ground for future employment. For me the shadows were the employment possibilities that often come as a result of achieving a university education—the only part of the university that was real for me growing up. In reality, I have been awakened by writers like Freire (1970/2000) to the possibility that universities can actually be arenas where discovery, personal development, and social transformations can take place.

A further motivation of this research is to illuminate the intersectionality of gender and class. For instance, being a working-class woman in university brings with it the perpetual threat of violence. Hooks (2000) writes that "The poor...live with the fear of being assaulted and mistreated if they are out of their place" (p. 49). This threat becomes increasingly pronounced when you are both poor and a woman. According to the Government of Canada (2016) young women aged 15-25 are at the highest risk of experiencing acts of violence and that risk is exacerbated further for those from marginalized communities, including Indigenous women, those who identify as LGBTQ, and women with a disability. This is also something with which I can identify. Fear for my personal safety was something that has been ingrained in me from the moment I stepped on campus. Reminders come through official channels; for instance, signage offering a volunteer Safewalk service to discourage students from walking alone after dark, or e-mail alerts notifying students about recent assaults that have occurred on campus grounds. Reminders also come through unofficial channels; for example, warnings from peers about studying on the upper floors of the library, as their relative seclusion make them an alleged breeding ground for sexual predators. Despite all the warnings, I have not been successful in navigating the university safely. While I have experienced insidious forms of violence—what Bourdieu (1972/1977) refers to as symbolic violence, or the naturalized rules and norms that go unnamed yet perpetuate oppressive rules and power relationships—I have also experienced overt physical violence, including an in-class assault at the hands of an affluent male peer. The research expressed here examines these experiences in depth and analyzes the ways in which they are representative of a larger system of oppression that takes place on university campuses.

Research Significance: Contributions to Knowledge and Educational Practice

For my own practice as an instructor who works primarily with Indigenous adults, this work is significant because many of the students I work with go on to study at the university. As

an instructor, it is one of the stated responsibilities of the position to prepare students for what lies ahead, whether that be direct entry into the labour force or continuing their studies at a university. By naming the ways I have struggled within the university, I am hoping to illuminate some of the challenges that they too might encounter. Many of the students I teach have come to our school telling stories of having already experienced violence and oppression in other contexts—including many who have attempted to pursue a post-secondary education at other institutions—and have chosen our school as a place of refuge. Through the telling of my stories, my hope is that these students might come to understand their own experiences in a new way, and ultimately that this shift in consciousness might contribute to taking action towards ending oppression within the halls of higher learning.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (n.d.) acknowledges the value of sharing stories in its vision, "to create a place of learning and dialogue where the truths of [residential school survivors'] experiences were honoured and kept safe for future generations…[and] to learn from these hard lessons so they would not be repeated" (para. 1). The sharing of stories and learning from those experiences is common in my daily work as an educator working with Indigenous adults. My own critical autoethnographic research works to honour this spirit of truth-telling, by sharing some of my own experiences within the higher education system, and acknowledging the ways in which that system has both privileged and harmed me. Being a woman who originates from the working class, I having endured negative experiences that may resonate for many of my students, and yet I am also conscious of my role as a professional and as a member of the white-settler population—parts of my identity that bring with them elements of privilege, along with the potential to blind me to the many ways that I might perpetuate further harm to my students. This is something I am dedicated to avoiding and correcting. In fact, I began my graduate program intent on educating myself so that I might be a more effective instructor in my work with Indigenous adults. I can empathize with—albeit perhaps never fully understand—students who have suffered wounds inflicted on them and their families through oppressive educational systems that date back even further than the residential school era and that carry on into today.

Sharing some of my own experiences in university and illuminating their broader social significance is an attempt I am making toward reconciliation so that other potential university students—like the individuals I teach—are aware of the challenges that may lie ahead for them,

and to help them reframe their understandings of their own experiences within education. My ultimate hope being that this heightened awareness and understanding might ultimately become the impetus to push for more substantial institutional change within the academy.

In addition to my personal motivations for conducting this research, this study also has broader implications within academia. One of the broad contributions that this study aims to make is to address the inclusion mandates that many universities currently espouse. The University of Saskatchewan, like many other universities, has made public commitments to promoting inclusion (University of Saskatchewan, 2012, p.13), and yet, in my experience, oppressive systems and practices that hinder the university's stated aims are often difficult to identify. This study provides an insider's perspective and sheds light on some of the insidious ways that the academy contributes to the ongoing oppression of marginalized students. In many cases, the factors that contribute to making universities exclusive and unsafe are not conspicuous. It is often the small moments, or the microagressions, which culminate into more pronounced forms of assault and exclusion that need to be recognized and removed if we are to have a truly inclusive academic environment. For example, on the institutional level, the University of Saskatchewan's (2012) third integrated plan speaks of "Valuing a wide variety of perspectives – Aboriginal, new Canadian, international students, mature students, various sexual and gender identities, differently-abled" (p. 13). The perspectives of women in particular, as well as those from different socio-economic backgrounds are conspicuously absent from this list. While some might argue that this is an unintentional omission, others, including Sue et al. (2007), might suggest that this is an example of a *microinvalidation* [italics in the original], a form of microaggression that is "characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person" (as cited in Ross-Sheriff, 2012, p. 234).

I can recall being a first-year university student and experiencing the build-up of personal slights related to my class-origins which were casually hurled at me by one of my affluent male peers. These slights gradually evolved from what Sue et al. (2007) refer to as *microinsults* [italics in the original], or rude or insensitive comments related to my class identity, to *microassaults* [italics in original], or an explicit verbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim, (as cited in Ross-Sheriff, 2012, p. 234) and ultimately culminated in a violent physical attack on my body. By paying heed to the smaller moments of exclusion that marginalized students in universities

face, we will be better positioned to realize inclusion mandates, such as the one set out by the University of Saskatchewan.

In addition to addressing the inclusion mandate of universities, this work also makes a contribution to an emerging field of inquiry—critical autoethnography. In their book *Critical Autoethnography*, Boylorn and Orbe (2014), define the method as, "Cultural analysis through personal narrative" (p. 17). Through the telling of personal stories, researchers are able to identify and describe broader cultural phenomena that are represented within the stories, enabling both researchers and readers to create new meanings out of lived experience. Chang (2008) writes that, "Autoethnography is becoming a particularly useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings, such as educators, social workers, medical professionals, clergy, and counselors" (p. 51-52). As the research that is contained within this report was carried out by an educator, on the topic of higher education, in the College of Education, it is my hope that the methodology and the stories within will inspire others who have been marginalized to share their voices and stories toward the advancement of teaching and learning in post-secondary education. Intersectionality, which is an important theme within this research, recognizes that as individuals, we belong to many communities who shape our identity and influence the way we experience the world. Critical autoethnography allows researchers, in all of their complexity, to share stories with which other persons of marginalized positionings might identify, which can help to create understanding that might be used to fuel substantive change towards social justice.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to analyze my experiences as a university student and to identify the broader sociological forces that helped shape these experiences and call into question the image of the university as a safe and inclusive space. By enacting my stories through the use of written narrative, I am bringing to life the complexities of my experiences as a university student. Through the telling of these stories, I am able to revisit and investigate my experiences and reframe my understanding of them by situating them within the broader context of an academy that is rooted in systems of privilege and inequality. It is my hope that the performative nature of the text will allow readers to situate themselves in relation to me and my experiences, and perhaps encourage them to reflect on their own experiences within the university. More specifically, I hope that others who have experienced marginalization are able to find some

comfort in knowing that they are not alone in their struggles, and that transformation towards social justice is possible when we speak the truth of our experiences and then take action towards substantive change.

Research Questions

The primary question that guided the collection and analysis of this study was: How has my intersectional positioning as a woman who originates from the working class impacted my ability to navigate the university? This question was explored primarily through the use of personal narratives and through the analysis of my personal memory data. After engaging in a number of exercises to draw out memories from my undergraduate university experiences, these memories took the shape of stories of my personal experience, which I then analyzed for themes and common characteristics.

In addition to my primary research question I was also interested in investigating the question of how the university has been uniquely unsafe for me, given my intersectional positioning as a woman who originates from the working class. In order to explore this question, I examined my personal narratives and looked for examples of incidents where I felt discomfort, a fear for my own personal safety, or experienced physiological distress. I also reviewed the literature on the experiences of other women from the working class for clues as to the kind of experiences that may be common to our experience and that may have resulted in feelings of being unsafe.

Another secondary question that I wanted to answer through this research was, how does the telling of my stories as a university student reframe my understanding of those experiences? By simply recording many of the experiences from my undergraduate experiences, which are now almost two decades old, I was able to analyze them more clearly. In part, this comes from the wisdom accumulated through life experience. The stories also become clearer when they are written down in a complete narrative, rather than recalled from the dark recesses of my memories in fragments before being pushed back down, as I had done in the years previous when I was not prepared to explore them in a systematic way. Reframing these stories was highly dependent upon looking at them in the context of a larger system, rather than as mere stories of individual experience. By using a critical feminist lens to analyze my stories, and also comparing my stories to similar stories told by those who have been marginalized in academia, it becomes clearer that my story is not one of a single individual who had a rough time at school, but rather, that many of

the experiences I endured in my attempts to navigate academia are a symptom of a larger system that wreaks havoc on bodies and minds in unique ways, depending on our social positioning.

And finally, through this research I also wanted to explore how the telling of my individual stories might lend support to others by helping them to reframe their own understanding about the nature of the university. In fact, this is the primary reason I began my graduate work and why I chose to use the critical autoethnographic method for my major research. As a post-secondary instructor working almost exclusively with Indigenous adults, I wanted this research to lend support to my students, by inviting them to position themselves within the academic landscape, as I have through this research. I have heard many students say that they have attempted university and that it did not work out for them, so they have come to the technical college for a second chance. This is similar to my own experience of struggling through university on my first attempt, and eventually attending a smaller technical college when I chose to pursue my studies further. By revealing some of the structural and systemic reasons why I struggled, I hope that my own students, and others who read this work, can examine their own stories and begin to understand that their experiences are not isolated incidents, and that in fact their stories—just like mine—are connected as part of a larger contextualized reality.

Thesis Overview

This research is laid out in a circular path, whereby it begins and ends by exploring a macro perspective on what the experience is of being a working-class woman in university. In other words, this research begins by zooming out to explore the literature in chapter two in order to determine what has already been written on this topic, then it zooms in to look more deeply at the experiences of one working-class woman—myself as the researcher/participant of this study—in chapters four and five, and then zooms out again to connect my stories and experiences to a larger cultural story in chapter six. This approach of zooming in and out in a cyclical pattern of analysis is commonly used with the critical autoethnographic method (Chang, 2008). In this method, which is detailed in the third chapter of this research, the writer's own life experiences are explored and analyzed with the purpose of connecting them to a broader cultural reality.

Of particular note for the organizational pattern of this research is the holographic picture that is created through the research that is discussed in chapters four, five, and six. Meyer (2013), an Indigenous scholar from Hawaii, writes that knowledge is like a hologram in that it requires three beams—the body, mind, and spirit—to create a full understanding. Chapter four then

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explores what the physical experience of being a working class woman has been for me through the telling of three stories that are emblematic of my overall experiences at university. In chapter five, the second beam of the hologram—which according to Meyer's model involves the mind— uses an analytical approach to investigate the physical experiences that were described in the preceding chapter. The final beam, which is explored in chapter six, is the spiritual beam, which involves connecting ones individual experiences and thoughts to a larger cultural picture. In this case, I describe how my own experiences are part of a broader system, and that there is a connection between my stories and those of others with similar positioning to me within academia. To conclude the final chapter, suggestions are made about what might be done to transform our shared reality, as those who have experienced marginalization within universities, so that individual university experiences moving forward can be predominantly positive and transformative, rather than oppressive.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparation for this research, a literature review was conducted to evaluate the existing scholarship on the main topics I was investigating. Sources were collected from web and library searches and include refereed journal articles, books, and government documents. Some of the key search terms included: "working-class," "social class," "socio-economic status (SES), "low-income," "women," "feminism," "intersectionality," "university," and "academia." These terms were combined in various ways to yield many of the resources described below. Other sources referred to in this section were discovered during my graduate coursework and from materials recommended to me from professors and researchers with knowledge on these topics. What follows in this section is a summary of the findings from these sources.

Emergent Themes from Previous Research

Personal Narrative & Autoethnography

One of the first things that became apparent as I scanned the literature on the experiences of women and working-class individuals in university are the methods that have been utilized to analyze these experiences. While a variety of approaches have been taken, there is a significant body of work employing personal narrative or autoethnographic methods as a means to articulate the challenges that marginalized groups face while trying to navigate academia (Adair, 2008; Benton, 2007; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Bunch & Myron, 1974; Dews & Law, 1995; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; hooks, 2000; Kelly, 2008; Neilsen, 1998; Overall, 1998; Reay, 1998). This suggests that the research proposed in this report bears a logical consistency with the work pioneered by other academics in this area. Nonetheless, the intersectional and personal nature of critical autoethnography promises that while my research may share similarities to previous work, it is original because of the uniqueness of my life history and positionality. Originality is important in justifying the value of embarking on this research, but so too is being able to demonstrate that there is a greater significance to this work, beyond my personal interest. I cannot claim that the observations and analysis that have emerged through this research are generalizable; however, Diversi and Moreira (2009) attest that autoethnography, "explores the singularity of the experience, [and] when performed by the oppressed it gives name '…to experiences of many through the experiences of one'" (p. 187). By transforming my personal stories into research I am connecting my voice to the chorus of others who have written about

their experiences of oppression within academia. By heightening the awareness of these experiences and by generating new meaning and understanding through the sharing of stories, myself and these others might work together to push back against the oppressive forces that we have been subjected to throughout our lives.

Intersectionality

In addition to recurrences in method, the literature on women and working-class individuals in universities also contains a number of recurrent themes. The first of these is the use of an intersectional analysis to understand the experiences of those who have struggled within universities (Bishop, 1994; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Dews & Law, 1995; Diversi, M. & Moreira, C., 2009; hooks, 2000; Lapour & Heppner, 2009; Kelly, 2008; Neilsen, 1998; Overall, 1998). This type of analysis gives a fuller understanding of the difficulties that those from marginalized communities experience within universities. Overall (1998), for example writes, "The phenomena associated with sexism are not adequate to fully account for my discomfort within the academic community. For I occupy a minority status not only by virtue of my sex but by virtue of my class origins" (p. 112). Orbe (2014) similarly explores the intersection of class and gender by describing his realization that while he has experienced class-based oppression within academia because of his working-class upbringing, he has also benefitted from male privilege along the way.

For myself, I often find that I can identify with the critical autothnographic research published by women who originate from the working class because of the similarity of our positioning. Nonetheless, within the literature on working-class women's experiences in university, there can still be gaps or uniqueness because of the complexity of each individual's positionality. While our experiences may resonate with someone because of similarities in our positionings with relation to gender or class, they may also differ because of differences in how we are positioned with regard to race, sexual orientation, ability, and other factors. Intersectionality matters because it helps to interrogate the nature of our experiences more fully, while also helping to bridge the divide of understanding which can occur because of the unique ways that individuals experience privilege and oppression. A researcher's positionality does not have to be identical to our own in order for their work to be valid or to resonate with our own experience; it simply means that all voices are needed in the struggle to end oppression because of the heterogeneity of social positionings and experiences that exist.

Gendered Role Expectations

As a society, we continue to reinforce gendered expectations about the roles individuals are to play within society. These roles are rooted in a patriarchal and heteronormative ideology that still assumes that a woman will marry a man, have babies, and perform the majority of the unpaid domestic work, regardless of whether or not she also works outside the home. (Adair, 2008; Anyon, 1984; Anzaldúa, 2010; Boeckmann, Misra, & Budig, 2015; Kelly, 2008; Orbe, 2014; Orlowski, 1997). These biases are deeply entrenched in a colonial worldview that perpetuates systemic sexism in families and in the public sphere. The Indian Act in Canada, for example, is but one form of legislation that perpetuates a simultaneously racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideology by establishing laws and rules based on race, that strip women and children of inherent rights, and that only proffer status and rights through male hereditary lines by way of heterosexual relationships (Cannon, 1998). The attitudes that derive from these flawed ideologies undoubtedly impact a woman's experiences as she attempts to navigate academia—in fact, social norms and attitudes about a woman's role in society influence whether university is even an option for many women. For example, Orbe (2014) writes, "Our parents pressured my brother and me to do more academically because the assumption was that we would be providing for our families. My sisters didn't receive that message; instead they were socialized into domestic roles" (p. 202).

The gendered expectations that plague women through their academic experiences continue to have lasting material (Barth, Goldin, Pekkala Kerr, & Olivetti, 2017; Budig & Hodges, 2010) and emotional impacts (Kelly, 2008) on them throughout their lives and careers. A recent study showing the wages of professors at the University of Saskatchewan, where this research takes place, shows that female professors continue to make less money than their male counterparts (MacPherson, 2017). It is possible that this wage gap is even more significant for racialized female professors, considering that the Conference Board of Canada (2017) reports that "In Canada, university-educated Canadian-born members of a visible minority earn, on average, 87.4 cents for every dollar earned by their Caucasian peers" (p. 1); While the United Nations (2015) reports similar concerns regarding, "the persisting inequalities between women and men. In particular…the high level of the pay gap, which… disproportionately affects low-income women, in particular minority and indigenous women" (p. 2).

This theme resonates with me, in light of the fact that I grew up in a household with a mother and father who both worked outside of the home for most of my life, and yet my mother still took on the majority of the child-rearing and household responsibilities. My mother is a role model when it comes to education, having completed a two-year nursing diploma, despite having to overcome significant personal and financial challenges of her own. My mother has always insisted on the importance of education for her children, regardless of gender, and she has often expressed a desire to pursue a university education herself. And yet despite the positive and supportive force that she has been in my life, I still feel the pressure to perform my gender in ways that are deemed socially acceptable to others. On my wedding day, for example, I was questioned by well-intentioned loved ones about when I was going to have babies. I suppose among my predominantly Catholic family and peer group that this seemed like the logical next step for a newly married woman, when in reality my priority was to advance the education I had struggled to complete years earlier. Since becoming a mother who works outside the home, who is again advancing her education, I am still inundated with contradictory messaging about who I need to be in order to fit with societal expectations.

There are real consequences for being a woman who is pushing against the status quo and trying to learn and labour in spaces that have traditionally been the domain of men. For example, in Canadian universities the threat of verbal attack, physical assault, and sexual violence are documented problems facing women who attempt to pursue an education (Quinlan et al., 2017; Tremblay, et. al. 2008). Women are also more highly represented in lower ranking, lower-paying and precarious academic work (Wallace, Wallin, Viczko, & Anderson, 2014) and are expected to play a larger support role for students and emerging academics (Overall, 1998). In short, working-class women who try to navigate academia are not only tasked with negotiating the intellectual rigours of student life, they must also battle gendered societal expectations that have created systemic disadvantages for generations of women in the university.

Caught Between Worlds

For those who feel alienated by the continued pervasiveness of society's gendered role expectations, the next theme that is prevalent within the literature may resonate. The narrow definitions of what it means to be male or female within our society can leave those who do not fit within a rigid binary system as if they are lost somewhere in between. Many researchers who write about the experiences of women and working-class people in the academy describe a

similar feeling of being caught between worlds (Benton, 2007; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Dews & Law, 1995; Fedukovich, 2009; hooks, 2000; Hoyt, 2013; Kelly, 2008; Overall, 1998; Käyhkö, 2015; Reay, 1998; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). In the case of the working class, a number of academics (Benton, 2007; Overall, 1998; Reay; 1998), have written about feeling fraudulent while trying to navigate the unwritten social norms of the middle class and in trying to relate to their life experiences, while at the same time feeling like a traitor when they eventually learned how to speak the language and advance financially and professionally within that world. Hooks (2000), on the other hand, writes of the expectations she had as a student to find racial solidarity among the black elites at Stanford University, but quickly discovered the need to find allies who could also identify with her along class lines (p. 35). In terms of gender, Overall (1998) writes of the difficulty of being a woman who faces oppression within the university, but who is also in a position of privilege as a professor within the institution.

The feeling of being caught 'somewhere in the middle' is something I can relate to as well. As a first generation university graduate, some of the language and knowledge that I have acquired through my studies can be alienating when I try to communicate with members of my own family. Yet, when I am in the academy I frequently feel that I lack the right types of knowledge and refined linguistic skills to truly fit in. Further, as a relatively young female student engaging in graduate research I feel like an outsider to academia, and yet I am concurrently in a position of privilege in relation to my students, given that I am a white, university-educated, professional with permanent full-time employment in a First-Nations educational institution. This feeling of "betweenness" is echoed in the work of Diversi and Moreira (2009) who write about the fluid and contradictory spaces we all inhabit that contribute to us being simultaneously both insiders and outsiders. Rather than regarding this as a problem to be solved, they articulate a hopefulness that "betweeners can manage multiple worlds at the same time and be facilitators of…transformation" (p. 25). My hope is that in sharing some of my experiences as a university student, from the uniqueness of my social positioning, that I might be a facilitator of transformation, beginning with a transformation in my own understandings of the experiences.

Systemic Power & Privilege

Perhaps one of the reasons many researchers write about feeling torn between different worlds is because universities are fundamentally rooted in systems of power and privilege. This is another theme that I observed in my scan of the literature. For years, I believed that my own challenges in university could be reduced to the financial burden that university placed on me. As I began my research, however, I started to realize that even in quantitative studies where financial obstacles are controlled for (De Broucker, 2005; Frenette, 2007), or in a county like Finland, where access to post-secondary education is said to be universal (Käyhkö, 2015), that students from the poor and working classes still attend and succeed in university at lower rates than their peers from the middle and upper-classes. Additionally, there is research to suggest that women, in particular, face additional obstacles when it comes to university participation due to factors including the threat of assault and harassment (Banyard, 2014; Oakes, 2004; Overall, 1998; Wallace et al., 2014) and social pressure to conform to gendered roles upon completion of high school (Lapour & Heppner, 2009; Orbe, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, the marginalization of students does not actually begin once they enter university; in fact, plenty of research demonstrates that streaming of students happens much earlier and often in insidious ways (Anyon, 1994; Kelly, 2008; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). For example, a landmark study in the late 1970's conducted by Anyon (1980/1994) of five grade five classrooms in the United States demonstrates how students from different class backgrounds are educated in ways that are consistent with prevailing expectations for their futures based on their class backgrounds, which limits what they can know, how work is defined and practiced, and essentially guarantees the replication of existing class stratifications within the broader society. While Anyon did not attempt to generalize her analysis of classroom work based on the small sample of schools that she studied, her work clearly showed that teaching methods can be linked to social stratification and alerted researchers to the ways teachers may perpetuate social and economic inequalities through the hidden curriculum of differential expectations based on class. If this type of teaching occurs on a broader scale, then the replication of social differences among students could be a systemic concern, worthy of further research and intervention. The observation of academic systems replicating, rather than emancipating students from the social constraints of their class origins was also noted earlier in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), who write about reproduction theory in education and argue that "schools

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legitimate inequality…they create and reinforce patterns of social class, racial and sexual identification among students" (p. 11).

Invisibility of Power & Privilege

  This brings me to the final theme that became clear upon reviewing the literature, which is that many systems of power and privilege are normalized within universities, and in society more broadly, rendering them virtually invisible. For example, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) dedicated an entire chapter of their book to discussing the invisibility of oppression. One example they provide is the way media inundates our culture with messages to reinforce stereotypes related to gender, which limit the roles available to women, and contribute to their ongoing oppression. Bruno-Jofré and Young (1999) reveal the false assumption some professors have that students who are marginalized within the university are fully aware of their oppression and can readily provide suggestions on how to improve the situation (p. 50). A number of researchers have also discussed how a lack of class consciousness among students and the broader society works to maintain the marginalization of the poorest members of our society (Orbe, 2014; Orlowski, 2001; Orlowski, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Weiner, 2004). This is also something with which I can identify.

  For most of my life I had no language to articulate the class oppression or the gender-based violence that I experienced. It was not until I began reflecting on my life as an adult that I came to see that some of the irritating or upsetting behaviour I experienced growing up could actually constitute harassment, and in some cases even assault. Once I began my graduate work I also came to see that my self-identification as a member of the "middle-class" was deeply flawed, and that in fact I had grown up as a member of the working class—ironically a term I never learned until I was already a working professional and arguably no longer a member of the working class. In a related vein, my lack of class-consciousness resulted from an overall lack of understanding of privilege and power more broadly. As a result, not only was I unable to articulate the ways in which I have experience marginalization, I was equally unable to recognize the ways in which I have experienced privilege. For instance, my understanding of racism was extremely simplistic for many years. Rather than being taught about the systemic nature of racism and being confronted with the ways in which I have benefitted from such a system as a member of the white majority, I grew up believing that racism was simply cruel words or actions directed at individuals based on the colour of their skin. The concept of power was seldom discussed, and

so to me racism became synonymous with prejudice or discrimination. What I have come to understand, however, is that my lack of understanding of racism is closely linked to my lack of understanding of class and gender-related oppression. Systems of dominance that perpetuate inequality—such as classism, racism, patriarchy, colonialism, heterosexism—continue, in part, because of society's inability to name and explain them. Even as a small child, I knew that racism is bad, and yet my understanding of what racism is, and how I am implicated in it, was absent or flawed and so my ability to combat it was severely limited. Similarly, my inability to name classism or sexism as the source of any of my individual difficulties severely limited my ability to challenge the systems that interfered with my ability to pursue a university education.

Gaps in Previous Research

As I was reading through the literature on the experiences of working-class women in university, I was surprised to find that violence was not a more predominant theme. Violence is expressed as a concern for women in universities (Banyard, 2014; Lund & Thomas 2015) and is a significant theme in much of the work that deals with other forms of oppression, including racism (Berlak, 2004; Fanon, 1986; Theoharis, 2010; Thomas, 1994) and colonialism (Daschuk, 2013; Silver, 2013). Research in these areas often delve into the impact of oppression on the body, so it stood out for me that where the research explores the intersectionality of being both a woman and someone who originates from the working class, that the subject of physical violence is not frequently addressed. Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) write that, "Mounting evidence seems to suggest that the inhibited, constrained and restricted nature of oppression leads to physiological difficulties" (p. 132). This is why it is important to explore, not only the social challenges of being a woman who originates from the working class, but also the physical consequences that are experienced in the bodies of these individuals. The urgency of this consideration is something to which I can personally attest.

Across my years of schooling, I have been grabbed, pushed, choked, and groped because I am a woman from the working class. It seemed as though I was being sized up by classmates to determine if I would be an easy target for their abuse and whether they had some kind of power that they could wield over me. These assessments seemed to be happening all around me. Kids who could afford designer clothing displayed evidence of privilege by way of their financial status, while these same kids might still become targets for harassment if they were not white. Additionally, women of all races and financial statuses seemed to be targeted for assault—often

in the form of unwanted grabbing or touching by male peers—but I cannot be sure that the abuse was spread evenly among us. The physical attacks I experienced in school have at times left marks on my body. Stigmas related to my gender and class positioning have also made me a target for bullying, harassment, and name-calling which at varying times has led to anxiety and depression, with their accompanying physical symptoms, and even self-harm. Violence, both symbolic and physical, are intimately connected to all forms of oppression and that is something that is demonstrated through the research contained within this thesis.

Implications of the Literature for this Study

The existing scholarship that details the experiences of women and working-class individuals provides a valuable context for the work that I carried out. My individual experiences have taken part within the larger system of academia, so familiarizing myself with the research that has come before helped me to gain a broader understanding of the nature of academia and assisted me with interpreting my own stories. Chang (2008) writes that autoethnography is about analyzing culture and that culture fundamentally refers to the self in relation to others. She recommends a process of zooming in and looking at the experiences of the individual self and our relationships as well as zooming out to understand how those stories are a piece of a larger story as a member of society. My own research is an example of this. What began as an attempt towards better understanding myself and enhancing my efficacy as an educator, has grown into an investigation of how I am an active player in a system where I have experienced both privilege and oppression. This research has the potential to contribute to a larger body of academic knowledge which illuminates the oppressive nature of the university and also suggests possibilities for individuals and communities to work towards enacting incremental change.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

This research was carried out in a systematic way, first by considering the theoretical grounding on which the study would be built. Crotty (1998) states that there are a number of choices one needs to make when designing a research study and that in order to justify these choices we must return to my original research question(s) (p. 2). Through this research, I set out to explore how my intersectional positioning as a woman who originates from the working class has impacted my ability to navigate the university. Given this mandate, a number of methodological possibilities could have been logical, so in the sections to follow I explain the choices I made with regards to this research, and the theoretical underpinnings that influenced my decisions.

Epistemological Framework

Before making choices about the specific methods that I used to carry out this study I took some time to consider the epistemologies and theories that have influenced me in wanting to carry out this study to begin with. According to Crotty's (1998) model, there are three dominant epistemologies that inform the countless theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and data collection methods, which are available to researchers: Objectivism, Constructionism, and Subjectivism (p. 5). For myself, the most powerful energy that is contained within my life experiences as a university student does not flow from the verifiable facts, dates, and locations contained in the stories I describe; rather, it comes from the emotion and the cultural significance of these experiences. For this reason, my research makes no claims to Western epistemological notions of objectivity. On the other hand, to say that the stories of my university experiences are purely subjective, negates the broader social relevance of these stories or the possibility for them to create meaning for others who have endured similar circumstances. It is for these reasons that I identify most closely with Constructionism, and as a result this view forms the epistemological framework for this study. Charmaz (2008) advocates a research paradigm that examines "(1) the relativity of the researcher's perspectives, positions, practices, and research situation, (2) the researcher's reflexivity; and (3) depictions of social constructions in the studied world" (p. 398).

Constructionism asserts that "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). In other words, reality is dependent upon our experiences and

interactions with the world. For example, there is no objective truth as to the nature of the university, it is a constructed reality based on the experiences and interactions of the participant interacting with the actions and aims of the institution. Are universities conduits for personal transformations? Are they oppressive institutions? Are they tools of social replication? The truth will depend on a number of factors, including one's own experiences with the university.

The University of Saskatchewan, for example, was founded on the ideals of its first president, Walter Murray, who in 1909 stated, "This is the university of the people, established by the people, and devoted by the people to the advancement of learning and the promotion of happiness and virtue" (as cited in Woodhouse, 2000, p. 148-149). This was at a time, where legally, Indigenous peoples, on whose land the University of Saskatchewan was built, could not attend university without facing enfranchisement and the loss of their Indian status and rights (Government of Canada, 2010). This contradiction between the mandate of the institution as being supposedly "of the people" no doubt contributes to a constructed reality of the university for many Indigenous students that would differ greatly from someone who comes from a different historical or ethnic background.

A similar argument can be made for a constructivist framework by referring to the work of Brant Castellano (2000) who shares the story of a Cree Elder who is asked to give testimony and to swear to tell the truth. When the word truth is translated for him, presumably as "something that holds for all people," his response is that, "I can't promise to tell you the truth; I can only tell you what I know" (p. 25). This gives further evidence to the idea that reality, or truth, flows from one's lived interactions with the world, rather than from some objective reality. Accepting that reality is constructed, however, does not mean that reality ceases to exist. Neilsen (1998) uses the metaphor of a traffic accident to articulate her shift in consciousness from Objectivism to Constructionism. She writes, "Ask enough witnesses, vary your detective work as necessary, and you will find out what really happened. The truth will be a construction among all participants" (Neilsen, 1998, p. 38). In much the same way, the nature of the university is grounded in reality—a constructed reality—which is born out of the university's own history, policies, and goals, as well as the participants who interact with it and their own histories, experiences, values, and goals. As I delve into my own stories and dig through the literature, aspects of the constructed reality of the university, and what it means to be a working-class woman within such an institution, are revealed.

Theoretical Framework

While Constructionism is the epistemological framework that underpins this research, the theoretical framework is somewhat more complex. According to Crotty's (1998) model the possibilities are plentiful and he lists Positivism, Interpretivism, Critical Inquiry, Feminism, and Postmodernism as but a few of the options available to researchers (p. 5). The dominant theoretical perspective that guides the research in this report is best described as a critical feminist framework. The initial urge I had in sharing my stories was to raise awareness about the oppressive nature of the university, as I had experienced it, to demonstrate that my stories are but one example of a larger system of injustice, and to use this knowledge as a basis for resistance and contributing to change through my own pedagogy as an adult educator. I have come to understand that these aims align with those of critical theory. It is not enough for me to simply share my stories and seek to understand them, I want this research to make a difference for those who have been marginalized within the university. Habermas (1992), one of the theorists who is commonly associated with critical theory, echoes this concern when he states that he, "cannot imagine any seriously critical social theory without an internal link to something like an emancipatory interest." (As cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 1133).

Critical theory is also a particularly useful theoretical framework, given that the purpose of this research is to interrogate the university, which is an environment of adult learning. Brookfield (2005) argues that critical theory is fundamentally linked to adult learning. He writes that,

> A society can be judged as more or less democratic according to the ways its adult members learn how to come to decisions about matters that affect their lives. The more democratic, the fuller the information to which citizens have access…the greater the freedom of conversation, the higher the chance that true critical reason—reason employed to create a just, human democracy will emerge. (p. 1134)

By sharing and analyzing the stories of my experiences as an adult learner in university, I am releasing previously inaccessible private data into the public realm in the interest of promoting social justice.

Critical theory alone, however, is not sufficient for explaining the theoretical lens through which this research takes place. It is also through feminist theory that I have made sense of the data that I uncovered. Feminism is a concept with a rich and complex history, and one that has

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been subject to many interpretations and transformations over the years. Hooks (2000), for example, makes the distinction between reform feminism and what she calls revolutionary feminism by stating that the former is primarily interested in equal participation in the existing class structure, while the latter would prefer to challenge the class structure itself (p. 101). Having struggled within the existing class structure, I have always empathized with others who have struggled and have felt compelled to ally myself with those who are fighting for change. It has never been sufficient, in my mind, to simply switch roles from being the oppressed to the oppressor, so with this hooks' description being one of my first theoretical introductions to feminist thought, I was immediately drawn to the possibilities contained within revolutionary feminism. Nonetheless, I have come to understand that there are numerous branches of feminist thought, and that each of them is grounded in a particular history and set of goals.

To delve more specifically into what defines a theoretical framework as being feminist, Lerner (1993) provides a definition of a feminist consciousness that is appropriate here.

> The awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that they must join with women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination (p. 14).

Within this research, my own feminist consciousness guided me in determining the type of data that I would collect, as well as how to make sense of that data. For instance, much of the memory data that I collected as I was in the early phases of this research were drawn because they exemplified instances where I was subject to subordination due to my gender and social class. Through the analytical process I was able to connect my individual stories to broader social phenomena and conclude my research for suggestions on how a new reality might be created that would benefit all persons who have been marginalized within the academy.

Much of my own feminist consciousness has grown in recent years after I returned to university as an adult. It is interesting that the site where I have experienced some of my most significant feelings of marginalization is also the place where I have come to understand my circumstances and where I have laboured to work towards transformational social change. This is not unusual, as Lerner (1993) points out that the concept of a feminist consciousness at large is one that has developed incrementally over generations, and admits that for her book the women she

studied were "largely white, upper-class, wealthy, or economically privileged, but that is precisely the problematic of women's intellectual history: for women, far longer than for men, education was a class privilege" (p. 16).

What makes feminist theory, in general, amenable to critical autoethnographic research is the way in which both acknowledge the significance of one's personal experiences and stories and how by creating space for individual stories, we might better understand our social and political world. Donovan (1985), for example writes that "Feminist theory is moving toward a more comprehensive view that recognizes the interrelationships among all living things" (p. 220); in other words, what happens at the level of the individual, impacts, and is reflected in, the broader society. The interconnectedness of all living things is also why intersectionality is important to Feminist theory. In *Becoming an Ally*, Bishop (1994) writes that "no one oppression can be ended without all ending…all oppressions are interdependent, they all come from the same world-view, and none can be solved in isolation" (p. 10-11). Smith (2006) affirms this interconnectivity by describing how, "patriarchy rests on a gender binary system in which only two genders exist, one dominating the other…the colonial world depends on heternormativity…Any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy" (p. 72). For these reasons, an intersectional critical feminist lens is an important piece of this study's theoretical framework. This ensures that the interpretation of the stories contained within this research not only consider how patriarchy and class dominance have contributed to my oppression, but also how I have benefitted from interconnected systems of dominance and privilege, like white supremacy and colonialism. The goal is to end all forms of oppression, not just the ones that have adversely affected me as an individual.

It is important to note that while this research was born out of a critical feminist lens, it has also been deeply influenced by Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. As a white researcher, I cannot claim to have an Indigenous standpoint, and yet as an educator working almost exclusively with Indigenous adults, and as a student who has had the privilege to learn from numerous Indigenous Elders and professors, my work has no doubt been shaped by Indigenous persons and perspectives. As such, it is critical that I acknowledge this influence but make explicit that I make no claims to Indigenous ways of knowing. I commit to crediting these influences explicitly within my work wherever they arise. For example, I have learned that

reciprocity is a fundamental rule of life and of research. I have heard a number of Elders teach that "when you take something, you must put something back." One way I am doing this with this research is by taking the teachings and the lessons that I have learned through this process and sharing them widely with others who could benefit from this knowledge. For example, I have shared some of my work with my students, as well as with friends and family members who have shown interest in my work. I also intend to publish this work and to share it in various public forums, not for the self-interested purpose of raising my own prestige, but rather to generously share the knowledge that I have gathered from others and have created on my own.

I have also learned of the importance of balance in all things. The conceptual framework for this research references this concept of balance, as described by Meyer (2013), as referring to the mind, body, and spirit. On the land where I live and work, the Cree, as well as other Indigenous language groups and nations, similarly referred to balance through the four directions, or the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of ourselves. The concept of balance is one I engaged with as I collected my memory data, by trying to ensure that I was capturing the full range of human experience that took place for me in university. In other words, I attempted to answer the questions of: what happened physically to my body in those experiences (physical), what feelings and relationships were present during those experiences (emotional), what those experiences meant and how I thought about them then as well as now (mental), and finally, what my purpose was throughout those experiences and what guided me during those times (spirit). Balance was also important in the process of conducting this research, and I had to use that guiding wisdom to maintain my own holistic wellbeing as I engaged with this work, that was, at times, extremely difficult.

Research Methodology

In order to unify the objectives of creating a narrative that is rooted in a Critical Feminist theoretical framework, the specific methodology that I employed is the critical autoethnography. As mentioned previously, critical autoethnography is an emerging field of inquiry, that respects the integrity of individual stories about life experience, while illuminating broader social themes that are demonstrated through the stories (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2013; Spry, 2016). This is done by using the researcher's personal narratives as a source of primary data while making extensive reference to the literature as a secondary source of data and to support the analysis of the research. In their description of autoethnography, Boylorn

and Orbe (2014) profess that it is an intrinsically critical method in that it seeks to, "understand the experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination" (p. 20). One of the key characteristics of autoethnography is an attention to positionality—in other words, acknowledging the complexity of the positions we inhabit, in relation to others, at various points in time. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) stress the importance of acknowledging both, "the inevitable privileges we experience alongside marginalization and to take responsibility for our subjective lens through reflexivity" (p. 15). Alcoff (2005), who is known for her writing on positionality, further describes the importance of positionality and its impermanence across time in saying,

> …a concept of identity as positionality offer[s] a means to give a content to women's identity without solidifying that content for all time, since positionality is a content that emerges in relational circumstances that are in constant change as we, and those around us, are engaged in a world that is itself in movement. (p. 151)

For myself, I must acknowledge that while I primarily identify with some of the marginalized elements of my identity—my sex and class background—I also benefit from unearned privilege afforded to me through other elements, like my race (I am white) and gender identity (I am cisgender). By incorporating this recognition into my data analysis, I am acknowledging the complexity of positionality and making visible the viewpoint from which I compose and analyze this research.

Data Collection Methods

While critical autoethnography is often associated with the use of extensive personal narratives, it is still a systematic research method, which means that the stories that are told have been carefully selected to convey a message and to produce meaning. The process of data collection in a critical autoethnography is very similar to the data collection in a traditional ethnography. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe how ethnographers collect data by "taking field notes… interview[ing] cultural members… and/or analyz[ing] artifacts…and texts such as books, movies, and photographs" (p. 276). Autoethnographers collect data in much the same way. For my research, I used the three-phase framework set out by Chang (2008) to guide my data collection. While each of the phases are distinct, I moved fluidly between them through the course of this study. Gathering data, reflecting on its meaning, recalling past experiences, and

observing my present circumstances all took place organically, under the guidance of my research purpose and questions.

The first phase of data collection, according to Chang (2008), is to produce "Personal Memory Data." For me, personal memory data included recording poignant stories that stood out as being particularly emblematic of my university experience. It also meant reflecting on my journey from when I began university to where I am now. This process began through a series of letters, which I titled the "Dear Maggie Letters." These letters, and the personal stories contained within, emerged out of a need to make explicit some of the more traumatic, and previously unmentionable experiences I have endured as a university student. For some time, the direction of my research was stalled and disjointed, until it was suggested that I write down some of my experiences in the form of a letter to one of my trusted graduate committee members. This momentary aside from the pressures of formal academic writing proved to be a cathartic and productive process which helped me to begin the process of reframing my understanding of my personal experiences, as well as helping me to uncover the passion and energy that would guide my thesis. Chang (2008) provides a number of writing exercises to help evoke one's personal memory data, so as part of my collection process I worked through a number of these exercises (See Appendix A) and looked for themes that connected to my research purpose and questions.

The second phase of data collection, according to Chang's (2008) model is to develop "Self-Observational and Reflective Data" (p. 90). She suggests that "Self-observational data from the present, when compared with personal memory data, can reveal changes and continuity in your life over time" (Chang, 2008, p. 90). This type of data, according to Chang (2008), can include recording one's own "behaviours, thoughts or emotions at certain time intervals or by occurrence (p. 91). In order to do this, I wrote periodically in a reflective journal to express the numerous emotions I was experiencing as I worked through the numerous phases of this research project. There were moments of profound discovery and also moments of overwhelming frustration, so journaling became a form of catharsis to help process these feelings, while also acting as an additional source of data which was analyzed for my final report. One such example of this can be seen in a poem I titled "Relationality", which concludes this thesis . This poem was composed on one of the many days that I was struggling to balance the pressures of being a full-time instructor, a mother, a partner, and community volunteer. This poem was not initially intended to form part of the content of the thesis when it was written, rather it was meant to be a

form of data that might help me to make sense of the work I was carrying out, and a reflective exercise to help me refocus on why this work matters. There were countless times through the process of carrying out this research that I wanted to quit, but reflective writing like the "Relationality" poem allowed for a cathartic break that would help me to persevere, while simultaneously generating new data that I could later analyze and incorporate into my work. In addition to the free reflective poetry and journal writing, I also worked through some of the recommended exercises advocated by Chang (2008) to ensure a balance between observational (objective) data and reflective (subjective) data, as part of the data collection process (See Appendix B).

Finally, Chang (2008) advocates that the autoethnographic researcher gathers artifacts or what she refers to as "External Data" (See Appendix C). This type of data can come in many forms and it can "provide contextual information, validate or correct your personal data from the past as well as your self-observational and reflective data…and connect your private story with the outer world" (p. 112). To facilitate this process, I generated a list of the artifacts I thought might be useful to incorporate into my research and then worked to locate as many of these artifacts as I could. For example, I unearthed a personal journal that I kept during part of the time that I attended university, as well as photos from my days as a university student. I also retrieved copies of transcripts from my university career and an apology letter I received from my assailant after I was physically attacked during my undergraduate studies. I used to write poetry and record lyrics from songs that resonated with me as an adolescent and a young adult which I also retrieved through the process of data collection. Finally, I conducted a more extensive literature review on the experiences of women and the working-class to help draw cultural connections between my own personal experiences and the experiences of others from similarly marginalized positions within the academy.

Data Analysis

The final methodological consideration that I took was to determine how I would analyze the data I collected. Ellis et al. (2011) write about the many forms that autoethnographic research can take, and therefore the numerous ways that the data can be analyzed. For example, one form of autoethnography they describe as "layered accounts" fits the goals I had for my research, which was to use my personal stories, supported by the literature, to describe and give meaning to broader cultural phenomena. In this case, Charmaz (1983) explains that "data collection and

analysis proceed simultaneously (as cited in Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). This is also the analytical technique endorsed by Chang (2008), who states, "data analysis and interpretation, does not mean abandoning the previous step, data collection, because data collection is likely to continue along with data analysis and interpretation to fill gaps and enrich certain components of data" (p. 125). Therefore, the actual process of data analysis was cyclical. For example, as I composed my self-reflections I engaged in a process of analysis, whereby I both generated new data, but also made sense of the data I had already collected. Chang (2008) suggests a number of specific strategies to help build a strategic foundation to this process, which essentially involve searching for patterns and making connections between the varying forms of data one has collected. According to Chang (2008), this requires "shifting your attention back and forth between self and others, the personal and the social context" (p. 125). In doing this, the work I produced meets the critical objectives I had for this research, which was to not only make sense of my own experiences, but to demonstrate their broader sociological significance, and to contribute to positive transformations in academia.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that this study adheres to the ethical standards of the University of Saskatchewan, where this research took place, Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) clearance was obtained as a safeguard to ensure the research meets the ethical standards expected within the broader research community.

Carrying out a research study in an ethical manner should always be of paramount importance to any researcher. The same is true for critical auteoethnographic research. While the key informant for the study is myself, the fact that my identity is revealed to the reader means that the identities of those who are named in my stories could also be revealed. One of the key considerations that was made with this work was to determine who is implicated in the telling of my personal stories and determining how I can protect the identities and confidentiality of those who have not willingly consented to being part of the study. One way I have ensured this was by obscuring the identities and changing the names of those who may be negatively impacted by the telling of my story, while maintaining the integrity of the stories themselves. For example, in my time as a university undergraduate student I was assaulted at the hands of a classmate, who is the son of a prominent member of the university community. While my classmate's gender and social positioning as an insider within the university community are critical elements to know in

order to analyze that story, his name and any other identifying characteristics about him, including the dates of our interactions, are not. Therefore, to maintain confidentiality the obscuring technique of labeling him "the son of a prominent member of the university community" and providing a pseudonym for him, and all other persons described within the research, was employed.

A second ethical consideration within the study was to ensure that those who have not specifically consented to be part of the study do not become the primary subjects for analysis. As social beings, it is inevitable that our stories will often involve other people, but while others may enter in, it is I who am being analyzed. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) question whether someone owns a story simply because they tell it (as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 69). In other words, because we are social beings, and the stories of our life experiences often include others, we need to be cautious about speaking as an absolute authority or claiming ownership of the accounts of these interactions. As a result, I was mindful through this research that my stories are but one version of the truth and that I do not claim sole ownership of these stories. Rather, the accounts that are analyzed through this research focus on one primary subject, myself, and the broader sociological phenomena that are represented by my stories. My analysis does not involve trying to interpret the intentions or feelings of individual others who are implicated by my stories, because as unknowing participants they do not have the opportunity to talk back to these assumptions, and their accounts and interpretations of these scenarios may differ from my own.

A third ethical consideration that was made in preparation for conducting this research was the ethical duties I have to myself as the researcher/participant. The personal nature of the research topic brings with it the possibility of psychological or emotional harm, and so a number of safeguards were put into place to mitigate the possibility of such harms. The reflective writing that I engaged in as part of the research process allowed me to work through some of the negative feelings that arose from recounting challenging life experiences during the collection of personal memory data. Additionally, I had access to counseling and Elder supports through my workplace's Employee and Family Assistance Plan for occasions when I may have needed additional assistance dealing with feelings of stress or anxiety that occurred during the research process. It was necessary to recall some of the difficult experiences that I have endured as a university student in order to address the research question; however, I was still responsible to

care for myself as I would have cared for other participants that I would have recruited, had this been a traditional ethnographic research study.

It is also important to mention the ethical obligations I have to my past and future self. This critical autoethnographic study focuses mainly on my experiences as an undergraduate university student. Reay (1998) attests to the danger of writing a working-class narrative in academia, for the reason that "the text will be understood and made sense of within the confines of dominant, middle-class discourses…" and by putting her stories into the public sphere she fears that she may "objectify the young working-class woman that [she] was" (p. 16). This is a challenge that I, too, faced. In telling my stories I risk interpreting them—or having them be interpreted by others—through the lens of someone more privileged, in a different space and time. The challenge of this research was to expose and transform understandings of my personal experiences, but to do so without imposing harsh judgement on the actions and emotions of my younger, less privileged self. One way that I addressed this was to use a holistic framework for writing and interpreting my experiences that expressed and validated the physical, emotional, and spiritual relevance of the stories. A second measure that I took was to refer to the narratives of other working-class and female academics' experiences to give meaning to my own experiences, with the idea that the similarity of our positionings might help to alleviate misinterpretation and exploitation that can occur when outsider discourses (Reay, 1998; Smith, 1999) are used to assess research data.

Conceptual Framework

In order to conceptualize this research, two metaphors were used to create structure and to aid with the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the research. Each of the two frameworks are discussed in the subsections that follow.

The Kaleidoscope

As the proposal for this research was first being conceived, the metaphor of a kaleidoscope emerged as a dominant framework. The reason for this was because of the connection between the similar ways that the critical autoethnographic research method and a kaleidoscope operate through the use of light. Consider the following kaleidoscope image:
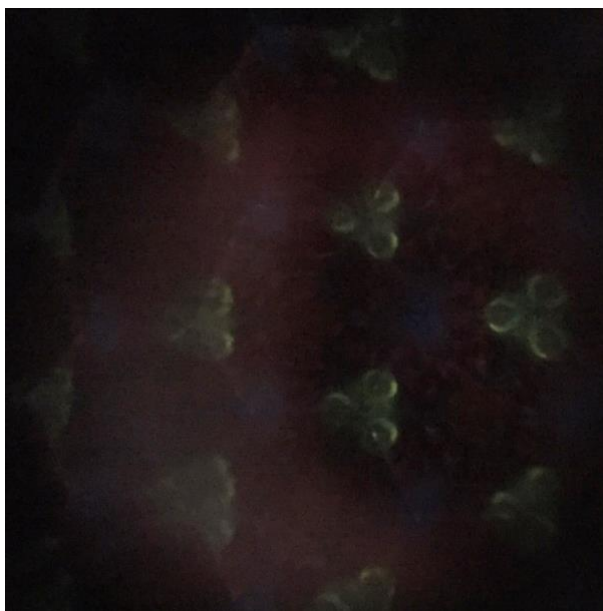
While some basic shapes and patterns can be deciphered in this image, there is much more contained within the kaleidoscope device than what can be seen from this darkened view. Now, behold the next photo, which is one that was taken of the inside of the very same kaleidoscope, only this time with the addition of light:

Not only does the addition of light make the patterns and colours more clear and vibrant, but the addition of light also causes new patterns and colours to emerge. This is a metaphor for the critical autoethnographic research method. Critical autoethnographic research involves bringing to light stories of personal experiences that have been hidden in the darkness of one's memory and connecting those experiences to broader social and cultural phenomena to reveal patterns that

exist among them, for the purpose of social and personal transformation. Critical autoethnography is also like a kaleidoscope in one other way: Once you see the patterns, just a tiny shift can lead to tremendous change. In much the same way, the purpose of my research is to raise the consciousness of individuals—myself as the researcher as well as the readers of my research—so that we might see our life experiences in a new way, and to use this reframing of experience to work towards change. In other words, my purpose is to create a shift in the minds and actions of those who encounter this research. Diversi and Moreira (2009), support this aim of critical autoethnographic research by describing how it can seek to "understand the experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination" (p. 20).

While the kaleidoscope framework was useful in supporting this research through the proposal and initial data collection phases of the project, once the analysis began, a second complementary metaphor began to emerge, which stems from the work of Meyer (2013) who uses the hologram to help explain Native Hawaiian epistemology. These two frameworks work together well, as both make reference to the importance of light in creating meaning. The following section summarizes Meyer's (2013) concept of holographic epistemology and provides an explanation about how this framework was applied to the analysis of my primary data and in the composition of Chapters Four to Six of this thesis.

The Hologram

In describing her use of the hologram to explain Native Hawaiian epistemology, Meyer (2013) writes, "Each beam in the hologram is necessary to bring forth the fullness of its essence, form and purpose…Mind/Body/Spirit" (p. 96). Likewise, the critical autoethnographic method was selected to provide a fuller picture of what it means to experience the university as a working-class woman. It is not a purely rational or objective experience, nor is it purely subjective or emotional. It is a real physical encounter that can be observed, described, and witnessed. It is also a personal, emotional, and mental experience that is given meaning through the broader context of one's own life. It is also a cultural, spiritual, and transcendent experience that connects to a larger reality. In order to fully capture what it means to experience the university as a woman from the working class, all three of these aspects must be included to create a complete picture. The chapters of this thesis that follow are therefore structured in this way.

The fourth chapter represents the first beam of light that is used in the creation of a hologram. This beam is directed towards an object, but alone cannot replicate the image. In this way, I am bringing to light three stories of my personal experiences within the university. These stories alone do not create a clear image of what it means to be a working-class woman in the university—they are but one necessary beam that is being shone on my experiences within the academy, which, when combined with two other beams, creates a three-dimensional object that the human eye can see. In Meyer's (2013) model, the first beam represents the "Body: External, Physical, Objective, Content" (p. 96), therefore, the stories in chapter four focus mainly on the experiences I have had that could be observed and described by other witnesses to those experiences. Within these observable accounts, I also describe the physical and physiological impacts that these experiences have had on my body. It is worth noting that it is impossible for the mind, body, and spirit to become completely disconnected from one another. In fact, Meyer (2013) explains that it is helpful to identify and discuss "three 'laser beams' to bring out facts, logic and metaphor to help us get to this 'inseparable whole' we have known all along exists," but she also warns that, "it is separated now for discussion only, and only for a moment!" (p. 94). In other words, taking these three up and discussing them independently is being done here only for the sake of discussion and clarity. It is critical to remember that all three elements are a part of one whole. They interact with one another and interfere with one another to create reality. This is the same with the beams of light that create a hologram—while they are all critical for creating the holographic image, they do not act independent of one another—they each play a role, and at times interfere with one another in order to create the image that we can see.

The fifth chapter, in keeping with Meyer's (2013) model is dedicated to the "Mind: Internal, Mental, Subjective" (p. 96). It is in this chapter that connections are made between the three stories in Chapter Four, and where the process of creating meaning out of these experiences takes shape. Because this chapter focuses on that which is subjective, it is worth noting that the meaning-making process for the reader and for myself as the researcher may be different, due to the uniqueness of our own personal experiences. In other words, I will draw connections and interpret these stories through my critical feminist lens, and my own lived experience as a working-class woman in a certain place and time, but there is space for readers to interpret and create meaning out of these experiences that is different because of their unique lens and lived experiences. It is the connections and the process of meaning-making that start to give substance

to one's understanding of what it means to experience the university as a working-class woman. This mirrors the second stage in creating a hologram, where the second beam of light that is directed at the object interferes with the first beam of light and makes an impression on a recording medium. At this stage, an image becomes visible to the human eye, but it still is not clearly discernable for what it is. It is only when a third beam of light is shone on this recorded image that the three-dimensional object comes into clear view.

Chapter Six acts as the third beam of light, to reveal a clearer picture of what it means to be a working-class woman who is trying to navigate the academy. Meyer (2013) writes that the third beam represents, "Spirit: Transpatial, Non-Physical, Culture" (p. 97), and so it is in this final chapter that I demonstrate that my experiences in university are actually connected to a larger cultural story. This final chapter takes the stories and the connections from the fourth and fifth chapters and demonstrates, through reference to the literature, that my experiences are not an anomaly that begin and end with me. That, in fact, the commonalities that exist between my experiences, and the experiences of others, is evidence of a holographic reality. With a hologram, the entire image is contained within each of its parts. In other words, if you were to break up a holographic image into a million little pieces, each of the pieces would contain a small copy of the full intact original image. This is something that is prevalent throughout the scientific world; for example, the DNA that is contained in nearly every of one of our cells tells the full biological story of who we are. In other words, the whole of who we are is contained in each of the smaller parts. In the same way, the larger story of what it means to be a working-class woman in the academy is contained within each of the smaller parts—whether it is in the life experiences of one woman, such as myself, or in the smaller pieces of my individual personal experiences.

My experiences, collectively and individually, are connected to a larger holographic whole. This reference to holographic thinking is also described by Absolon and Willett (2004) who write, "At times, we need a hologram to illustrate the multiplexity, multi-dimensions, and interconnection of all aspects of Aboriginal reality" (p. 14). From my time working and learning in Indigenous communities, I have come to learn that the connectedness of all things is an important teaching that is expressed uniquely in many communities. For example, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes, "Many indigenous creation stories link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish, animals, insects and plants. To be connected is to be whole" (p. 148). Wilson (2001) connects this teaching directly to research

when he writes "Our systems of knowledge are built on the relationships that we have, not just with people or objects, but relationships that we have with the cosmos, with ideas, concepts, and everything around us" (p. 177). So it is from this perspective that the sixth chapter of this research is framed—that my own stories and experiences are not isolated incidents that impact only me, but rather that they are connected to something larger than myself. Some of these connections will be identified by demonstrating how many of the themes that run through my experiences are also shared by other women and working-class individuals in universities. This is done by making reference to published literature on the experiences of these individuals.

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCING THE ACADEMY THROUGH THE BODY: THE FIRST BEAM

"We just refuse to erase the flesh from the study/understanding of being human. We can only experience the world through a very specific physical location: our bodies"

(Diversi & Moreira, p. 31)

Story One: Getting Lost

"COMM 105…CMPT 381…BMSC 240…Why isn't BIOL 110 written on the board?"

I am staring at the whiteboard that has been set up outside of the Education gym and am wondering why I do not see my class listed on the hand drawn map outside of the room. This is my first set of university final exams and I am unfamiliar with the ritual, but my friend Zoe, whose brother recently convocated from Arts and Science, informed us that first year Arts students often have their final exams in the Education gym alongside other classes. I have never taken a class in the Education building before, but in my year on campus, it is one of the buildings I have walked past numerous times, so I have found it with relative ease. Unfortunately, I am not locating the specific area in which I am to write my exam with that same level of ease.

I stand frozen outside of the gym listening to the hum of chatter and footsteps in the hallway decrescendo into the silence of the exam room as people rush past me into the crowded gymnasium.

Finally, I conclude that there must be an error on the whiteboard so I take a step away from the chaos of the hallway and towards the order and silence of the exam room.

When I enter the space, I see that the room is neatly arranged into perfectly aligned rows of thin wooden tables with cold metal legs and matching hard wooden chairs on which hundreds of students sit uncomfortably—yet perhaps eagerly—for the invigilators' instruction to begin their exam. As I scan the room I am looking for anyone who might be familiar to me. In a class of nearly 200 students I do not know anyone personally, but surely I will find a familiar face among this harshly-lit sea of wood and metal.

I recognize no one.

After it is apparent that my search for someone familiar has come up short, I look around to observe the behaviour of others in the room. Perhaps there are others who are as lost as I am

and together we might find the rows that are dedicated to the BIOL 110 exam. Instead, however, it seems that everyone else is moving with confidence to their designated rows. Not a single person seems hesitant to take their seat—but why would they? Each of them knows their place before they even enter the room because of the sign that has been propped up outside of the door.

The only trouble is I still have no idea where I belong.

It has become apparent that I am in the wrong place, and I notice that my heart is starting to beat heavily in my chest. My breathing has become shallow and my mind suddenly feels less clear.

"Did I really read 'Education Gym' on the exam schedule?"

I scan my memory and try to recall exactly what I had read when I looked at the paper exam schedule that was posted on the bulletin board of the Arts building.

I distinctly recall reading that the exam schedule said I am to write in the Physical Education Gym. I had never heard it referred to as the "Physical Education Gym" before, but Zoe's brother had mentioned that exams are commonly written in the "Education Gym" and I had once attended a volleyball game there and knew it was large enough to accommodate a large group of students, so I assumed that this was where I was supposed to go. In this moment, however, I am starting to question whether there is another place on campus called the Physical Education Gym that I need to locate to write my exam.

My cheeks feel hot and the hand that is clutching my plastic travel coffee mug starts to feel clammy. I turn on my heels as I stare at the ground and walk briskly out of the gymnasium. I push past the last few students flooding into the room as though I am a salmon swimming upstream. As I burst through the doors of the Education building and jog across the road towards the Arts building to re-examine the exam schedule, I try to steady my breathing but start to feel a sharp pain in my side. I slow down to ease the stitch that has tightened under my ribs as the chill of the spring air calms the burning sensation flushing my cheeks. As I speed away from the open air and towards the encampment of stone towers that entrap the natural grounds of the campus, I wonder when the grey Earth and the bare trees will start to bloom with any colourful signs of life. Before I have time to consider it, I have arrived at the heavy metal doors of the Arts building which I clutch and yank open as I stagger into the hallway of one of the campus' regular hubs of activity.

The hallway is silent.

My harried pace suddenly feels like an imposition in the calmness of the empty hall, so I slow my footsteps to a more casual pace as I focus on catching my breath and step toward the bulletin board on which the exam schedule has been posted. As my eyes scroll down the list and finally land upon BIOL 110, I realize that my memory was correct, while my original assumptions about the location clearly had not been.

Course: BIOL 110. Exam Location: Physical Education Gym

"So where the hell is the Physical Education Gym?" I say aloud to myself.

Once again, I find myself scanning my memory trying to remember where I might have come across a map of the campus over the past year. Before beginning university, Zoe and I had walked around the campus with our course schedules and traced the path we would take each day to get to our respective classes. We had different schedules, but armed with her brother's knowledge of the main buildings, were able to figure out where we needed to go. I wish I had either of them with me in this moment but when I look around I do not see another living soul.

"Slow down and think. If someone is unfamiliar with the campus where would they go?"

Suddenly I recall that the only time I had visited the campus before I was a student was when my mom and her best friend used to bring their little herd of kids to Place Riel to watch movies when there was a regular movie theatre operating in the building. Neither of these two women went to university and yet they found their way around, so I channel their strength and wisdom and tell myself I need to calm down and find the map that must be somewhere near the entrance of the Place Riel building. Being that Place Riel is the central hub for buses and humans to gather, this would be a likely place to establish a permanent campus map.

As I turn towards my next interim destination, en route to my exam, I catch a glimpse of a clock that says it is now well past 9:00 am—the time that my exam had been scheduled to begin. I abandon all of my previous attempts to remain calm and run as fast as I can towards Place Riel. My lungs are on fire and my heart is pounding as I race down the stairs and through the long underground tunnel that connects the Arts and Place Riel buildings. When I reach the bottom of the stairs at the other end I can feel my pulse throbbing in my temples and it is obvious that the last time I forced my body to run was during mandatory fitness testing in grade 10 gym, several years earlier. I suddenly find myself craving a cigarette, but know that will have to wait, as I am in desperate pursuit of a campus map in a race against the clock. As I clutch the railing to the stairs and drag my heavy legs slowly up every step, the sight of the campus map comes into view

like a mirage on the horizon of a sweltering hot desert. I scan the map until I find my final destination: The Physical Education Gym. It is further away than I had hoped but at least I now know where I need to go.

Some of the tension in my muscles begins to relax as I take a moment to catch my breath before bursting through the Place Riel building doors and begin running again towards my final destination. When I finally see the Physical Education Building come into view, I settle my pace from a laboriously slow run to a purposeful march. I have a semi-regular ritual that carried me through my final exams in high school, so I decide to attempt it to get myself centred and back on track to perform well on my first-ever university final exam.

First, I will begin by running through the main points I recall from the text that were also reiterated throughout the class. Usually I can remember an interesting story that a teacher shared that helped me to connect with the content of the course. I can only recall a single story that one of the four professors who taught the class had shared. His story was an account of the so-called "Kentucky Blue People"—a remote group of individuals whose skin appeared blue due to the presentation of a rare recessive gene that resulted from the procreation of individuals within a narrow population across several generations. This lesson, which he framed as one that demonstrates the importance of genetic diversity, is one of the few that sticks with me from the semester. When I try to recall any other stories that might trigger my memory, all I can recall is that there was a change in some classification system that had occurred in the new edition of the textbook, which often left me feeling like I was a step behind as I attempted to navigate through my older, used edition. The page references and text examples never quite seemed to line up with the instructor's directions and by the time I located what was being discussed I was usually several topics behind the group. I found the language that the professors—and many of the students—used through the year to be intimidating and confusing, and I wondered how anyone was able to make sense of anything that was being talked about during the lectures. After a while I abandoned my discount textbook completely and prayed that if I memorized the notes I took during the lectures that I would manage to do well on the exams.

Speaking of prayer, that is the second part of my pre-exam ritual. To say a prayer asking for wisdom, calm, and focus as I attempt to demonstrate what I have learned throughout the year.

Just as I reach the base of the path to the Physical Education Building, I see a professor from a different class that I had taken in the first semester. He is wearing a grey newsboy cap and

a long brown coat and is walking casually with his brown leather briefcase in hand. He smiles in recognition and asks if I am a recent student of his. I confirm that I took the first half of a year-long course with him last semester, to which he chuckles and nods proudly to himself that he has remembered.

"Where are you off to? You look like you are on a mission," he asks me with a good-natured tone.

"I'm late for an exam. I went to the wrong building and it took me a while to figure out where I am supposed to be," I reply.

He glances down at his watch and suddenly his large brown eyes grow even larger.

He looks back up at me as his eyes soften and his bright smile narrows to a gentle grin as he says, "Well I won't keep you. Good luck."

I race up the sloped walkway and through the cold metal doors and glance around for signs of life. I eventually find the room and the handwritten sign that waits outside and indicates that I have finally found the correct location.

I approach the exam invigilator and inform her that I am there to write the BIOL 110 exam. She scoffs and says, "Jeepers are you ever late. You're lucky you made it when you did. If you were any later you wouldn't have been allowed to write this exam."

Those words go through my ears and straight to my stomach and I start to feel nauseated.

"Take a seat and do the best you can, I guess. You don't have much time left," she tells me.

So with my heart once again pounding in my chest, and with the redness in my face returning, I take a seat and try to salvage what I can with whatever time I have remaining.

Story Two: Getting Hurt

"I'm stepping out, but once you have completed the evaluations I will be back."

Kate. The tender gravel in her voice and the sparkle in her hazel eyes reassures me that these four walls are safe.

Even if the towers that enclose our humble little drama building are cold, hard, and imposing, within these four walls you can be you. There is no need to be different than who you are.

"What is your name?" Kate had once asked a new student in our class.

"Peter," he had replied.

"No, not your North American name. What do your friends and family call you?"

"Chaoxiang. But that is hard for you to say."

"We will learn," Kate replied.

So now it is time to evaluate our professor, Kate.

Question #1: I have learned something that I would consider valuable

In this year I have spent with Kate I have learned to live in the moment. I have learned to be aware of the idiosyncrasies of my body and my voice, and those of others, and to do so without imposing judgment or shame. I have learned to breathe. I have learned to listen, to respond, and to support other players in a scene. I have learned to express ideas and to convey meaning through my entire body, and not just through my words or my facial expressions. I have learned that it is okay to feel silly or uncomfortable and that allowing ourselves to feel vulnerable can lead to tremendous growth.

So yes, I would say that I have learned something that I would consider valuable.

Strongly agr--

"Oh god, I'm sure you're going to give her a glowing evaluation!"

Daniel. Ordinarily, his smile greets you from across the room. He moves through the space with a presidential gate, telling jokes and entertaining us with his celebrity impressions. His antics often generate bursts of laughter, which erupt through the steady hum of conversation that constantly fills the room. Today, however, his mouth is tight and his eyes are piercing me as he spies me shading in the circles on the instructor evaluation form.

"Well yeah. I like this class."

Me. I can feel my stomach tighten a little when I hear the chiding in his voice. He has mocked me only once before, for working in what he described as a "demeaning" fast-food job. He laughed that time and I had brushed it off as an insensitive joke. He is not laughing today.

"This class is bullshit. This whole department is bullshit. I could have the whole thing shut down. Somebody should burn it to the ground."

Daniel has a lot of cultural capital within the university. When he says he could have the entire drama department shut down, he states it with confidence. Now if I—the daughter of a retail-sales worker and a licenced practical nurse—made such a proclamation it might be laughable. When he says it, it actually sounds plausible.

I try to diffuse what sounds like mounting aggravation in his voice but he quickly shoots back at me with a sarcastic remark,

"Oh yes! How could I forget? You have to defend this place because you're going to have a lucrative career starring in Burger King commercials!"

I cannot recall what I say that makes him grab me by the throat and pin me against the wall but I do know that I can feel his fingers gripping slowly tighter around my windpipe and I can hear his voice whispering in my ear,

"Are you afraid?"

It feels like the room is spinning and my heart is beating heavily inside my chest. Instinctively, I shove him away from me and scurry off to join a group of my peers standing at the other end of the room.

"What happened to your neck? It's all red. Did Daniel do that to you?"

Sean. He is large in stature, but has always been gentle in his conduct towards others. He is the first man I have known to take his wife's name after marriage. Rather than following the patriarchal norm of keeping a name passed down to him by a father who had little to do with him growing up, he told me once that he chose to carry on a name that represents a tradition of nurturing and love for one's family.

I nod to confirm that what Sean has asked me is indeed what happened, and his response, "That's assault," seems to echo off of the hard wooden floors and the mirrored walls that line the room.

Daniel hears this declaration and charges across the room, loudly demanding that Sean repeat what he has just said.

I can see that the situation is escalating quickly so I step between Daniel, who is quickly approaching, and Sean who is maintaining his ground with a tall posture and a stern facial expression.

Suddenly I feel the same grip on my arm that I had felt on my throat moments earlier, only this time it is not a gradual squeeze, but a vicious grab followed by a jerk that shifts my momentum and propels me to the side, clearing the path so that Daniel can approach Sean face-to-face.

"Jeez, you're not doing much to protect yourself from an accusation of assault by flinging her across the room!"

One of my other classmates is expressing his observation of the situation, while Daniel marches straight up to Sean, until their faces are inches apart.

Some posturing and words are exchanged, but Daniel does not lay a hand on Sean, and Sean stands firm in his original stance. The two seem to be at a stand-off, with the rest of the class standing huddled around what has become an uncomfortable scene.

"What's going on!?"

Kate has returned and is attempting to break up the argument between Daniel and Sean, and in that moment some of the tension releases out of the room, and many of the bystanders to the conflict start to disperse.

"I'm going to need you to prepare a written statement to document what took place here today," Kate tells me at some point after things have calmed down.

I consider the backlash that might come from documenting the details of what has transpired. Will anyone believe my account of what took place? Will I remember it in enough detail to give an accurate account of the events? If I pursue a complaint against him while he is still in my class, how might he behave towards me? What if he sees me filling out my statement and he confronts me outside of class? And so I respond,

"No. His dad is a professional with a lot of influence and my dad works at Home Depot. Who do you think this is going to end badly for?"

I avoid further discussions on the topic and decide that it is better to just carry on as though nothing happened. The problem is that something did happen, and Daniel certainly was not going to forget about it.

He demonstrates this a couple days later when we are working on a 'moving-through-the-space' exercise in class. At one point, our class forms a circle that he and I must move through at the same time. I reluctantly enter the circle while he confidently strides up towards me, and when he gets close enough that we almost touch he throws his arms in the air and dramatically exclaims,

"Oops, sorry! I almost touched you there! I wouldn't want anyone accusing me of assault."

An uncomfortable silence falls over the room and a few students stand dazed with their mouths slightly agape. After class, as I walk along the hard asphalt path that leads to my bus stop, I hear a rush of footsteps hurrying towards me from behind. The muscles in my shoulders tighten

as I turn around, but I am relieved when I see a small group of my classmates with their arms outstretched and smiles across their faces. They want to know, "Are you okay?" They reassure me that they felt the tension of my encounter with Daniel. They want me to know that although they did not address it directly in the moment, that they had noticed his behaviour and that they support me.

Eventually, Kate convinces me to prepare a written statement about what transpired between Daniel and me on the day we were supposed to be completing our course evaluations. She reassures me that I am safe and offers to let me write the statement at her home, where nobody will even know I had written it.

I quickly forget what I have written—I cannot recall how much detail I shared or how many pages I fill out—but many years later I will still remember the smell of Kate's spaghetti sauce cooking on the stove as I furiously scrawl down my memories in the comfort of her armchair, in the safety of her living room.

After secretly recording my account of the conflict between Daniel and me, I navigate the remainder of the class by trying to pretend that nothing ever went wrong. It seems like the best strategy to survive the rest of the semester without any additional conflict. I never speak of my feelings and I make every effort I can to put it out of my mind. And then one day, I receive a letter in the mail from the Department of Drama. My heart starts to race before I open the envelope and when I see the words inside I begin to feel nauseated and dizzy.

Dear Laura,

I am writing to you to apologize for my unfortunate behavior in our drama class this past month. My unfortunate behavior was not directed toward you, it was rather as a result of general disappointment about the way in which the class seemed to be going. Although I was responding to an unfortunate comment made by another classmate, there is no doubt that this incident could have been avoided had I exercised better judgment. Look forward to seeing you next year, follow your dreams!!!!

Cheers,

Daniel M. Goodson

Story Three: Getting Out

The scraping sound of chairs being pushed back from their desks, practically in unison, startles me awake. My eyes shoot open and I raise my head from the darkness of the hole I have made with my arms atop my desk and realize I am in class.

Shit I fell asleep again.

I look down and notice the little drops of saliva that have formed on the desk beneath me and I quickly brush them away before the students rushing past me toward the door happen to notice.

"I missed that last thing he said," I state with a deliberate casualness to the student sitting next to me.

The student glances at me from the corner of her eye as she gathers her books and says, "He said that he's almost finished marking our last paper and that we will get the feedback a couple weeks before final exams start."

Shit I still haven't handed that in.

The knotted muscles that seem to have taken up permanent residence in the center of my abdomen suddenly tighten and my breathing starts to get shallow. I feel light-headed, but I recall the words of the social worker that Zoe dragged me to recently and I start to count inside my head in order to slow down the rhythm of my breath.

In: one, two, three, four, five. Out: six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

I recall the social worker saying that when I feel moments of panic that I should focus on my breathing and that I should take time out to do something that relaxes me. She also said that I should consider removing coffee from my diet, but I have a hard enough time staying awake through the day as it is. When I think of what I can do in this moment that might be relaxing I suddenly realize that many supposedly relaxing activities actually elevate my anxiety because they force me to be still with my own thoughts. I also find that between shuffling from class-to-class all day and then racing to one of the jobs that help to mitigate my mounting student debt, stillness is not normal. In fact, stillness feels rather uncomfortable. I assure myself that the lengthy walk from the classroom to the parking lot will help to relieve this sick feeling later, but for now I need to swallow the lump that has formed in my throat so I can approach my professor about my late paper.

The room has cleared out, except for my professor, whose slender frame is hunched as he gathers the books and notes he used to aid today's discussion. I can only see his graying hair, and not his face, as he is turned slightly away from me. I hope he did not notice that I fell asleep in his class again today.

"Umm…Dr. Rankin?" I stammer as I walk softly towards the front of the room.

He suddenly looks up, and I see that his eyebrows are raised and a smile quickly lifts the corners of his mouth. "Yes! How can I help you?" he asks.

"Well…" I bite my lip and I can feel the quickness of my pulse suddenly increase. The cold cement walls of the room betray the heat that I can feel starting to warm the skin of my face. "I uh…was working late last night so I'm sorry if I spaced a bit in your class today. I really enjoyed that video you showed us the other day. I can't believe you made that kind of a connection to our reading." Dr. Rankin commonly showed modern movies and TV shows in class to help us to see how the course themes actually connect to our daily lives. I had always found history and a lot of classical literature hard to relate to, but he had a way of simplifying it and making it relatable. I wish I had more hours in the day to focus on this class so that my work could demonstrate how much I appreciated his teaching methods.

"I'm so glad you enjoyed the video. Is there something that I can help you with?" He asks as he grips the handle on the briefcase he has finished packing.

I quietly mutter "I am so sorry that I still haven't handed in that last paper," as I quickly look down so that he cannot see the tears that have begun to well up inside of my eyes.

"I appreciate you coming to speak to me about it. Why haven't you handed it in?" The gentleness of his voice surprises me, as I had been prepared for a shaming lecture about time management, setting priorities, and him needing to consider whether he would entertain the idea of allowing me to hand in the late assignment. This had been the message I received from the last professor I turned a late paper in to. I had tried to slip the paper to her without comment, knowing that it was within her rights to refuse to accept it, which she threatened to do. I thought there was a chance Dr. Rankin may be more merciful, but I was not expecting to hear this tone of concern in his voice. The tears in my eyes betray me as they start to run steadily down my cheeks.

Without looking up I reply, "It's been a tough year. And I know that's not an excuse, but I have had a lot of personal stuff going on lately. I've been working a lot to help pay down my

student line of credit, and well…it's just been a lot. I'm really sorry. I promise I will hand it in, if you'll let me. I just need a couple days. I really like your class, this is all on me. I'm really sorry."

My lip is quivering and my shoulders shrug softly with each sob as the tears drop onto the floor beside my feet.

"Are you okay?" He asks, and I can see that he has set down his briefcase and is now sitting on top of one of the desks.

"Not really. But I will be. I've been to a doctor. It's just anxiety he says. And I've been talking to someone. She's trying to help. I'll be fine. It's not that bad. It's just been a tough year." I brush away the tears from my face and I look up at him with a slight smile to show him that this was only a temporary moment of weakness, but I am capable of the work I need to do in the class.

"Listen," he says, "anxiety is a real thing and it can really make it hard to focus on what you need to do. I want you to take whatever time you need. I would appreciate if you could get that paper in to me before you write your final exam."

"Absolutely! I promise!" I reply as I widen my smile and raise my eyebrows to reassure him that I am capable of the task and am appreciative of his offer.

<center>***</center>

"I need to get this paper done."

My eyelids feel like they're being pulled down by some imaginary force, but I promised Dr. Rankin I would get this paper done and I cannot let him down. I am still wearing my uniform from the six-hour shift I worked after I left classes this afternoon. The bottom of my black polyester pants rests against the floor unevenly in the spots where there is no safety pin to hold up the hem. Even if I owned a sewing machine or knew how to sew by hand I would not have time to worry about sewing pants anyway. I have to get this paper written.

Suddenly my mouth is agape and my eyes are watering—my body is betraying me. For a moment I consider going to bed and setting an early alarm for the morning. In reality, I know that if I do not finish this assignment now that I may never come back to it. I take another sip of coffee and I can feel the dark bitter liquid slide down my throat and reach my stomach to rest among the butterflies that seem to have taken up permanent residence there.

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"I know I should insert a source here, but the library closed hours ago and I need to just get this done. The late marks are going to kill me on this paper anyway, so what difference will a missed reference make?"

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

"Thanks again for taking this in." It is the end of class and Dr. Rankin grasps the papers I have extended toward him as his grey-blue eyes lock onto mine.

"How are you doing?" He inquires with a slight smile on his face.

"I'm good. Thanks again."

As I walk away from the classroom and exit the building, the cool spring air hits my lungs and I look up to see that the sun is poking out just slightly from behind the clouds. The end of my third year on campus is drawing to a close and when I look around at the brown grass and the bare trees I try to remember the warmth of the sun and the colour of the flowers that surrounded this area when I first stepped onto the campus grounds. I suppose they will return again as the seasons change, but right now I see no vibrancy or signs of life emerging from this space.

A few months ago, Zoe suggested that I apply to convocate this spring after a tear-filled conversation in which I bemoaned the fact that my student loans would barely cover a third of my tuition this year. I dismissed the idea at first because I had never heard of a three-year degree, and second, because I needed a degree that would break me out of this rut of having to work multiple retail and service jobs to pay back the loans I had accumulated. Thankfully, my mom was able to co-sign for a line of credit so I could pay the remainder of this year's tuition. The money I had saved from my jobs through the year, combined with my meagre student loan had been enough to get me through the first two years of tuition and books, but this year I had come up short. No— stopping now is not an option when I have come this far already.

As I recall this conversation, I find that I have begun walking towards the tower where my professors' offices stand. I have been meaning to speak with Dr. Filtzer about the other paper I have yet to write this semester before final exams start, and now that I no longer have the assignment for Dr. Rankin looming over my head I decide that this is the time.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The brown wooden door is agape and I see slouched shoulders inside a tweed blazer and the crescent of hair that surrounds Dr. Filtzer's scalp sticking up from his desk. He is peering down at a pile of papers and seems unaware of my presence. I clench my fist and softly wrap my

knuckles on the door, as his bald head pops up and he looks at me through the wire-rimmed glasses on his face.

"May I help you?" He asks as he squints his eyes to look at me.

"Um...yes. I am a student in the department, and I would like to talk to you about handing in a late paper for your class."

"What is your name, Miss?"

"It's Laura. Laura Mills."

"Ok, have a seat Miss Mills while I look through my files for a moment," he says as he starts shuffling through the papers on his desk.

I shift my weight in the chair as I sit across from him. I stare at the rows of books that line both sides of his room and I begin to wonder if he has read them all. I bite my lip and look back at him to see that he has quit shuffling and is now staring down at a rumpled piece of paper in his hands. His eyebrows have lowered and are now lost from sight beneath the frame of his glasses.

"You have missed a lot of class Miss Mills," Dr. Filtzer comments as his eyes remain locked on his paper.

I can feel the heat begin to rise in my chest and cheeks and a familiar pair of knots start to form in my stomach and throat.

"Uh...yeah, that's true. I'm sorry. I've been keeping up with the readings at home and I know I have missed some of the smaller assignments but that's ok—"

"Actually it is not ok," he interjects. "The smaller assignments, Miss Mills, are intended to spark a dialogue in the classroom and to ensure you are engaging regularly with the readings. The fact that you have missed a large number of them tells me that you have chosen not to properly engage with the learning that has taken place in the class."

It feels like the room has narrowed and I take a minute to slow the pace of my breath before I respond.

"I understand. I am normally a decent student, and I apologize for not being able to be in class more often. It's been a difficult semester," I try to explain.

"Well I appreciate that, but unfortunately it is too late to make up what you have missed—" His words are cut short because it is now my turn to interject.

"But the thing is I'm not here to ask you to make up what I've missed. I know my mark won't be great, but I'm just asking if you'll let me hand in the last paper of the semester if I get it

to you this week. I understand you'll need to deduct late marks but it's just that I was sick around the time it was due..." The pace of my voice is progressively quickening. "I haven't been sleeping, and I couldn't focus. I have some medication now to help me with everything so I'm catching things up now but...uh...hang on," I say as I begin rifling furiously through my backpack. Eventually I find the doctor's note crumpled between my textbooks and my work uniform so I draw it out and extend it towards the professor with a hand that has begun to shake.

Dr. Fitzer raises his hand as though he is about to swear an oath and says, "You can save your note, Miss Mills. I hear what you are saying, but as I said, I am afraid it is too late and I cannot, in good conscience allow you to submit a paper at this point or to write the final exam."

The walls now feel like they have stopped narrowing and are now spinning around me. It feels as though the rows of books that line the room might come crashing down on me at any moment.

"The final?" I mutter as I furrow my gaze toward him.

"Yes. If you show up to write the final exam next week, I am afraid I will not permit you to write it. To pass an exam in a class that you have scarcely attended would not be likely anyway. I think it would be in your best interest to try repeating the class next year when you are more prepared to focus on your studies."

I say nothing and begin to stand up but my legs suddenly seem incapable of holding my weight. I grip the handle of the chair I have been sitting on when Dr. Fitzer makes one last suggestion,

"Return to my office next week, just before exams begin, and I will have a letter prepared for you stating to the department that I believe you should be allowed to drop the course at this late juncture without academic penalty. I can see from your record that you earned an 87% on the first paper you submitted to me, so you are obviously a bright girl with academic potential. I would hate to see *one bad experience* leave a permanent mark on your academic career. I imagine if you bring that doctor's note and prepare a letter explaining your circumstances that the department will strike this from your record and you can start fresh next semester. Good luck to you."

<div align="center">***</div>

As I stare at the glass doors to the department, clutching a large brown envelope containing three notes—one written by me, one from Dr. Filtzer, and one from my family

doctor—I wonder who I should ask for once I get inside. In my three years on campus I have spent time in classrooms, the library, and the occasional teacher's office, but I have never had a reason to come here. I have never failed a class before. Not in all of my years of schooling. This is the first one.

Who should I ask to speak to? I wonder to myself.

How do I explain to them that I failed and I want them to not hold it against me? But how is this going to affect me next year when I needed all of the classes I was taking in order to graduate on time? Will I have to take an additional class? What is that going to cost? Is student loans even going to give me any money next year, seeing as I have received less and less each year so far? How much room is left on my bank line of credit? Should I look at convocating this year with that three-year degree thing Zoe talked about? Oh yeah, I can't of course—duh—I failed, so now I'm a class short. That's why I'm here. I failed.

"I can't do this. I'm done." I say to myself as the tears that that have been welling up inside of my eyes start to stream down my face.

I run out of the building and when I get to my truck I hurl the envelope into the back, I light a cigarette, and I speed off towards work. As I drive, I can hear the voice of a family member who told me when I was growing up, "If you ever get the chance to go to university, stay as long as you can because, trust me, if you quit, you'll never go back."

I hope someday I can prove this proverb wrong.

Epilogue

After three years of navigating the difficult terrain of academia I made plans to take some time away from school, to save money, and to eventually return with a solid plan for my academic future. At the time that I made this decision I had begun training for a management position in the retail store where I had been working part-time while attending school. At the time, I believed that I would have enough credits to graduate with a three-year Arts degree, but after failing Dr. Filtzer's course, I ended up being three credits short; however, by that time I had already accepted a full-time position and had made plans to take a break from school, and so I left university one class short of my degree. It would take two years for me to return to university to complete the one class I needed to graduate. I took the class in the mornings during the summer session and continued working full-time in the evenings. I wanted to complete the course, and my

degree, as quickly as possible so that I would have something to show for the time and money I had spent on my studies in the previous years. I successfully completed the course and applied to convocate that Fall. I did not attend the graduation ceremonies and I felt no sense of pride when I finally received my degree in the mail. In fact for many years after receiving my parchment, that piece of paper laid buried in the bottom of a desk drawer, in the same cardboard mailer in which it had been delivered to me. I did feel a small sense of relief at finally being done, but also I felt shame that it had taken me so long to complete my program. I also felt a sense of inadequacy at stopping at a three-year degree and not continuing on to a four-year or an honours degree, or some kind of professional program.

Two years after finishing my degree, after marrying a well-educated partner, who provided a sense of financial and emotional security that I had not previously experienced, I chose to return to school. I avoided the university environment and chose to enrol in a distance education program through a technical college. The physical isolation provided me with a sense of physical safety that had not been afforded to me in the university environment. Also, the college system felt more practical and fitting with my working-class roots, which provided me with a sense of emotional security. After excelling in the college business program and enrolling in a second distance-education certificate program, this time in adult education, I started to be confronted with the question of why I was not pursuing a master's degree instead of collecting post-graduate certificates. This question forced me to face all of the challenges I had put out of my mind from my university experiences. It forced me to consider that I may need to confront the feelings of fear, shame, and inadequacy that I had carried with me because of my undergraduate experiences. I chose to confront these feeling and apply to the Masters of Education program, which is how I came to engage in the research contained herein. The stories that I have told in this chapter, and the analysis that takes place in the remaining chapters is my formal attempt at confronting all of those earlier feelings and experiences I had and to give them meaning. This research also aims to contextualize my experiences within a broader system that perpetuates the marginalization of certain members of the university community.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIENCING THE ACADEMY THROUGH THE MIND: THE SECOND BEAM

"Pain is an event, an experience that must be recognized, named, and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action" (Lorde, 1984, p. 171)

Now that we have illuminated some of the physical experiences of being a working-class woman in university, the next step is to shine a beam on the parts of those experiences that may not initially be visible to those who read them. Just as with a hologram or a kaleidoscope, it is through the addition of light that we are able to see patterns and shapes begin to emerge. In order to do this, some of the emotional significance of the experiences described in the preceding chapter will be explored, as well as the themes, or common thoughts that run among each of these experiences. As mentioned previously, the whole is in every part, which means that while the stories from the preceding chapter may vary in their content, duration, and intensity, they are all connected and they work together to exemplify what it means to experience university as a woman from the working class. The process of identifying the connections between these stories began during the data collection phase of this research project. As I recorded my memory data and gathered my reflections during the data collection, I began to notice themes and commonalities within the information I was collecting. The stories contained in Chapter Four are a representation of that data and the themes that emerged. In this chapter, the most poignant themes are identified and discussed in order to create a discernable image for the reader. And yet, these descriptions are not a definitive analysis of these stories, in fact, as Stuckey (2010), points out, one of the benefits of a narrative is that it

> …does not spell out lessons to be learned. When used as a teaching tool, its preserves the agency of listeners by not imposing meaning upon them. It relies on the listeners to draw their own conclusions, to parse the complexity of their own lives to see if any elements of the story apply (p. 201).

In that spirit, the following descriptions are the ways that I, as the researcher, have drawn connections between these stories based on my own experiences, but I also welcome the readers' interpretations and own personal connections to these stories, based on what stands out to them due to their own unique life experiences. This method of storytelling and shared meaning-making

is compatible with an Indigenous teaching tradition which, as mentioned previously, has had a tremendous influence on this research.

Physical Consequences of Oppression

Oppression harms bodies. Whether it was being physically assaulted or suffering the physiological symptoms of prolonged stress, there are clear physical consequences to oppression. The mind and body are inextricably linked and so even recalling and analyzing my university experiences within this research has at times recreated the physical symptoms of pain and stress that I felt years ago. Just as the mind remembers, the body remembers also. Navigating academia has taken a physical toll on my body. These are not simple stories of hurt feelings, they are stories of physical injury and violence. The first instance we see of this in the stories comes in story number one when it becomes apparent that I have gone to the wrong location to write my final exam and "my heart is starting to beat heavily in my chest." Similar physiological symptoms are found in each of the three stories. These symptoms include: changes in breathing, mind fog, sweating, nausea, and fatigue. All of these are symptoms of stress and anxiety and take place at times when I felt lost, confused, embarrassed, and angry. Some of these emotions arose due to difficult circumstances that I found myself in, and other times they are a direct reaction to someone's words and behaviour towards me. For example, in Story One: Getting Lost, when I had finally calmed my physiological responses to getting lost and running late for my exam, the scolding words and tone of the exam invigilator filled me with guilt and "I start to feel nauseated" and I begin writing my exam "with my heart once again pounding…and with the redness in my face returning." Similarly, in Story Two: Getting Hurt, it is not only the violent outburst of my classmate Daniel that impacts my body, but when I receive his letter some time later I am overcome by feelings of nausea and dizziness, in anticipation of reading his words. In fact, many years later I still have a visceral physiological response when I read that letter or when I enter the building where the attack took place. In Story Three: Getting Out, I once again, experience similar physiological reactions when I am told by Dr. Filtzer that I will not be permitted to write his final exam and I feel as if the walls "are now spinning around me…my legs suddenly seem incapable of holding my weight."

The cumulative impact of anxiety and stress can lead to burnout, which is why the symptoms take a larger toll in the last story, after three years in university, in contrast to the earlier stories, which took place earlier in my university experience. In fact, these experiences can

have a lasting impact long after the initial incidents. For example, in a study that explored the effects of race, sex, social class, obesity, and age on blood pressure, it was revealed that suppressed anger can have adverse consequences on an individual's blood pressure, helping to draw the connection between emotional stress and physiological health (Dimsdale, Pierce, Schoenfeld, Brown, Zusman, & Graham, 1986). These adverse physiological effects are evident in my own experiences as well. For instance, as I mined through my memories to recall these stories, I collected self-reflective data that included the emotional and physical experiences I encountered during the data collection. Simply recalling the experiences often caused me to re-experience many of the same symptoms in my body as I had initially. This is also likely compounded by the fact that this master's research is again unfamiliar territory for me. While I have more supports and cultural capital than I did as an undergraduate student, there have been challenges including the need to balance my role as student researcher with my other responsibilities as a full-time instructor, a mother, a partner, and a community volunteer. There have been numerous times since beginning my graduate work that I have considered quitting or finding a different way to complete my studies rather than to write a thesis because of the emotional and physical toll that my studies have taken on me.

In addition to the physiological symptoms I experienced, there are other physical impacts of oppression evident throughout the three stories. In the Story One: Getting Lost, for example, I describe how running a relatively short distance has left "my pulse throbbing in my temples and…I suddenly find myself craving a cigarette." Throughout my life, I have always loved sports and physical activity, and yet as Cragg, Costas-Bradstreet, Arkell, and Lofstrom (2016) point out, "some women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, new Canadians, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ community, and Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions do not participate at the same rates as their mainstream counterparts" (p. i). I have faced barriers to participation in organized physical activities, which has led to physical health consequences throughout my life. As a six-year old child I suffered through a prolonged period of illness due to a serious form of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, which left me unable to walk for a period of time due to severe joint pain and other systemic physical symptoms. Some of these symptoms have carried with me into adulthood. In addition to the physical barriers to participation in physical activity, I have also experienced socioeconomic and social barriers. Some of these barriers that many women and

girls generally face, and that I personally have experienced include, "social pressure and lack of social support, encouragement, positive role models, self-confidence and money" (Cragg et al., 2016, p. 14). Not only does lack of access to physical activities rob marginalized bodies of the direct positive health consequences of those activities, it also makes these individuals more likely to engage in alternate activities that may actually be harmful. For example, as a teenager, I tried out for all of the high school sports teams, but having not had the money for private lessons or having played many organized activities in the past I did not have the skill to be selected for these athletic opportunities within the school. As a result, I turned my attention to alternatives, including writing, acting, and playing music, but also to physically destructive behaviours including partying in groups where smoking, drinking, and recreational drug use were heavily prevalent. What is interesting is that Cragg et al., (2016) point out that access to physical activity is not enough to see benefits within marginalized groups, "for example, offering subsidies without providing a welcoming environment will not entice people to come or to stay. A holistic approach to increasing sport participation is needed" (p. ii). This same argument can be made regarding post-secondary education. It is not enough to permit entry to students from underprivileged backgrounds into university. If they are not welcomed and do not feel safe, they may be less likely successfully achieve their educational goals. This leads me to the second example of the direct physical consequences of oppression from my stories—in Story Two: Getting Hurt, when I am physically attacked by Daniel Goodson.

The story of being physically assaulted is possibly the most dramatic of the examples of my body being impacted by the experience of marginalization. I was targeted by Daniel because I am a woman and because of my social class. Evidence for this is contained within the story. For example, when my classmate, Sean calls Daniel out for his behaviour toward me, Daniel never lays a hand on him. Despite the fact that Daniel rushed towards Sean in a fury of anger after having been accused of assault, he contains the anger and the conflict does not escalate. Sean's transgression towards Daniel was accusing him of assault, while mine was simply liking a course and a professor that he took issue with. Daniel does not restrain his anger towards our female professor, which he takes out on me and my female body, while at the same time he leaves the body of our male peer Sean, who he has also expressed anger towards, untouched. This scenario demonstrates that my gender played a role in his decision to target me in his violent physical outburst.

There is also evidence within the story to suggest that my social class played a role in his decision to target me. There were many other women in that room that he could have taken his

frustrations out on that day, but his words to me about "working in Burger King commercials," immediately before the attack were a direct connection to an earlier conversation we had, in which he communicated his disdain for me working in the fast-food industry. He had labeled my job as "demeaning" and so perhaps because he viewed me as having demeaned myself by selling my labour in a way that he disdained, that I was an easy—if not deserving—target for his physical attacks. This process of dehumanizing persons in order to justify mistreatment and abuse of them is a common theme within anti-racist and anti-oppressive literature (Erickson, 2013). For example, Erickson writes about how when we cling to the belief that our systems—including education and employment—are a meritocracy, so that "one can only attribute the existence of intergenerational poverty to moral failure or lack of intelligence on the part of those who do not succeed" (p. 5). Once an ideology that dictates oppressed persons and bodies deserve their marginalization, then virtually any kind of action or inaction towards these individuals can be justified. This is the kind of logic that has been used to blame Indigenous students and their families for the challenges they often face in schools (Fletcher, 2008; McCreary, 2011). It is even a logic that has been used to justify sexual assault (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Tendayi Viki, 2009; McNinch, 2010) and countless other personal and systemic attacks on marginalized bodies.

By labelling me as a demeaned other, Daniel could justify his physical attack on my body. This justification process continues long after the actual assault, as evidenced in his letter to me. At no point does he take responsibility for his actions; rather, he justifies his behaviour by stating that it "was not directed toward you, it was rather as a result of general disappointment about the way in which the class seemed to be going." The rationalization that a deliberate physical attack on my body can somehow not be directed toward me and is excusable on the grounds of his dissatisfaction with a course is absurd logic, unless you consider that he does not view me as fully human and deserving of safety in that academic space. His dissatisfaction is more important than my physical safety, because he, as a wealthy male student with cultural capital in our institution, is entitled to feel safe, while it is normalized that I, as a working-class female with very little social clout in the academy, should experience victimization. I have always interpreted the final words of his letter to "follow your dreams!!!" as sarcasm, and a reminder that even if I find places where I feel safe or valued within the university, as I did in our drama class, that I will never be more than someone who might aspire to someday star in a Burger King commercial. In the countless instances where I have felt like I did not belong within the academy, I am reminded of Daniel's crushing grip around my throat and I remember that the consequences for speaking or

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acting outside of what others perceive to be my place can have real physical consequences on my own body, and those of other marginalized persons.

Precariousness of Safety

The physical consequences of oppression for working-class women, and others who are marginalized within the academy, are real, and so the need for finding places where we can feel safe is critical. The trouble with this dictum is that safety can often be a precarious thing. Often what made an assault—whether verbal or physical—so jarring for me, was that it came after I had finally relaxed and started to believe I was finding my place. The class that I was physically attacked in, for instance, was a drama class, and the one safe haven I had found on campus that year where I felt both physically and emotionally supported. In each of the three stories there are moments when I felt safe or like I had finally arrived.

In the Story One: Getting Lost, I initially went to the wrong location to write my exam, but once I located the actual building where my exam was taking place I was able to use calming strategies that I had learned in my earlier years to settle my anxieties and prepare to write the exam. This feeling of calm and safety was compounded by the gentle greeting and the recognition I received from my former professor when I had almost reached my destination. It was the snide remarks from the invigilator that unsettled the feeling of calm that I had finally managed to achieve during that stressful situation. The invigilator seemed to assume that my lateness was due to a personal failing on my part and her tone and unsympathetic words caused me to internalize a feeling of shame and fear that I would perform poorly on the exam that I had worked so hard to get to.

In Story Two: Getting Hurt, despite a challenging year, I had found in my drama class a safe space where I felt validated and supported for my skills and my knowledge. It is clear that outside of the drama class, the campus was cold and uninviting in a literal, physical, sense but also figuratively speaking, such as in the attitudes of many people around the campus. Safety did not mean comfort—in fact, some of the most important growth that took place in that class happened by pushing myself beyond my comfort zone. What made that class safe, for me, was the supportive environment that was led by our instructor, where being the best in the class was not the goal, but rather being the best you could be and experimenting were paramount. For me that safe space was violated at first in a small way, when Daniel chided me for working in a "demeaning" fast food job. I was able to brush that comment off initially, but perhaps it had

foreshadowed the physical assault I would experience at his hands weeks later. In his letter to me he spoke of being dissatisfied with the way the course was being conducted and used this dissatisfaction to explain his violent actions towards me. Daniel was used to holding a position of power and privilege by way of his gender, race, and social-class, which is why he was able to attack me with such a strong sense of entitlement and no serious repercussions. In order for him to retain his power and position, those with less privilege were forced to suffer from his callous words and actions.

Finally, in Story Three: Getting Out, the cumulative impacts of the stresses of my university experience are quite apparent, and yet I still found hope and of a feeling of comfort when Dr. Rankin is compassionate towards me. It is because of his concern for me as a person, and his flexibility with accepting my late paper that I found the courage to speak to my other professor, Dr. Filtzer. Unfortunately, as was the case in the previous stories, my sense of security was disrupted when Dr. Filtzer not only refuses to consider my request to hand in my late paper, he also informs me that for the first time in my academic career I would fail a class because he would refuse to let me write the final exam for his course. The paradox of feeling simultaneously safe and unsafe in the academy is particularly salient in my interactions with Dr. Filtzer. At the same time that his decisions are impacting me emotionally, physically, and academically in ways that he cannot comprehend, I can also see the humanity in him and his actions towards me. In his mind, I am a bright student who has had one bad university experience that should not be held against me. By providing me with a note to excuse the class from my permanent record he believes that he is showing me compassion. In that moment, however, I do not see any possibility of kindness in his actions, rather I feel like I am once again caught in a situation with a man who is using his social and institutional power to remind me of my place on the lower rungs of the academy.

The stories in this research are not a comprehensive portrayal of the times when I felt safe or unsafe in the academy, but rather they are snapshots of experiences that are emblematic of my undergraduate years. As these stories point out, moments that have had a profound effect on me emotionally and physically, may not always be visible to an external observer. Sometimes a simple smile or a kind word was enough to make me feel secure in the unfamiliar world of academia. Conversely, many casual or seemingly innocuous comments that were hurled at me by professors or fellow students caused me tremendous pain when they indirectly attacked or

invalidated my experience. For example, I felt hurt and angry when Dr. Filtzer states that he would hate to see "one bad experience" leave a permanent mark on my academic career. His seemingly harmless comment felt like an invalidation of the countless struggles that I had endured in my years as an undergraduate student. Tremblay et al. (2008) describe how this is a phenomena that impacts many women

> It is clear that negative social experiences experienced by students occur along a broad continuum, weighted by degrees of hostility and the relative social costs of acknowledging or ignoring them. Female students are particularly likely to be negatively affected by these experiences, even by those we might consider to be relatively "mild" in form (p. 71).

Perhaps women are more likely to be affected by negative experiences that may seem "mild" to others because of the cumulative weight of the micro and macroaggressions that we must face by way of having to navigate the academy in a female-identified body. Those women who also face marginalization by way of their race, class, sexual orientation, or because of a disability may find that these effects are compounded even further.

Replication of Social Hierarchies

Hierarchies are often replicated insidiously. This is a very prevalent theme, and I suspect that anyone that reads the stories contained within this research could identify different examples, based on their own interpretations of the scenarios. As I conducted my own analysis and interpretation of the stories I was struck by the use of micro and macroaggression as a means to wield power and to subjugate marginalized bodies. The term microaggression was first defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). Over time that definition has been expanded, notably by Sue, et al. (2007) as including an array of words, gestures, and behaviours that take place in everyday exchanges that serve to belittle and dehumanize marginalized individuals and perpetuate social inequities. One such example can be seen in Story One: Getting Lost, when the exam invigilator made a sarcastic remark to me after I had arrived quite late to the exam, it reinforced the feeling I had all year as a first-generation university student that I was not welcome and was unlikely to be successful. Her advice to "do the best you can, I guess. You don't have much time left," and the accompanying thought I had to "try to salvage what I can with whatever time I have remaining," are a comment not only on the exam, but also on my

broader experience in university. The words of my relative, which appear at the end of Story Three: Getting Out, were already running through the back of my head at this early stage of my academic career, warning me that staying in university was much harder than getting in, and that getting back in once you are out is harder still. In this way, the subtle negative messaging I received in school and at home was consistent: success in university will be difficult and your time is limited.

This preoccupation with time is reinforced throughout academia. For example, one semester I registered for an extra class that was a prerequisite for a program I had considered entering. I arrived a few minutes late to the first class and as I was leaving the room at the end of the period I overheard the professor comment to another student "Wow, did you see how she showed up late on the first day? Way to make a great first impression!" I immediately dropped the course that same day. There is pressure for students around time, not only in terms of attendance, but also with relation to deadlines and program completions. There have been numerous studies, in fact, that analyze the time it takes students to complete their undergraduate (Barclay Hamir, 2011; Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2016; Lam, 2006; Lee, 2010; Robinson, 2004) and graduate (De Valero, 2001; Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1992; Elgar & Klein, 2004; Ellis, 1997; Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998; Sheridan & Pyke, 1994) programs and that make recommendations to shorten this duration. For myself, the pressure to finish school in the same time frame as those with greater cultural capital and financial safety nets created tremendous fear and anxiety in me as an undergraduate student. These feelings manifested themselves in physiological ways and added to the stress I was already feeling from the various challenges I encountered on campus. When the mounting physical, emotional, and financial strain I was experiencing as an undergraduate student led me to drop out, I carried a tremendous amount of shame. Part of that shame was tied to the fact that even if I were to go back, which I ultimately did, that I would not have completed the program "on time."

In addition to the shame I felt due to the messaging I had received about the importance of time, I also carried shame because of having bought into the myth of meritocracy (Liu, 2011; McNamee & Miller, 2004). I have received messages my entire life that working hard is the key to success and that with the right combination of talent and discipline anyone can be anything they want to be. As a working-class girl this message was motivating and uplifting in my early years. While I knew that our family was not as financially privileged as many of the other

families in our neighbourhood, I believed that my intelligence and hard work would help me to succeed in university and enable me to ascend the social and financial ladder once I entered my career. When I struggled academically in my first year of university I was not conscious of any of the external or systemic factors that could be contributing to my struggles, I only questioned myself. The formula of talent plus hard work equals success was no longer motivating and uplifting. As I looked at the low grades on my transcript it was apparent to me that I was not a success and that this must to be a product of being untalented or not working hard enough. This is a message that is reinforced in my conversation with Dr. Filtzer. In his remarks about my lack of success in his class he comments that, "You are obviously a bright girl with academic potential" and so I indirectly receive the message that I have simply not applied the requisite hard work to be successful. This creates for me an extreme feeling of cognitive dissonance. How can it be that I am working so hard that I am physically exhausted and I have professors who believe I am intelligent, and yet I still struggle? Years later, with the privileges of being a working professional and having access to a graduate education, I have acquired the language and consciousness to help me make sense of this situation. It is unfortunate that the hurt and frustrated young, working-class girl that I was many years ago did not have access to the knowledge I now have so that she could have better understood—and perhaps even worked to transform—her experiences.

One example of hidden knowledge that could have benefitted me as an undergraduate student came when I enrolled in a business certificate program, after completing my undergraduate degree. It was in this program that I learned mental and physical illness are protected grounds of discrimination according to human rights laws, and that individuals and institutions have a duty to accommodate individuals who are struggling. I had no idea that there were legal protections that might have supported me if I had asked for adjustments to my work because of the enormous mental and physical strain I was under. This knowledge remained hidden from me when I needed it the most. It is possible that I would not have pushed the issue if I had faced resistance from Dr. Filtzer, just as I had hesitated to pursue any charges against Daniel Goodson after I was assaulted, but at least I could have taken some solace in knowing that I was not alone in my need for support. To that point, it seemed as though everyone around me was able to find ways to meet the demands of the academy, and so it felt that my inability to do

so was simply due to my own personal failing. I never considered that perhaps the compassion that Dr. Rankin had shown to me should be the rule and not the exception.

Finally, it is not only the subtle and indirect messaging that many different working-class women receive in university that help to reinforce hierarchies in the academy. Privilege and power are replicated in universities through direct attacks on underprivileged minds and bodies and also by ignoring the challenges that marginalized individuals face as they navigate the system. When these attacks are more overtly directed towards an entire group of individuals due to characteristics such as their race, gender, social class, etc. these attacks are sometimes described as macroaggressions (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016). Tremblay et al. (2008) advise that, "for those concerned with keeping college and university campuses safe, it is clear that students can be affected by a broad range of negative social experiences, some of which have a significant impact on their emotional wellbeing and academic performance" (p. 71). In other words, if we want universities to be inclusive we need to be aware of the broad range of factors that can lead students to feel marginalized and unsafe and attend to these. Sexual violence, for example, poses a significant threat to all women at university campuses across Canada and is a systemic concern that is perpetuated, in part, due to a lack of action on the part of university administrators to challenge and prevent rape culture from spreading (Quinlan, et al., 2017).

From my own experience, some of the other factors that can lead students to feel marginalized and unsafe include: insensitive comments and attitudes of professors and university staff, rude and harassing comments from peers, social isolation and a lack of on-campus social community, physical assault, unclear and inconsistent academic policies, and a lack of access to financial support to attend school. To the final point in this list, Adair (2008) points out how people are often ensnared into a cycle of poverty because of systems like the welfare-to-work programs that have been created in the United States. Such programs are said to encourage people to escape poverty and to move into the workforce, but as Adair points out, these programs often force poor people into low-paying work with little opportunities for advancement. In contrast, Adair writes that prior to the age of neo-liberal welfare reform, she was able to access post-secondary education which allowed her to escape a life of domestic abuse and poverty and to grow as a person and to find meaningful employment.

In my own way, I have discovered the way that a financial safety net can dramatically influence academic success. When I was single and struggling each semester to pay my tuition

and other expenses, in addition to the other challenges I was experiencing at that time, my academic performance suffered and I lasted only three years in my program. When I got married, not only did I find a partner who is emotionally supportive, he has also been able to support me financially at times so that I could advance my education. For example, when we were newly married, I quit my job as a retail supervisor and completed a business program through distance education. I excelled in this highly reputable and challenging program and achieved substantially higher grades than I had previously as a university student. While I had emotional support from my family at home during my undergraduate studies, I did not have the same level of financial support that could have lightened some of the burden of being a young university student. Also, because the business program was offered mainly through asynchronous distance education, with little required contact between participants in the program, I did not have to deal with some of the previous challenges of physical and verbal attacks that might be hurled at me unexpectedly. By completing the entire program alone in my living room, I felt safer than I had ever felt as a post-secondary student.

Silence and Avoidance as a Deliberate Survival Technique

Finding safety by studying through distance education has awakened me to the different coping techniques that I used in my time as an undergraduate student in order to get by. In that distance education program I learned that being physically separated from the student body that I was taking my courses with was a way to feel safe while I studied. On the other hand, some have identified concerns regarding distance education, including its potential to rob students and professors of the benefits of social engagement during the learning experience (Bower, 2001). In the case of Indigenous education specifically, studying at a distance may offer some physical security and enhanced access to education while still perpetuating emotional and spiritual harm if the curriculum that is pushed out to students is highly colonized and lacking appropriate design, delivery, and support elements (Kovach & Montgomery, 2010). Despite these challenges, the benefits of distance education as mode of delivery for Indigenous students (Philpott, Sharpe, & Neville, 2010; Sanchez, Stuckey, & Morris, 1998) has been researched and has helped to shed a light on some of the ways that others from marginalized communities might benefit from it as well.

For myself, the benefits of studying in isolation far outweighed the negatives when I was first returning to my post-secondary studies after completing my undergraduate work. In the

research detailing the benefits of distance learning for Indigenous students, at least part of the advantage is said to stem from a feeling of safety during the learning experience, in contrast to the negative experiences that many Indigenous students face in traditional classrooms. For myself, this feeling of safety I experienced from having limited contact with other members of the student body was certainly one of the reasons that I was more academically successful in the business program than I had been in my undergraduate university experience. Without fear for my physical and emotional safety on a daily basis I was able to focus on my work and to complete the course requirements more effectively. I consciously chose to enrol in this program because of its primarily asynchronous delivery, which meant that I could work at my own pace, and because the assessments and activities were entirely independent, meaning that there was virtually no contact with others. The only contact that I was required to engage with was written correspondence with my instructor, along with physically sitting among a handful of students twice per course at a testing facility to write midterm and final exams. It is possible that the socially isolated learning environment created its own limitations, but for me those limitations were less severe than the consequences I endured in a traditional classroom environment in my time as an undergraduate university student.

Looking back on the stories of my experiences in university, I am able to see further instances when silence or retreat are used as a survival technique. More than once I have been questioned as to why I did not stand up for myself more as a young person whether it was when someone called me a rude name as a child, or after I was assaulted as a university student. I was never sure how to answer that question in the past, but now I do: Silence does not equal weakness. For those who have been marginalized in society, sometimes the safest way to navigate the various systems we move through in our lives is to use silence strategically. A dramatic example of this that can be seen in the broader society is the way that many black men have learned to conduct their behaviour in their interactions with police, particularly in the United States. Because of deeply entrenched racism towards black bodies, black men have had to adapt survival techniques when faced with unjust systems and racial profiling. One man describes how he has been repeatedly stopped by police and searched for drugs, despite having never had any experience with drugs, and how he handles those encounters,

> Depending on where they catch me, I carry myself differently. I ask questions which let the officers know that I'm not going to be the easy victim. Or so they know that I'm not

going to give them a reason to overreact. I'm becoming more studious with age. Police officers scare me in a really big way . . . they walk around with guns and sticks. So they are already in a position of power because I don't carry a gun or a stick (Bell, Hopson, Craig, & Robinson, 2014, p. 37).

In this case, the author does not advocate silence, per se, but his approach to injustice is not to call it out directly and to be confrontational. He is aware that he is in a vulnerable position, compared to the police officers who carry guns and sticks, therefore, his approach balances the need to stand his ground in the face of prejudice, but also to refrain from giving the officers any reason to attack him. Those who disregard strategic silence as a way of 'standing up for one's self' might question why he is not more direct in calling out the injustice of being racially profiled. The reality is that this man is standing up for himself by doing and saying what he believes he needs to so that he can leave that encounter alive.

While my own situation did not involve the same of life-or-death consequences, a similar instinct to do what was necessary in order to safely navigate my encounter with Daniel Goodson prevailed. I refused to report the incident between him and me, as he held more power than I by way of his institutional privilege as the son of an influential member of our community, and in terms of social privilege by way of his class and gender. At the time of the incident, as mentioned in Story Two: Getting Hurt, my remark was, "His dad is a professional with a lot of influence and my dad works at Home Depot. Who do you think this is going to end badly for?" I felt no blame or shame related to this incident, but I knew that formally reporting the incident to the university or the police was likely going to be a long, expensive process in which I would have to defend my own character and actions. I barely had the energy to navigate the usual rigours of university life, so I knew that the drawbacks to my own wellbeing far outweighed any positive results that might have come from pursuing the issue further. In reality, what benefits would I have received? An apology? A sense of justice in seeing him punished in some way? Neither of those things would have countered the toll that pursuing the matter would have taken on me, so I tried to let it go. In retrospect, I see that if I had chosen to pursue this matter more aggressively, perhaps it would make an incident like what I experienced less likely to occur to another woman if he had been held accountable for his actions. And yet, there is a possibility that had I pursued the matter and he was granted leniency, he may have felt emboldened to attack again with the knowledge that his privilege would allow him to get away with it. All of this is easier for me to consider with

the privilege and clarity of retrospect, but it not something that was on my mind at that time. In fact, other women who have shared their reasons for not reporting assaults have also minimized the severity of their experiences and made a deliberate choice not to report the incidents for a number of reasons, including a fear of being blamed for their attacks (James & Lee, 2015).

Trying to make peace was something I learned to do in order to get through difficult situations with minimal harm throughout my life. Similarly, when I dropped out of university, I considered this a personal failure, but when I look back on it, I was protecting myself the only way I knew how. At that point I was suffering emotionally, physically, and financially, and so "dropping out" was not an act of failure, but rather of self-preservation. I would eventually return once I was more emotionally, physically, and financially able to tackle the challenges of academia again. Unfortunately, not everyone has the same privileges and opportunities that I have had and so they may never feel that it is safe to enter or return to university.

Importance of Allies

The final theme that connects the three stories of my personal experiences in university is this: Allies can make a big difference. For me, one such individual was the kindly professor who recognized me and offered an encouraging word when I was late for my exam in Story One. I also found safety and support from my drama professor who invited me to her home so that I could write an official statement after being assaulted without anyone knowing I had written it as detailed in Story Two. The professor in my last semester as an undergraduate student, who saw me falling asleep and handing in papers late could have scolded me but instead simply asked "Are you alright?" in Story Three. All of those individuals—and countless others—helped me to get to where I am today. There have been many challenges in navigating this system, but sometimes the smallest kindness was enough on a given day to help me persevere when my resilience was wearing thin.

CHAPTER 6

EXPERIENCING THE ACADEMY THROUGH THE SPIRIT: THE THIRD BEAM

"A realm of unseen connecting patterns exist and we are the causal linkages that alter its

capacity" (Meyer, 2013, p. 97)

The linkages that connect each of my personal experiences as a working-class woman in university simultaneously connect me to a larger cultural story. The themes that are present in each of my experiences are also present in the experiences of other marginalized bodies who have attempted to navigate academia. The sections that follow parallel the themes that emerged during the data analysis of my own stories.

Marked Bodies

The physical consequences of trying to navigate academia as a working-class woman are woven throughout my stories, and these consequences are echoed throughout the literature on the experiences of marginalized bodies in academia. For example, in all three of my stories, the negative experiences I feel in my body frequently emerge as a physiological response to fear, anxiety, and feeling lost. My body is also negatively impacted because of the social determinants of health that have impacted me from an early age and that have continued to have a lasting impact on my body through my university years. Being a woman from the working class also made me a target for physical assault by a more affluent male, with whom I had previously had an amicable relationship. Finally, my body experienced negative reactions to those who used their words and their positions to assert their power over me, which also led to emotional reactions of feeling shame, guilt, and fear. All of these physical consequences of marginalization are similar to that experienced by other women and those who lack class privilege in university.

Among the studies and personal narratives of being a working-class woman in university, fear, stress, and anxiety and are frequently described emotions that are prevalent throughout one's academic experiences (Käyhkö, M., 2015; Lutes, 2005; Reay et al., 2009). These emotional experiences can also have physical consequences. For example, Reay (1998), in recalling her experiences as a young working-class student, states, "I very nearly missed my finals, had begun to get physically ill over the last year, constantly tired and depressed" (p. 15). Here she makes the connection between emotional stress and the physical consequences that accompany that stress. Moreira and Diversi (2011) elaborate on this connection further as Claudio, a professor who grew up poor in Brazil, is confronted on the university campus where he works. A student had been

harassed by three individuals and Claudio is said to fit the description of one of the perpetrators. Two police officers follow him into a downstairs campus bathroom and begin pounding on the door demanding he come out. "I wanna tell you how tough and Brazilian Macho I am. But no. I am scared. Shaking. Sweating. It literally smells bad in here. Right now, performing at this moment, my jaw is locked with rage. I am in pain. Embarrassed. In fear" (p. 234). His body is perceived as "other" and as not belonging in that space, despite his advanced degrees and the fact that he is employed at the university. His body is marked by the gaze of others as not belonging, and the humiliating confrontation he endures impacts his body in real physical ways, as he describes the feelings of shaking, sweating, and locking his jaw with rage.

I can relate to these experiences because of the physical toll that the cumulative emotional stress I have faced in university has had on my body as well. This is perhaps the most evident in Story Three: Getting Out, where I describe feelings of anxiety and incessant fatigue as I struggle to get through my third year of undergraduate studies. Lutes (2005), captures a similar response to stress through the words of a research participant named Theresa who says,

> I'm gonna cry about this again right now. The stress is so tremendous. Go. Go. Go. Not much gets done when I'm in school, but I have a counselor I've been seeing who helps me give up the cleaning house in favor of doing schoolwork right now because it's the schoolwork that's gonna get me out of this rut (p. 65).

Similarly, in Story Three: Getting Out, I also describe seeking the support of a counsellor to deal with the stresses of balancing the numerous responsibilities and stressors I face while I am attempting to complete my studies. And I too describe having, "tears in my eyes [that] betray me as they start to run steadily down my cheeks." One more thing that I share with Theresa is a determination to complete my program, despite the challenges, because we both believe that an advanced education is the key to delivering ourselves and our families towards a better life—a life with greater freedom and opportunity, and with fewer physical and emotional threats. It is important to note, however, that this faith does not hold true for everyone.

In addition to the stresses that marginalized students are faced with when they enter university, many of these students are already battling challenges that mark their bodies before they enter the school. For example, Adair (2008), describes how many women, including herself, pursue post-secondary education as a way to escape violence and poverty that they experience in their personal lives. And while some women describe their university experiences as being

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largely positive and an escape from the traumas of their past (Lutes, 2015), many others describe how the threat of violence that is a concern to women in the broader society is a looming concern for women trying to navigate university campuses as well. For instance, one research participant in a study about the first female academics in programs of educational administration in Canada, describes her efforts to protect herself from a sexual assault she anticipates from a senior male colleague:

> I said to [a female colleague], "If I'm not back at ten after ten, you need to phone the Dean and say, quickly go to that office." She looked at me, and I said, "Promise me you'll do it. If he's not there, get the Assistant Dean, but go to that office and you come too, as fast as you can." Ten minutes I thought I could handle. I went to the office and just as I thought, it played out. He locked the door, moved over, put his hand between my legs, and then I said, "This stops here and now. I have done nothing, nothing to entice you", and I said, "I am starting at this building and I'm going to have a career here and you are not going to screw it up for me" (Wallace et al., 2014, p. 445).

In this story we see the simultaneous hope that academia can provide opportunities for women to create a good life for themselves, while at the same time forcing women to navigate some of the same violence that they are trying to escape from the broader society. For myself, this is a story that is very familiar.

In Story Two, Getting Hurt, when I am assaulted by Daniel Goodson, it is not the first time I experienced male violence. Throughout my life I have experienced a feeling of powerlessness after being targeted as the subject of unwanted touching, grabbing, and shoving by boys and men at work and at school. Part of my determination to pursue a post-secondary education has been to educate myself and to gain positions of leadership where I might have the power to enact meaningful changes for other women and girls who experience violence. Assaults on my own body could be tolerated if it meant I was working toward establishing myself in a place in society where I could ensure that such assaults will be eradicated for myself and others into the future. A participant in Wallace et al.'s (2014) study shares a similar motivation for enduring the difficult situations she has faced as an academic: "In addition to her pre-emptive actions and firm response to unwanted attention, this participant, as did others, worked very hard throughout her career to ensure that students and other faculty were protected in similar circumstances by anti-harassment policies and practices" (p. 445). Individuals who lack privilege

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within university may be subject to experiences that harm them emotionally and physically, but many of them are willing to endure the assault because of the hope that by doing so they can position themselves to make positive changes for themselves and other marginalized persons into the future. Diversi and Moreira (2009) state, "One cannot erase the oppression from the marked body" (p. 473). By inviting others to experience our personal narratives we can help others to understand the ways we experience privilege and oppression within our bodies. This encounter can be instructive and it can also influence individuals to work towards change.

Negotiating Unsafe Spaces

The concept of safety is challenging when it comes to university campuses. Moreira and Diversi (2011), for example, ask "Whose bodies are safe at this university, and under what circumstances?" (p. 246). Certainly, there have been many circumstances in which my working-class, female body has not been safe in the university and yet this same body has also been safe in ways that other bodies have not. For example, my light skin and European ancestry protect me from racism and have helped me to benefit from a colonial system that has wreaked havoc on the Indigenous peoples of this land, including the students whom I teach. Navigating the world in a female body, however, has often led me to feel unsafe in institutions that have been traditionally dominated by men, and have at times made me a target for violence, as discussed previously. And yet other factors, like social class, can complicate the notion of safety further. While social class may not be as readily apparent to others as race and gender can often be, there are markers of it, including the way one speaks, or the clothes one wears. Even when there are no distinct markers of social class that are visible to others, an internalized class-consciousness can cause those who lack class privilege to feel marginalized. In fact, many of the factors that lead marginalized individuals of various social positionings to feel unsafe are not obvious from an external viewpoint. Below are several examples from the literature that describe the various ways that individuals have dealt with the precariousness of safety within the academy.

Reay (1998) describes how,

The working-class pupil who "makes it" to university is deemed to have succeeded. However it was at university that my real struggle started. I began to be seriously harassed by a male member of staff and felt I had no option but to switch courses at the end of the first year" (p. 13).

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Here we see the juxtaposition of feeling secure at having supposedly 'made it' with the feeling of being unsafe in this new environment. Examples of this contradiction are prevalent throughout my stories as well. The drama class I describe in Story Two: Getting Hurt, for example, is the place where I had felt the safest in terms of my academic ability and in terms of social support, and yet that class was also the site of the most violent physical attack I would experience in my time as a university student. Wallace et al. (2014) also share the story of a participant in their study who had been the only female student in a course and was told by a female advisor, "why didn't I look around and realize that I shouldn't be in there…I had had it. I went upstairs to withdraw…I went to her because she was a female prof, I thought she would be supportive" (p. 445). Once again, this student believed that she would find security through the counsel of a fellow female academic, but instead was met with hostility and a reinforcement of the feeling that she did not belong. Even women who successfully negotiate the challenging terrain of academia to become professors in the system face messages that their safety and positioning are not guaranteed. Kelly (2008), for example, writes about how she loves teaching and yet she still fears that,

> 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 (p. 207).

These fears are not unfounded. In fact, Kelly (2008), a university professor, writes about the way her marginalized positioning is reinforced, often in subtle ways, within the university environment. For instance, a male colleague of hers, who is also one of her former professors, always introduces her as a former student, rather than as an equal (p. 158). This kind of a subtle reminder of her lower status within the order of academic power and privilege is one of the ways that hierarchies are replicated and maintained within universities across time, which is the focus of the next section of this paper.

Invisibility & Replication

Within academia, even when there is a stated aim to be more inclusive, many institutions still struggle with creating truly safe and diverse environments. Direct acts of discrimination and violence are difficult enough to identify and eradicate, let alone the more subtle and systemic barriers and assaults that marginalized students face. These real but often invisible challenges contribute to a system that replicates existing hierarchies and maintains the status quo of

exclusion that marginalized bodies have faced, including women from the working-class. A number of efforts have been made to address these barriers, but any initiatives to make universities more inclusive will fall short if the complexity of the systemic barriers many individuals face are not identified and eradicated.

For instance, Adair (2008) describes how the rise of neoliberalism in the United States, through legislation like the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), drastically reduced the number of welfare recipients who have accessed college or completed a degree (p. 4). Before such reform, she was one of many women who were able to escape a life of poverty and violence because of public support systems that allowed her to pursue a university education and access gainful employment. Since neoliberalism's rise, those who might like to attend university and increase their chances of accessing a world of more gainful employment, instead become trapped in a cycle of barely getting by in low-paying jobs that scarcely pay enough to cover the basic necessities of life. Saving to attend university becomes virtually impossible for these individuals, and so the prospects of escaping a life of poverty or the trap of low-paid work are grim. I believe this is what the family member who warned me to "stay in university as long as you can because once you leave, you'll never go back" was talking about. He was aware of this cycle that keeps, or pushes, working-class people out, because it happened to him and he did not want to see it happen to me.

Unfortunately, I experienced the feeling of being caught in a system that makes it difficult to escape a life of low-income jobs. For example, to qualify for student loans directly out of high school, I needed to provide my parents' financial information so that it could be determined how much they would be expected to contribute towards my education. Those forms did not take into account the years that my parents were unable to save for my education because they had struggled in low-paying casual and part-time work, bouts of un/underemployment, and health issues that at times interfered with being able to work. No, those forms only took into account their previous year's earnings, which in my seventeen years of life, to that point, had been their most stable and highest earning. As a result, they were expected to contribute thousands of dollars towards my education, which they simply could not do. As a result, I struggled to make up the difference through working numerous low-paying jobs to make up the difference of what student loans would not provide. The only way to avoid the parental contribution requirement is to work full-time for at least two years after leaving high school, which for many poor and

working-class people becomes a trap that is difficult to escape. Without post-secondary training, many people get stuck in low-paying jobs that barely pay enough to get by, making it difficult to save money to further one's education and to gain access to more gainful employment. Kelly (2008), another working-class woman who has studied her personal experiences within the academy, confirms that she too has shared a fear of accumulating debt and struggling with stingy loan programs that limit borrowing, and force people to work (p. 170).

Another example of a systemic issue that makes challenging the status quo difficult is the invisibility of the hierarchies that divide people within academia. For example, in Bruno-Jofré and Young's (1999) study about inclusivity in a Canadian Master of Education program, they found that male students had a much more optimistic view of the academy than female students who were surveyed. While many of the men who were surveyed indicated that inclusivity is important, more men than women seemed to think that the university was already doing a good job (p. 52-53). This points to blind spots that exist and can undermine the goals of inclusivity and being able to tear down the rigid hierarchies in academia. This theme of privilege and oppression often being invisible was also a prominent theme that emerged during the literature review that helped to frame this study. This again reinforces the importance that those who have experienced marginalization and harm within the university share their stories of personal experience. It seems that many people want to see the university be a safe and inclusive space, and yet individuals are often not conscious of the ways in which universities have been unsafe unless they have experienced it or have heard the stories from those who have had that experience.

Without the stories of marginalized students, universities are likely to continue to replicate the existing systems that privilege certain bodies and minds over others. For instance, Bruno-Jofré and Young (1999) revealed that most of the faculty in the department studied are middle-aged white men and that the one female member of the faculty is valued for her sameness, instead of what she could bring that is unique to the group. They also observed that this lone female faculty member often struggled for power and space (p. 41-42). In this way, the optics of having a female colleague in the department signifies progress towards the inclusion of women; however, in reality she seems to only be accepted on the condition that she remain quiet or assimilate to the existing dominant discourses and ideals. The gender composition of institutions has certainly shifted since that time; however, women still face obstacles when they attempt to challenge the status quo.

This tendency towards assimilation, rather than inclusion of difference, is also documented in those scholars who have used an anti-racist lens in their analysis of teacher views of education. Poullard (2014), for instance, documents that non-minority teachers often advocate colour-blindness and "treating everyone the same" (p. 75) and while appealing to some, this philosophy aids in maintaining the invisibility of oppression. Other systemic norms that marginalized students describe as posing challenges for them, and which are evident within my own stories, are focussing on academic rigour over student support (Hoyt, 2013, p. 84) and a preoccupation with time and deadlines that do not mirror the reality of a working-class student's lived experience outside of school, which helps to reinforce the idea that university is separated from the "real world" (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1113). Diversi and Moreira (2013) attest that academics, too, perpetuate the notion of an academic world and a "real world." They challenge this notion by asking intellectuals,

> Wait a minute here, are you saying that 'this' classroom is not real? Or, are you implying that a classroom is somehow separated from the world we inhabit?[...]
> Any educational setting is part of the real world. The same power relations shaping and informing the real world are present in the classroom (p. 469).

For myself, I have experienced this paradox of feeling like the university is a world that is alien and abstract to me, and yet my experiences in university have had consequences for my life that are undoubtedly real.

These are examples of broad structural challenges that poor and working-class women face in trying to achieve a university degree, and if we zoom in on the personal experiences of these individuals there are an endless array of additional incidents that work to contribute to the replication of unjust hierarchical systems. For example, many women, particularly those who are poor or working class, endure an onslaught of microaggressive comments that minimize their challenges and delegitimize their lived experiences (Adair, 2008; Kelly, 2008; Reay, 1998; Wallace et al., 2014). These individuals are also often dealing with more overt and direct forms of abuse including sexual harassment and assault on campus and in their daily lives (Adair, 2008; Lutes, 2005; Reay, 1998; Wallace et al., 2014). This is why a comment like the one I received from Dr. Filtzer in Story Three: Getting Out, to not let "*one bad experience* leave a permanent mark on your academic career," is so jarring. This minimizing and obliviousness regarding my

lived experience feels like an erasure, and yet I understand that it did not come from a place of malice.

Those who occupy positions of privilege within academia may not be aware of the risks and challenges that marginalized students face, unless they have also experienced similar challenges. Unfortunately, however, those who can empathize with students who struggle because they have suffered similarly might still be facing their own challenges that limit their efficacy or divide their focus. For example, Wallace et al. (2014) report that female faculty are often faced with inequitable teaching loads, denial of leadership opportunities, male colleagues who silence them and who delegitimize and claim ownership of their work and ideas (p. 444). Kelly (2008) also writes about the challenge of having women from the working class disproportionately represented in lower-ranking and precarious faculty positions, which leads them to feel as if they have little power and voice in academia (p. 157). Because our positionality shifts across time and space, I have learned that it is important to be brave and take risks in academia when we are able, but to be gentle with ourselves and others who may be faced with circumstances that may limit their influence.

Strategic Silence

Speaking out against injustice in academia is important, but the value of using silence as a strategic technique to navigate through the system is seldom discussed. Lewis (1993), is one female academic who has challenged the traditional view of silence as an indication of compliance or of weakness. Lewis (1993) explores the unique ways that women are silenced by patriarchal systems, including education, that have privileged male voices for ages, but how women often choose silence as a strategy of resistance. In other words, there is a great deal of meaning in what women say, but also in what they choose not to say, and in the particular contexts in which they remain silent. There are others who support the notion that silence does not equal acceptance or weakness when facing a system that can be harmful and unfair. For example. Kelly (2008) writes that as a working-class woman first entering university, she often silenced her own voice in favour of echoing the voice of her professors in order to get through. She also describes how she uses silence within her family of origin in order to navigate difficult situations that have arisen since she became an academic,

> Years ago I silenced my voice out of fear; today, I silence my voice out of
> understanding…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 (Kelly, 2008, p. 206).

Others have shared similar examples of using silence strategically. Käyhkö (2015) writes about
how many working-class women learn from a young age that silence is a virtue and that when
they enter the academic world they apply this lesson because "they would rather keep silent than
expose their assumed weaknesses," especially in relation to their more affluent peers (p. 452).
Another example is Reay (1998), who writes about keeping quiet as an undergraduate student
when jokes were hurled at her that delegitimized her class-related experiences and how she still
views writing about class as being dangerous within women's studies (p. 16).

Another form of silence that is sometimes used as a technique of protection is avoiding or
withdrawing from situations that are harmful. Moreira and Diversi (2011) for instance, describe
how the pervasiveness of a racially hostile curriculum led one student to avoid class and consider
dropping out in order to cope with the trauma of the experience (p. 231). Reay (1998) describes
how she "staged a solitary walk out in protest," to a professor who had stated that "coal miners
keep their coal in the bath." She goes on to state that "Solitary walk-outs neatly sum up my
university experience" (p. 13). In Lutes' (2005) study of women who are set to be the first
generation in their families to complete their college education, one participant discusses how
after her mother died she, "had to step back [from university] and take a breather" (p. 65). For
myself, although I previously had conceptualized my withdrawal from university as a failure, I
now view my withdrawing as a way I tried to protect myself from the emotional, physical, and
financial strain I had been experiencing. The break from my studies allowed me an opportunity to
refocus my priorities and to find a supportive community outside of the university who would
offer me encouragement when I would eventually return.

There are of course those who are critical of silence. Lorde (1984), for example, writes
"My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you" (p. 41). Therefore, it is not
so much that silence is the answer to injustice, but rather to acknowledge that there are those who
use it consciously as a tool for self-preservation and to gain entry into a system that they hope to
transform when they have the ability to do so. Many, like Lorde, may challenge the legitimacy of
this approach and such challenges have merit. As Lorde (1984) writes,

Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger… But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live (p. 42).

While she challenges the efficacy of silence as a self-preservationist tactic, she is still able to empathize with those who use it, as she herself had used it at times through her own life. She acknowledges that speaking out can be dangerous and that many people, including herself, experience fear when they consider interrupting and challenging systems of injustice. Acknowledging that silence is a technique that many working-class women use in trying to navigate academia does not mean that this is an approach that is advocated. And yet a lack of endorsement for this approach does not equal a condemnation of it either. Instead, it is critical to be aware that silence is a strategy that many use as a method of self-protection while at the same time pushing back against the necessity for having to use it. Those who have been marginalized may not always be able to speak out, so those with privilege can push to create spaces and to offer support so that those marginalized voices can be more safely heard.

Connections & Supports

Within universities, those who hold social and institutional privilege have a tremendous opportunity to positively shape the academic experiences of those who have been marginalized, and thankfully there are many who do so. For instance, Adair (2008), who sought a university education as an escape from a life of domestic violence and poverty, writes,

I lacked the skills, knowledge, self-esteem, and/or vision necessary to glean the full benefits of a liberal arts education and to earn a college degree…yet…I was supported and challenged by dedicated, able, and patient instructors who encouraged me to transform my life…teachers whose feminist classrooms became places where I was able to build bridges connecting my own knowledge of the world to crucial new knowledge, skills, and methodologies (p. 3).

What she describes in this quotation are teachers who met her where she was, and who validated her ways of knowing and understanding the world. Her experience reads as one of transformation—personal and institutional—because of the way her instructors embraced her worldview, while also challenging her and presenting new ways of seeing the world. This supportive environment that made space for alternative ways of knowing led her to become an

academic within the system, who now works to promote this type of a learning environment for her own students.

      Unfortunately, as has been discussed previously, the norm of replication rather than transformation is still quite prevalent within academia. There are, however, further examples that give reason to hope that this can change. Kelly (2008) writes about how as a young working-class woman first entering university she was unfamiliar with the campus, but because she has successfully learned how to navigate the system and the campus grounds, she now brings her own children to the campus to show them around (p. 96). The value of this is something I have heard spoken about in my own family. My partner Ron, for instance, credits his success in university to his father who drove more than four hours to show him around the campus when Ron was considering dropping out of university as a first-year student living away from home for the first time. As the son of two university-educated parents, Ron was able to tap into the cultural capital of his family to help him through the stresses of university life. For students who are among the first generation in their families to attend university, however, those supports are not available within the home, and so they rely on others who are familiar with the system to help them get through. Poullard (2014) writes about the importance of positive and supportive relationships in helping students who lack cultural capital to succeed in university. For example, in her study of low-income African-American males attending a Southeast Texas University, many students report that having high school teachers that related to students and showed genuine concern to help students was one of the keys that helped them to succeed, but that unfortunately these teachers were few and far between. Allies exist in academia and where they are creating space and offering support to marginalized bodies and minds they are contributing to the transformation of academia. By allowing the voices of those whose stories have not been told previously to be heard, they are helping to create hope that universities can become more safe and inclusive into the future.

CHAPTER 7

NEW PERSPECTIVES

The preceding sections have focused on answering the question of what it is to experience the university as a working-class woman. This final chapter now shifts the focus to reframing the understandings of these experiences and revealing new ways of viewing them. This chapter concludes by suggesting ways that future experiences for working-class women, and other marginalized persons within the academy, might be positively transformed into the future.

Expanding Pockets of Safety & Support

In all three of my own stories it was the shock of feeling hurt and uncomfortable that exacerbated the pain of feeling unsafe. Nonetheless, that shock came as a result of finding places where safety had been found, which points to the fact that there are individuals who are already working to help those who feel marginalized. These pockets of safety need to be recognized and expanded. Adair (2008), for example, writes about how after escaping an abusive relationship she found support from people with similar experiences in a women's shelter, and that these kinds of supports continued as she went on to community college and eventually university. Kelly (2008), a working-class female academic, advocates a student-centred learning approach that validates the students' experiences and ways of knowing because this approach was particularly helpful for her as she was navigating the unfamiliar terrain of the university (p. 192). She also calls on fellow academics to, "Break the silence; start a conversation with all members of university life…about the arbitrary educational standards set by the ruling classes…[and] to show compassion to one another" (p. 215-216). This call to incorporate diverse viewpoints into the classroom and to challenge authoritative viewpoints from within the academy is also echoed in the work of Bruno-Jofré and Young (1999) who recommend taking steps to mitigate resistance to diversity that some students will express and to bring in more female speakers and permanent faculty into the classroom (p. 54). There is evidence from the literature that demonstrates that these types of approaches work. For example Wallace et al. (2014) write about a female academic in their study who faced harassment and abuse in academia but later, with the help of others, "[w]orked very hard throughout her career to ensure that students and other faculty were protected in similar circumstances by anti-harassment policies and practices" (p. 445). Reay et al. (2009) also report that the working-class students whom they studied, were able to attend elite

universities because of the encouragement they received from high school teachers and mentors (p. 1008).

While supports within the academic system are critical for marginalized students, there is also much written about the importance of support from outside of the school. For instance, in Lutes' (2005) study, some of the women reported having nurturing instructors and yet a lack of support from home posed a challenge to their education (p. 55). Thankfully there are those who have been able to demonstrate the benefits of having support from both school and home. For example, a study by Hoyt (2013) of low-income African-American women attending university, cites that mentoring and employment opportunities within the university, as well as home support, are factors that helped the students to succeed (p. 85). Poullard (2014) also lists teacher supports and relationships along with strong family support as integral factors in the success of the African-American male students in her study (p. 63).

Maintaining Feelings of Hope

Despite the many challenges I have faced in my university career, one of the feelings that has endured throughout those experiences has been hope. In fact, hope is found throughout the data within this research and is even illustrated through the descriptions of the natural imagery in the stories from Chapter Four of this paper. For example, in Story One: Getting Lost, despite the stress I am feeling as I scramble to figure out where I am supposed to be writing my Biology final exam, "I wonder when the grey Earth and the bare trees will start to bloom with any colourful signs of life." This is a metaphor for my own academic journey, which has often felt bleak, and yet I have continued to hold out hope that it can eventually lead to growth and perhaps even something beautiful. Similarly, in Story Three: Getting Out, despite my exhaustion from three difficult years of university, "I look up to see that the sun is poking out just slightly from behind the clouds…when I look around at the brown grass and the bare trees I try to remember the warmth of the sun and the colour of the flowers that surrounded this area when I first stepped onto the campus grounds. I suppose they will return again as the seasons change..." In this way I am trying to recall the eager and optimistic young person that I was when I first entered university. Like the sun, I see that she is still there, peeking out behind the feelings of gloom that I was experiencing in that moment. The belief that the seasons will create change is a reminder to myself, that even the depression and exhaustion I was feeling during that difficult time was temporary, and that it would change like the seasons.

Hope is also found throughout the literature of working-class women's experiences in university. Adair (2008), who claims to have lost hope during some of the challenges she faced in her early years, maintains a firm belief that higher education will help to disrupt and alleviate the cycle of poverty and abuse that she found herself in (p. 2). Kelly (2008) recommends to other working-class female academics that we acknowledge the difficulties of pursuing academics so that those coming into the system can be made aware of them, while at the same time encouraging emerging academics to not get discouraged by these challenges (p. 215). All of the women in the study by Lutes (2005) describe their hope for a better life that they believe will come as a result of their university education. Finally, some of the first female academics in programs of educational administration in Canada communicate through the work of Wallace et al. (2014) that they hope their work is contributing to transformations in the academy and in the K-12 education systems, while still tempering that hope with the reality of the limitations and ongoing challenges they, and others, face (p. 451).

Consistently, marginalized people seek education as a conduit for positive personal and social transformation despite the fact that educational institutions and systems have been complicit in maintaining policies and practices that keep certain groups of people out. The entrenched biases of the educational system has even been part of perpetuating abuses in the extreme, such was the case with the Canadian Indian Residential School system. Marginalized people are not naïve to the problems within our various educational systems—many are keenly aware of the problems and the negative sides of history, but it is the optimism of these individuals that causes them to pursue post-secondary studies. They often see the bad, but they also recognize the good, and work hard to reap the benefits of it. This is why the Treaty negotiations that took place on the land where this research takes place—Treaty Six territory—included provisions to ensure that future generations of Indigenous peoples could benefit from the educational systems that the newcomers had established in other parts of the country. They recognized the good that could come from learning from the ways of others, while still maintaining their own ways of knowing and living.

Despite the abuses of the residential school era, many Indigenous leaders today maintain an optimism about the positive role that formalized education can have on a society (Stonechild, 2006). One way to maintain this optimism about the benefits of formalized higher education is to maintain hope that the institutions themselves can change. It is not a forgone conclusion that they

are flawed institutions; there are many who believe that they do good, even as they are flawed, and who hold onto the belief that they can change. Peter Stoicheff, the current President of the University of Saskatchewan, for example, has stated, "Universities are so inherently white and Western, when you start to push against it, you realized how intractable a lot of that is" (as cited in Porter, 2017). And yet despite these challenges, Stoicheff and the University have been working to "Indigenize" the university and to make it a space that is more accepting and representative of Indigenous persons and their ways of knowing, however partial and flawed that process may be.

Reinforcing Resilience

In addition to themes of support and hope, there is also a tremendous amount of resilience within my own stories, and in those of other working-class women in academia. My reframed view of leaving university for instance, leads me to see that my exit was not a sign of weakness, but rather it occurred because I was strong enough to know when I had reached my limits— financially, emotionally, spiritually, and otherwise—so I took time away to mature, to save money, and to recharge myself so that I could return stronger. In fact, the act of completing this master's research is a testament to resiliency and resistance against the forces that have challenged me along the way. Many others have also written about the importance of personal strength and determination in order to navigate university life. For example. Kelly (2008) writes that by coming from a working-class family she was raised to expect hard work and struggle to be an inherent part of her life experiences and so she was well equipped to handle the storm of personal and professional chaos that she would endure as she has laboured within the university (p. 175). Reay et al. (2009) also credit the resilience of the working-class students in their study to the skills they developed throughout their lives; "Qualities of resilience and coping with adversity become productive resources for the working-class students in the middle-class contexts they have moved into, – they help in dealing with the strange and unfamiliar" (p. 1107).

In Lutes' (2005) study of low-income women attending university, all of the participants profess a strong determination to complete school, despite the many obstacles they encounter. Each of the women finds unique methods of self-care and of adapting to the numerous challenges they face in order to continue with their academic programs. The research of Wallace et al. (2014) reinforces this theme as well by insisting that the stories of the trail-blazing female professors in their study are not victim stories, but rather, "Could be seen as "talking back" with

"grit" and strategic action as the participants moved forward in agentic and purposeful ways in careers that they deeply enjoyed" (p. 445).

Personal determination alone is not the answer to dealing with the barriers that working-class women face in university, but it can be an important element when faced with the challenges and rigours of academic life. For me, my own resilience has worn thin at times, but that is when I have had to rely on hope that things could be better and on the supports I have had both inside and outside the university. Ideally, students should feel welcomed into the academic world regardless of their gender, class, race, or sexuality. For generations universities have clung to particular notions of what constitutes valued knowledge and so individuals who vary from the white Eurocentric norm often face abuses and marginalization. Academic rigour need not be sacrificed in order to promote greater diversity within academic spaces. What we need is to examine our understandings of what constitutes knowledge and create space and validate the experiences and knowledge of those who have been marginalized. Ultimately this requires broad systemic change to be realized; however, institutional change also requires action on the part of individuals, so for those who hold some level of social or institutional privilege in academia, we must continue to offer our support to students who are being marginalized and to encourage them to remain resilient and hopeful that positive change can happen.

Suggestions for Institutional Change

Revealing the stories of my personal experiences in university, connecting these stories to a larger cultural story, and reframing these experiences with a renewed understanding and feeling of hope are the main outcomes of this research. Nonetheless, it is also my hope that this work can contribute to a larger movement towards social justice within post-secondary education environments. For this reason, I conclude this research with suggestions regarding the broader work that needs to be done if this dream is to ever be realized.

Tremblay et al. (2008) write about the difficult work of creating universities that are safer spaces for those who have experienced violence in its many forms, "One of the challenges in effective institutional response is to create a context wherein students can recognize and name the problem, a process that is complicated by the relatively amorphous, subtle, and insidious nature of unwanted social events" (p. 71-72). What they describe is exemplified within this research. It is often the small moments of exclusion, invalidation, and violence that cumulatively lead to harm and often push marginalized bodies out of academia. To pinpoint a specific problem or to

prescribe an appropriate remedy is difficult because in some cases the problems are not large and easily identifiable. Tremblay et al. (2008) do offer some advice on this matter however: "A prudent institutional response may be to acknowledge that the effects of these experiences are often subtle and insidious, and may last long after the offense has occurred. In addition, institutions should anticipate and educate students about interpersonal conflict rather than merely reacting after the fact" (p. 72). In other words, taking serious the stories of those who have experienced exclusion and violence, regardless of their perceived significance and intensity, would be a positive first step. For myself, I had previously downplayed the significance of many of the incidents I have described in this research, including being assaulted by a classmate. I had become accustomed to making the best of any situation—quite possibly a carry-over from my working-class origins—and so I never considered how the cumulative weight of those experiences had impacted me until I embarked on this research. The telling of my own experiences, without a predetermined evaluation of them, led me to make connections and discoveries between them and to connect those experiences to the experiences of others in ways that I would not have been able to, had I not been encouraged to pursue this research. Giving voice to stories that had not yet been told was the first step in what I hope becomes a contribution to social justice in education.

Tied to the importance of sharing my personal experiences is the personal and institutional support I have had to do so. A year before this research began, I had not heard of the critical autoethnographic research method. All I knew when I began the Master of Education program was that, as a woman who had a difficult time in university, I wanted to conduct research that would help me to create a better learning environment for my own students. It was the encouragement and support of the Educational Foundations department and my research committee that led me to this method. In other words, the ability to investigate my experiences as a university student required that I first had professors who were skilled listeners, who could decipher what it was that I wanted and needed to do and to make recommendations that would suit those aims. Had my teachers been focused merely on replication of the status quo, which as discussed previously, is a challenge many students face in academia, this research would never have taken shape. I have been fortunate to have individuals who have validated my experience and knowledge and that have directed me to a form of research that would allow me to achieve

the goals I had set for my work, and that will also make a contribution to knowledge and to the practice of research and education.

Finally, it is important to note that the difficult work of making universities truly inclusive can never be the work of marginalized persons alone. Telling our stories, even with the encouragement and support of individual faculty members, does not in itself make universities safe for those who have struggled. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2013) argue what the work of ending systems of dominance falls to those individuals and institutions that are in positions of dominance. They write, "Women could not grant themselves the right to vote because they did not hold *institutional power* [emphasis in original]. Only men could actually grant suffrage to women because only men held the institutional positions of power necessary to do so" (p. 40). In other words, universities, which are deeply entrenched in systems of privilege with regard to gender, class, race, and other factors, will remain complicit in reproducing inequality unless those with the institutional power to transform these institutions actively work to change them.

One of the difficulties with transforming inequitable systems, and universities in particular, is that the forces that perpetuate the marginalization of certain groups of students have become so entrenched in our discourses and practices that it becomes difficult to see and acknowledge. This process is referred to as hegemony. For example, in modern discourses around race, coded-language is often used to perpetuate racist ideologies and to justify ongoing systemic bias within systems like education. For instance, the word "thug," while not explicitly racist, conjures negative connotations that are often associated with black men (Lopez, 2016). Refusing to talk about race or acknowledge the continued prevalence of racism in our society is often referred to as color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2002) reports that in one study on the linguistics of color-blind racism, none of the participants identified racism as having anything to do with an organization having a 97% white workforce (p. 53). This denial, or wilful blindness towards oppression, makes it difficult to transform our systems and institutions. Nonetheless, many schools in Saskatchewan, and across the world, have articulated a commitment to inclusion in recent years. Unfortunately the discourse of blaming marginalized groups for their own difficulties is still prevalent, as evidenced, for example, in the research that has investigated teacher understandings of challenges Aboriginal students commonly face in schools (McCreary, 2011; Tompkins, 1998); however, if more leaders understood that marginalized groups do not have the institutional power to undo their own oppression, they might reconsider these types of

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discourses. In fact, if those with institutional and social privilege better understood their own role in ending inequality, we might see significant social transformation take place.

One of the obstacles to a social consciousness-raising is the defensiveness that can occur with those who hold social and institutional privilege. Systems of power and privilege have been normalized in our society to such an extent that those who are in positions of dominance believe they are innocent. These individuals have been socialized to believe that their positions in life have been earned through individual hard work alone and they are often blind to the ways in which they have benefitted from unearned privilege. These individuals do not want to be constructed as "bad" and so they cling to the notion of innocence that they have been socialized with throughout their lives. The problem is that if people cling to the idea of being innocent or if they fear a loss of power and privilege, then there will be little reason for these persons to strive for change towards social justice. One way to combat this is to clarify that equity does not entail simply flipping the roles of the oppressed and the oppressor (McIntosh, 1988; Fanon, 1986). Equity, means creating a society where there are no winners and losers and where everyone is entitled to dignity and fairness. By embracing such a concept, we might create new possibilities that would allow us to let go of a life that is characterized by competition and fear.

One of the dangers of having those with privilege taking a more active role in ending inequitable systems, is the risk of dominant individuals and institutions co-opting and speaking over those from marginalized groups who have already begun this difficult work. For example, the push for ending racism has always sprung from communities of colour and so to have white people dominate these movements would only constitute a further act of oppression. This is a challenge currently facing the LGBTQ community also, as individuals and organizations begin to take a more active role within the Pride movement. This concern with co-optation, however, does not alleviate those with privilege from their obligation to end oppressive systems; what it means is that we need to enter this work with humility, a willingness to listen, and by building from the work of others in an effort to create new understandings. This is what I have attempted to do through this research and I will continue to do in my work as an instructor working with Indigenous adults. As a working-class woman in the university I have often found myself feeling marginalized and so this research has allowed me to push against this feeling, and with the support of my research committee and the Educational Foundations department, I have been able to use this work to give voice to my own experiences. And yet, I am also in a position of

privilege in many ways, and so I intend to not only push for changes within post-secondary systems that would allow me to feel more safe, I will continue to investigate the ways in which I can support my students by creating space for their voices and to work toward institutional changes from where I am positioned.

Conclusion

This research has explored the challenges of navigating the university as a woman who originates from the working class. By employing a critical autoethnographic methodology, this work not only contributes to an emerging field of scholarship, it may also benefit individuals and communities who have felt unsafe or excluded by academia. This work adds to the existing body of research exploring issues of gender and class-based oppression within universities, and has explored the many ways these systems interact and rely on one another in order to operate. This intersectional approach helps to ensure that the research not only serves working-class women, but all students who have experienced oppression within the university. While the stories contained within the research are of a personal nature, they are intended to demonstrate that there is broader social significance contained within a personal story and for this realization to motivate individuals and communities to make change and to pursue justice. As Cole and Knowles (2010) point out,

> Readers of research need to be moved to think and feel, and to be inspired in some way. It is our responsibility as researchers to provoke that kind of encounter. Research that is accessible, evocative, embodied, empathetic, and provocative more fully portrays the complexities of the human condition to broader audiences and takes important steps toward bridging academy and community (p. 130).

In this way, it is my hope that this research will connect with the hearts and minds of others who have felt excluded or who have been harmed along their academic journeys. I also hope that it motivates all who read it to feel compelled to act to make universities more inclusive, whether it be through the telling of their own stories of their experiences in academia, informing potential allies who situate privileged standpoints, or by pushing for substantive institutional reforms.

"Relationality" by Laura Negraeff

I hear you…
your laughter
your joy
your frustration.

I see your pride
your wounds
your anger
your hunger for justice.

I see your passion for life
and your hope for something
greater…

Minopimatasiwin

I feel your kindness
your admiration
your gratitude
your compassion.

And I am humbled.

You have seen what my eyes
will never see.
You forgive for things that would leave me
bitter…
and angry.

You are resilient
despite the trauma that runs through your
blood…
through your stories
your history
your community
your family.

You strengthen me when I feel like the
weight of the world is too heavy.

You challenge me
you confront me
you correct me
you frustrate me
& you honour me.

You share meanings from my teachings
that I had not before seen.

You are invincible
you are beautiful
you are funny
and you are strong.

You are exceptional
extraordinary
daring
and bold…

In simply living…
in creating
in celebrating
in risk-taking
in experimenting,
& in transforming

the world.

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APPENDIX A

Primary Data collection Exercises: Memory Data

1. "Considering your research focus, select and chronologically list major events or experiences from your life. Include the date and brief account of each item. Select one event/experience from your timeline that led to significant cultural self-discovery. Describe its circumstances and explain why it is important in your life" (Chang, 2008, p. 74).

2. "List five proverbs, in order of importance, that you have heard repeatedly in your family, extended community, and/or society and that have had an impact on your life. Describe briefly the context in which each of them was used. Select the one most important to you and explain how it influenced your thought, belief, and behaviour" (Chang, 2008, p. 76).

3. "List five personal, familial, or social rituals, in order of importance, in which you have participated. Briefly describe the context of the ritual. Select the most important one and describe it in detail in terms of who, when, where, what, and how. Explain why it is important in your life" (Chang, 2008, p. 78).

4. "List five mentors, in order of importance, who have made significant impacts on your life and briefly describe who each person is. Select one and explain how this person has influenced you" (Chang, 2008, p. 80).

5. "List five artifacts, in order of importance, that represent your culture and briefly describe what each artifact represents. Select one and expound on the cultural meaning of this article to your life" (Chang, 2008, p. 81).

APPENDIX B

Primary Data collection Exercises: Self-Observation & Reflection

1. "Complete the culture-gram. Explain three primary identities you selected and your reasons for these selections. Reflect on and write what you have learned about yourself through culture-gramming" (Chang, 2008, p. 100).

    a. The culture-gram is a tool developed by Chang (2008) to depict one's social membership and the linkages between them. It creates a visual image of the complexity of our identity and how we are part of a larger web of cultural groups.

2. "Select a specific behavioural or cognitive topic on which you want to observe yourself. [Ex. Conducting academic research and writing]. Select a manageable time frame for self-observation and identify a recording method (narrative, structured format, or hybrid). Conduct systematic self-observation and record your observation including context information such as time, duration, location, people, occasion, and mood" (Chang, 2008, p. 93).

APPENDIX C

Primary Data collection Exercises: External Data

1. "Make a list of textual artifacts that you are interested in collecting. For each item identify artifact type, the time and context of its production, access (possible location, contact person, etc.), and data collection date. Select one item and locate the artifact. Describe the artifact and explain what it is for and why it is important to your life" (Chang, 2008, p. 108).

2. "Make a list of categories of nontextual artifacts that you plan to collect for your study. Make the categories broad enough, but not so broad as to be unmanageable. For example, you'll want to list a category as "photos from high school" instead of photos." Collect artifacts that fit the category. Sort your artifacts into subcategories. Describe briefly the artifacts in one subcategory (type, time, and location of its production, others represented by the artifacts, etc.) and write your reflection on the significance of these objects in your life" (Chang, 2008, p. 110).

3. "On the research topic you selected, make a list of subtopics of which you plan to obtain contextual information. Draft a literature review plan including your main research topic and subtopics. Select one subtopic and conduct a preliminary literature search. If necessary, modify your literature review plan along the way. Take notes during the literature review" (Chang, 2008, p. 111).