

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2010

Collaborating for Social Change: Photographic Empowerment and Activist Blogging

Jennifer Dana Weill

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Weill, Jennifer Dana, "Collaborating for Social Change: Photographic Empowerment and Activist Blogging" (2010). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 398.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/398

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Collaborating for Social Change:
Photographic Empowerment and Activist
Blogging

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Jennifer Dana Weill

Candidate for B.A. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

May/2010

Honors Capstone Project in Women's and Gender Studies

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
(Minnie-Bruce Pratt)

Honors Reader: _____
(Glenda Gross)

Honors Director: _____
Samuel Gorovitz

Date: _____

Abstract

Much of my coursework in my major, Women's and Gender Studies, focuses on the way that certain identities have been privileged, oppressed, stereotyped and marginalized both socially and systematically on local and global scales. In particular, I study how societal institutions disadvantage and discriminate against non-hegemonic groups of people and the resistance and collaboration that these people have engaged in to challenge the dominant institutions.

These themes inspired me to design and create a collaborative photography collection on oppression and stereotyping among students at Syracuse University. The photographs are based on histories and stories that my participants shared with me regarding their own oppressed and stereotyped identities. I met with each participating student in order to discuss their background and record how the student's oppressed and stereotyped identity, status, or social location impacts the student's daily life, interactions, and relationships. Most of the students specified several scenarios, situations, or daily occurrences that demonstrate the ways their identities are stereotyped, whether based on one or many axes of their social locations.

Each participant and I collaboratively constructed two situations from which to photograph, so that each participant is photographed twice. The first picture portrays their stereotype through a genuine, real encounter they experienced. The second picture displays their real personality and characteristics that they chose to illustrate their identity, giving students an empowering opportunity to challenge their own stereotypes.

In addition, I created a blog showing several of the students' pictures. Each picture has a corresponding discussion question, with the purpose of initiating further discussion about the issues of representation and stereotyping in that student's photograph. Students are therefore able to learn from one another and debate how students are privileged, oppressed, and stereotyped at Syracuse University. I set up the blog in a way that students can actively participate in the project and its themes, even though they were not photographed themselves.

I strategically chose to use photography and blogging to exemplify my work in Women's and Gender Studies. Aside from photography being a powerful tool of empowerment, it allows its viewers to individually interpret the pictures and the identities being portrayed. Students are therefore able to think critically about their own privileged and oppressed social locations.

The blog, on the other hand, serves to encourage people in my generation, especially students at Syracuse University, to become aware of and involved in their own environment. A blog is a very effective mechanism to do so because of how popular culture and the media are significant influences on the lives of the student population.

I feel the power of this project lies in its ability to engage students to think critically about their daily interactions with other members of the Syracuse University community. It has the potential for students to feel

empowered and inspired to work together and form collaborations. From these collaborations, students can continue to build solidarities that both relate one another and that challenge oppressive institutions.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Reflective Essay	1
Introduction	1
Theory on Collaboration	4
Photographic Empowerment	9
Forming Solidarities	12
Sources	16
Appendices	portfolio folder, web address
Photography Collection	portfolio folder
Blog	syracuseactivism.blogspot.com/
Summary	17

Acknowledgements

First, I thank my parents, Judy Waxman and Jim Weill, for their unconditional love and support. They have given me wonderful advice and suggestions, and inspired me to work with my peers on confronting social issues. I have always admired their work ethic and dedication to helping others, and I hope to mimic their commitment to their community in my future work. I am forever grateful for their constant words of encouragement and I would not have accomplished this project without them.

Second, I thank Minnie-Bruce Pratt, my capstone project advisor, who has greatly contributed to the success of my project. She has kept me both focused and calm, and I am extremely appreciative of the energy, time, and effort she has put into my project. It has been an honor to work with Minnie-Bruce and I am so thankful for her inspiring words, patience, and dedication.

Additionally, I thank Glenda Gross, my capstone project reader, for accompanying me on my journey through my project and my work as a Women's and Gender Studies major. She helped me brainstorm ideas during the initial phases and has worked with me through my final drafts. Glenda's enthusiasm in the classroom sparked my passion for fighting social inequalities and systematic oppressions, and I greatly appreciate her commitment to my education and to my project.

Lastly, I thank my participants for working collaboratively with me to fight stereotypes. They took time out of their busy schedules to conduct oral histories and to create photographs. My project would not exist without them, and I really enjoyed learning from their stories and experiences.

Reflective Essay

Introduction

I started my major in Women's and Gender Studies during my second year at Syracuse University because I wanted my work to be meaningful, interactive, and eye opening. When I began brainstorming my final capstone project the following year, I knew that my project would have to represent all of those qualities. I took the course Feminist Theory with Glenda Gross, an adjunct faculty member of the Sociology Department and the Women's and Gender Studies Department, the same semester I began my project. The course focused on deconstructing power dynamics in oppressive institutions and covered a range of feminisms that connect theory to practice. Because I felt a strong connection to the class's themes, I began to brainstorm project ideas and met with Glenda to discuss them. We eventually came up with a photography project that relates feminist theory and practice by combining histories of oppression with activism. I soon requested her to be my advisor, to which she agreed. We met regularly the rest of the semester and throughout the summer, keeping in contact by email.

I wanted to create a project that adequately incorporated themes in Women's and Gender Studies, such as oppression, resistance, and agency. At first, I thought planning a rally, day of silence, or speaker would be the best way to both involve Syracuse University students and to create awareness about oppression and stereotyping on campus. However, ensuring that students take away the information and ideas that I am trying to project is very

difficult with a semi-interactive project. I soon thought of videotaping students' answers to questions involving their own privileges and oppressions, however, I realized (with the help of Glenda Gross) that their answers would have to be somewhat staged in order to bring up all the issues I wanted to include. As a result, I decided to do a photography collection of students that portrays both stereotypes and individuality/personality.

I came up with the idea of first photographing students and the oppression they feel at Syracuse University, and then photographing those same students in a manner that they feel more accurately represents their interests, personalities, and work. I find photography to be powerful, where each viewer is able to internally process the image they are seeing. While each photograph is briefly described by a caption, it is up to the viewer to interpret the images and decide what they signify. For my photography collection, I hope that when viewers see the picture of the student representing a stereotyped identity, they truly dissect the socioeconomic and political locations that they occupy at Syracuse University and in relation to the photographed student.

That spring semester of my third year, I also met with Amit Taneja, Associate Director of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Center, who helped me to develop the initial stages of my project. Amit gave me advice and many suggestions about my participants and how to build a comfortable, safe space to form a trusting relationship. He also helped me to strengthen several of my ideas aesthetically, in order to maximize the impact

of the photographs. Together we conceptualized several potential identities that students might portray, especially that challenged racism, classism, ableism, and heteronormativity. Lastly, Amit allowed me to send a flyer with my request for participants in a newsletter at the LGBT Resource Center, which attracted several students.

The following fall 2009 semester, the start of my senior year, I continued to meet with Glenda on drafts of my request for participants. In October, however, I received an unexpected call and was told that because Glenda was not a full time professor, the department had declined my request for her to be my project advisor. This was both a surprise and a setback, since I had already spent over six months working with her. Fortunately, the honors program immediately permitted Glenda to take the role of the Honors Reader in my project, since she already had a background in my project and knows my writing style and work well.

At the time, I was taking a course with Minnie-Bruce Pratt, a professor in both the Women's and Gender Studies department and the Writing department. Our class was an open, safe space where students were able to create dialogue surrounding social issues, especially in terms of stereotyping students based on their sexuality and sexual orientation. After meeting with Minnie-Bruce about suggestions for my project, I asked her to become my project advisor. We quickly built a relationship, where I felt comfortable working with her and was very responsive to her feedback because of the content overlap between my project and the topics she taught. We spent the

rest of the fall semester catching up and working on my requests for participants, in addition to coming up with ideas for the essay portion of the creative project.

Another obstacle came three weeks before midterms during my final semester. I was very ill with both bronchitis and stomach problems so that I could barely eat, move, or attend school for weeks. This experience completely changed my mindset and I have since adopted a philosophy of not dwelling on obstacles or problems of the past. Being ill definitely raised issues surrounding the way I perceived and presented myself, since my understanding of myself and self-confidence changed. However, I chose not to use stereotypes around body image and sickness for my self-portrait because I felt more connected to other axes of my identity, such as being adopted, which is related to several intersections of my social location. Lastly, I wanted to portray stereotypes about being adopted because they are not typically based on my appearance, while recovering from illness is often associated with strictly physical implications.

Theory on Collaboration

I chose to create a collaborative photography project because of issues of representation in the media. Certain idolized bodies are constantly photographed, whether in an advertisement, catalog, or commercial, permeating through popular culture, the news, and magazines. Other bodies,

however, are misrepresented, defined and portrayed through stereotypes and prejudices, or underrepresented, virtually neglected by the media.

The types of bodies that are idolized are based on ideologies surrounding white supremacist, patriarchal notions of beauty and beauty ideals, so that light-skinned, straight-haired, tall, skinny, heterosexual, hyper-feminine bodies are considered the standard. All deviations from this norm are considered “other,” different, and unattractive.

While white, Barbie-like models are often shown in magazines and on television, commercials also often capitalize on certain gender roles and cultural assumptions. For example, most advertisements for detergent or cleaning products are represented by a white, middle-class, heterosexual mother, exacerbating the 1950s female gender role, which obviously continues to flourish today. In addition, commercials on television for Kentucky Fried Chicken often use a black family to sell their products, which reveals commonly held beliefs surrounding communities of color. While fashion magazines typically use the stereotypical, white, tall, skinny, straight-haired young woman, clothing advertisements selling a garment or outfit made of animal prints will commonly show women of color, particularly African American women. The media depends on cultural appropriations, imposing one culture on to a particular body, enacting stereotypes about that specific culture.

This exoticization and fetishization of specific “othered” bodies in the media is perpetuated by the lack of collaboration between the photographer,

company or advertising agency, and the model. The model is instructed how to dress, put on make-up, and pose, leaving no space for the model to express hirself¹ through hir² own personal background and beliefs.

I decided that I wanted to create a feminist photography collection that involved collaboration between my participants, those who I photographed, and me. This aspect of collaboration is a central theme in feminist theory and practice, since it directly challenges the dominant ideologies that govern assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, religion, ethnicity, and class. By allowing my participants to convey their personal histories of oppression through examples and stories of stereotyping on the Syracuse University campus, they were given an outlet where they could empower themselves. In addition, the participants chose the location of their photography session, their clothing and accessories, and their method of portraying their own stereotyped identities. However, when they needed guidance or prompting, I provided questions for them to frame their stories around, so that they made the crucial choices, but still received help when needed. This process is what collaboration is founded on, a mutual creation of ideas or works, which is exemplified throughout my project.

In *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Shulamit Reinharz details several techniques in feminist research, including oral history. Reinharz

¹ Hir/Hirself is a gender-neutral pronoun, which detaches assumptions about gender from the pronouns
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hir#Modern_attempts_at_gender-equity_in_English_pronouns)

² See 1st footnote.

describes the many types of feminist oral histories and their importance and role in different settings. Specifically, Reinharz shares that certain “accounts or collections” of oral histories are accompanied by “photographs that give additional ‘life’ to the life histories” (Reinharz, p. 128). This category of feminist oral history perfectly represents my project, which combines collaborative oral histories with photographs in order to provide a space for viewers to visually interpret the experiences shared by those who were photographed.

Reinharz also points to oral histories as having the ability to “break the silence,” by highlighting the lives of certain marginalized or oppressed groups who have been systematically and socially silenced or misrepresented (Reinharz, p. 137). Therefore, oral histories give individuals and groups of people the opportunity to “publish their views who otherwise would not have done so,” which is extremely empowering (Reinharz, p. 142).

The next stage in my project that involved collaborating occurred during the important process of choosing each participant’s final photograph. After conducting their oral histories and constructing the set and situation from which to photograph the participants, we met for the photography shoot. Once we finished taking the pictures, each participant and I reviewed them together, each selecting two or three favorite pictures. Later, when I uploaded all of the photographs, I chose which to use, depending on how the picture of the student portraying the stereotype looked next to the student’s empowerment picture. Therefore, the final photographs were chosen when

the set of two pictures looked both unique and coherent, showing the participant's story and history.

While pictures are often selected in magazines and commercials for superficially aesthetic reasons, I determined which pictures to use after reviewing my previous conversations with each student. During these meetings, the students described the axes of their identities and personalities they felt are oppressed and stereotyped at Syracuse University through personal stories and anecdotes. My goal in selecting photographs was to have our collaborative histories come through in the pictures. Therefore, each picture was relative to and reflective of the participants and their identities, instead of simply showing their most aesthetically pleasing photographs.

This process is an example of feminist collaboration, where my participants and I are together challenging hegemonic standards of beauty. We created a context from which to construct a visually satisfying photograph that uses their shared stories about their identities while showing students how damaging stereotypes are to their self-concepts. Through this context, students are able to contemplate their own outlets of challenging stereotyping in order to stop taking paths of least resistance, which is how stereotyping often continues to flourish.

Photographic Empowerment

Before I began requesting student participation in my project, I looked at several photographers' work, whether in art galleries, museums, or in books. This past fall I went to a photography collection by Robert Frank at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The collection was created in 1955 and is titled the *The Americans*. Frank's goal was to depict real American life by photographing people in their natural element, instead of taking posed pictures of the dominant elitist members of society. He included both people of color and people from lower economic strata, in addition to using several unique artistic techniques, unlike many of his contemporary artists.

Frank's collection is particularly powerful because it challenged the popular photography during his time and continues to be applicable today. He chose a path of *resistance* by taking pictures of real lives and livelihoods, many of which destabilized dominant notions about wealth and beauty.

Frank's work inspired me theoretically and taught me artistically at the same time, virtually giving me tools to use in my own work. For example, as I walked through the exhibit, I wrote down several of the angles he used, both in terms of how he portrayed the poses of the "Americans" and in terms of the background of the scene. I noticed how he used his surroundings to the fullest, with people propped up against cars and brick building walls, in addition to using several mirrors and windows. I interpreted his use of accessories and photographed several of my participants leaning on windows,

standing or sitting by mirrors, and perched against walls or banisters. His work gave me a foundation from which to develop my collaborative photography sessions.

While Robert Frank influenced my artistic eye, “Patriarchy, the System” by Allan G. Johnson was one of the first theoretical pieces I read in Women’s and Gender Studies. Johnson presents patriarchy as a structural and social system of male privilege in which everyone participates. It is from this article that I learned the concept regarding paths of least resistance. Johnson details the ways in which those who benefit from male privilege are taking a path of least resistance, instead of challenging the patriarchal system itself.

Even though Johnson’s “Patriarchy, the System” is a basic article that is studied in most introductory classes in Women’s and Gender Studies, it provides such a fundamental understanding of oppression that can be applied throughout many courses, events, and daily activities. This simple, yet crucial, understanding of systems of privilege as being oppressive institutions enables one to engage in reflexivity. Being able to reflect on the many social locations that are applicable to one’s many identities is necessary both in feminist theory and practice, and in collaborative projects.

Therefore, one of the most important aspects of my project is how I transformed my theoretical foundation, through Johnson’s piece, and my artistic basis, from Frank’s collection, into a collaborative photography project. I combined these two disciplinary backgrounds from a feminist perspective, knowing that I wanted to find students who are willing to share

their experiences with stereotyping and oppression on the Syracuse University campus. My goal was to create an outlet where people are able to reveal themselves and represent who they are through photographic portrayals of oral histories.

Another influential site for my project was my internship last summer working at a non-profit organization called Women Empowered Against Violence (WEAVE). WEAVE provides a holistic range of services to survivors of domestic violence, including legal representation, individual and group therapy, outreach and education presentations, intake, protection orders, economic empowerment programs, and case management. I worked in the counseling and education services department under the supervision of the bilingual (Spanish-speaking) social worker. This opportunity allowed me to apply my feminist theoretical foundation, virtually turning theory into practice.

One major component of WEAVE's mission is to provide clients with the tools to empower themselves, by allowing them to make decisions about their lives. The case manager, for example, helps the client find job opportunities, but it is the responsibility of the client to contact the job and apply for the job. Once the client completes this process, ze³ feels empowered by making hir own decisions and controlling hir own life.

Learning how to create situations for marginalized people to empower themselves enabled me to brainstorm outlets of empowerment for stereotyped

³ Ze is another gender-neutral pronoun. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ze>)

and oppressed students at Syracuse University. I wanted to provide my participants with these empowering tools so that they could use their photographs to challenge both stereotypes and paths of least resistance.

Forming Solidarities

My work on my project reflects many of my beliefs and philosophies, which also mirror principles from feminist and activist theories in Women's and Gender Studies. Growing up in an open household where high value was placed on community service, social change, and political activism has shaped my personality, interests, and goals. This liberal environment enabled me to think critically about United States culture, society, and institutions, many of which are rooted in white supremacist, heteronormative, male privileged, colonialist attitudes and policies.

My upbringing has greatly impacted my life socially and academically. Consequently, my life goal has always been to change the world, whether in terms of ending hatred, environmental damage, war, or animal cruelty. Because of the difficulty in solving and ending all of these social problems, I have chosen to uproot the power dynamics that allow these issues to flourish. By providing a space for collaborative processes and work, powerful solidarities can be formed by those who have been oppressed by these hegemonic power institutions in many different ways.

This collaborative quality about my project is important on both ends, my participants' and mine, because it relates both my oppressed identities and

my participants' oppressed identities. Therefore, we together created communication by sharing stories that build a resistance against the power dynamics that have oppressed us, which also perpetuate the above social problems (hatred, environmental damage, war, and animal cruelty).

Building these solidarities is necessary and applicable in many settings outside Syracuse University. Collaborations and solidarities are useful within and between schools, organizations, movements, and even nations and countries. Next year I plan to find a job at a non-profit similar to WEAVE, working on social problems, such as homelessness, women's health issues, hunger, immigrant resources, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender rights. In all of these areas, I can use collaborative processes in order to combine efforts with other organizations fighting for the same cause. Strong solidarities are then formed that can challenge the dominant power institutions, creating more places to spread awareness about the issues and forming a numerically large movement. Solidarities can also cross borders in order to relate social problems on a transnational scale, enabling these solidarities to fight powerful international companies that exploit people and resources.

In addition to addressing these social issues by attempting to change systematic disadvantages through solidarities, I focus on empowerment, which, as I have mentioned, is a major theme in my project. Also as I have mentioned, I hope to carry these two themes of collaboration and empowerment to future projects, volunteer work, and jobs.

While the photography portion of this project is finite, in that it cannot necessarily be continued after I graduate, I created a blog (syracuseactivism.blogspot.com/) that allows the collaboration and solidarities to remain applicable. I am committed to people sharing stories about their own oppressions, so I wanted the blog's structure to enable a type of continuity for people to keep forming collaborations and solidarities. The blog includes several pictures of my participants and discussion questions around their histories and stories, with one discussion question or topic per picture. These discussion questions enable students to participate in my project even after the photography collection has been completed and presented.

I chose to create a blog for this reason and for several other purposes. Although the photographs encourage students to think critically around issues of representation and stereotyping on campus, it does not necessarily initiate discussion and debate around these topics. The blog gives students the opportunity to think about their own places of privilege and oppression, even if they do not directly relate to the students' photographs.

Integrating theory and practice in feminist activist circles is crucial in creating social change, so I combined a photography collection that utilizes feminist theories with a blog that allows students to actively challenge oppressive institutions. Additionally, I believe that using popular media, such as blogs, in feminist and activist organizations is extremely beneficial when reaching out to and accessing my generation. The internet is a useful tool in

spreading news quickly, so that transnational solidarities can communicate and share stories more easily. For example, I completed a portfolio on current events involving local and global economies in my Advanced Studies in Feminist Thought course this semester. All of the current events were located on websites, blogs, or online newspapers, which helped me to create a specific type of literacy to interpret online current events. It is these sites that organizations can use to spread news and awareness, especially if they are working with organizations internationally.

While I created the blog in order to connect Syracuse University students to my participants and their feelings of both oppression and empowerment, I want the blog to exemplify an alternative space that students can create themselves, instead of just a site on which they can comment. The blog will hopefully inspire students and spark an interest to create collaborations of their own that involve mutual storytelling.

The overall impact of my project lies in its three strengths, which are its ability to: engage students to think critically about the powerful hegemonic institutions that govern their sociopolitical and economic locations; initiate relationships and collaborations to fight for social change; and empower oppressed individuals and groups of people. Now that my project is completed, I am able to reflect on the collaborations I have built with the students who participated and I really enjoyed working with my peers to fight for similar social issues.

Sources

Gross, Glenda. 208 Bowne Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse. February-May 2009.

Johnson, Allan G. "Patriarchy, the System." 2007. *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. 4th ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1997. 28-37.

"Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans." *Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Web. 15 Apr. 2010. <http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId=%7b1FD57D4D-FE17-41FA-9025-E2667E36AD27%7d>.

"Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans." *National Gallery of Art*. Web. 15 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/frankinfo.shtm>>.

Pratt, Minnie-Bruce. 236 Huntington Beard Crouse Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse. October-December 2009.

Pratt, Minnie-Bruce. "Who Am I If I'm Not My Father's Daughter?" 2007. *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. 4th ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1984. 43-45.

Reinharz, Shulamit, and Lynn Davidman. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Taneja, Amit. LGBT Resource Center, Syracuse University, Syracuse. April 2009.

Summary

A central theme in my coursework for Women's and Gender Studies is oppression and misrepresentation. Certain identities are often invisible or portrayed in an extremely negative stereotypical manner, these stereotypes reinforce dominant ideologies and serve to justify systematic oppression. Privileged identities in a white supremacist, capitalist heteropatriarchy include those who are white, male, middle class, Christian, physically able, healthy, and heterosexual. Those who do not fall into any or all of these categories are considered subordinate in society and face oppression. Oppressed people are likely to be misrepresented, unrepresented, or even made invisible. When dominant groups have the power and resources to stay dominant, they push those who are subordinate out of the picture.

The goal of my project is to bring oppressed and invisible identities into the picture. I want to give students at Syracuse University who have otherwise been ignored, mistreated, and oppressed the opportunity to share their stories and have their voices heard. My work provides an outlet for these students to explain and share their feelings of invisibility or misrepresentation on campus.

I decided to construct a photography collection that would allow me to work collaboratively with students to challenge systems of power and privilege that create and maintain oppression. First, I met with each participating student, where they shared personal stories and histories

regarding their oppression. During this oral storytelling, the students explained how and why they feel stereotyped on campus. We then worked collaboratively to design the situation and setting for their photography session. I worked collaboratively with each student to ensure that their stories and backgrounds were accurately portrayed.

I chose photography for several reasons, including its powerful impact, its ambiguity (in that it can convey many meanings and is open to various interpretations), and its ability to portray human relationships in a raw, real way. There were several other methods I was considering in order to convey the themes that emerged from my project, such as a film, day of silence, public presentation, speaker, or rally. These mediums, however, do not allow the audience or viewers to process the information at their own pace. Photography, on the other hand, allows students to individually interpret the photographs and the messages the photographs convey.

I photographed students, including myself, in two different ways. One photograph portrayed the stereotype, while the other photograph challenged the stereotype. The first photograph is in black and white, displaying the student's stereotype in a genuine way that depicts a lived experience regarding that person's oppression. For example, one student shared that she dresses in a simple, plain manner because of her lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, I photographed her in a flannel shirt and jeans both leaning against a chipped, rusty banister on a staircase and looking through a glass window. The

staircase and the window both provide metaphors to the difficulty in both accessing upward mobility and breaking the glass ceiling, so to speak.

The second picture is where the student has the opportunity to express herself⁴ according to hir⁵ true identity, which is framed by one's experiences, personality traits, hobbies, interests, goals, and more. For example, one of my participants is committed to both her marital relationship and her studies at Syracuse University. We decided to photograph her in front of the Hall of Languages, which is a symbol of the college and appears in school paraphernalia, with the goal including her and her husband as a couple in addition to a sign that says "Syracuse University." The result is a juxtaposition of her dedication to being a student and a life partner to her husband.

During the discussions with the students, I asked whether they would feel comfortable allowing me to use their story as a discussion topic on a blog. With those who said yes, we brainstormed several questions that would initiate discussion and/or dialogue based on the students' personal background with stereotyping or with specific types of oppression, such as sexism and elitism. Each photograph has one corresponding question, so that other students on campus have the opportunity to talk openly about social justice and participate in collaborative work that challenges oppressive institutions.

⁴ Hir/Hirself is a gender-neutral pronoun, which detaches assumptions about gender from the pronouns
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hir#Modern_attempts_at_gender-equity_in_English_pronouns)

⁵ See 1st footnote.

From these collaborations, students are able to build a greater awareness of their own privileges and oppressions, where they can consider their daily interactions and situations where they are privileged and/or oppressed.

This type of reflexivity is central to theory-making in Women's and Gender Studies and helps create self-awareness around one's social location in relation to privilege and oppression. One of the first articles I read for a Women's and Gender Studies course was *Who Am I If I'm Not My Father's Daughter*, a section of *Identity: Skin Blood Heart* written by Syracuse University professor Minnie-Bruce Pratt. In this piece, Minnie-Bruce Pratt details her upbringing and how she had to expand her "constricted eye" to see past the lies her culture and history books told her (Pratt, p. 44). After she opened her eyes to her surroundings and the ways some people are privileged and others are oppressed in her immediate environment, she adopted a view of the world that was "more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensional, more truthful" (Pratt, p. 44). I hope to encourage this kind of critical reflexivity through my photographs and the blog, I want students to think critically about their surroundings by considering their own social locations in relation to the social locations of others.

Another aspect of Minnie-Bruce Pratt's work that is particularly applicable to my project is when she asks her readers, "where is our *need* to change what we were born into?" (Pratt, p. 44). This question is what I hope students will also take away from my project. I want students to consider the

ways in which they participate in dominant systems and how they can actively change the power dynamics within these systems.

In the future, I hope that students in and outside of Women's and Gender Studies are able to post on the blog in a respectful yet honest and open way that sparks productive conversations about stereotyping on campus. My project has the potential to create social change because it encourages students to think critically about the ways they interact with one another, and to refrain from judging and stereotyping each other based on one's race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, ethnicity, and physical and mental abilities.

The critical awareness that is built through collaborative work in the photography collection and the blog enables students to form powerful solidarities in many settings, such as in an academic arena or in a professional environment. My work from my capstone project and from my courses in Women's and Gender Studies provide me with the tools and foundation from which to carry these themes of collaborations and solidarities into future academic and professional opportunities.