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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the experiences of low income women undergraduates in a community college classroom anchored in decolonial feminist pedagogy. Analyses of in-depth interviews, student writings, and questionnaires are offered to further understanding of the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy on the experiences and learning outcomes of low-income women undergraduates in community college, and also works to shed light on how the praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy disrupts traditional hierarchies and claims to epistemic authority in the community college classroom.

Claiming Knowledge, Claiming Lives:
Decolonial Feminist Pedagogy and the Experiences of Low-Income Women
Undergraduates in Community College

by

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Dissertation

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“The first thing I want to say to you who are students, is that you cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education: you will do much better to think of being here to claim one”

-Adrienne Rich

In 1977, feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich gave a convocation speech to the women of Douglass College titled “Claiming an Education.” Rich (1977) wrote,

One of the devastating weaknesses of university learning, of the store of knowledge and opinion that has been handed down through academic training, has been its almost total erasure of women’s thoughts and experiences from the curriculum, and its exclusion of women as members of the academic community. . . . What you can learn here (and I mean not only at Douglass but any college in any university) is how men have perceived and organized their experience, their history, their ideas of social relationships, good and evil, sickness and health, etc. When you read or hear about “great issues,” “major texts,” “the mainstream Western thought,” you are hearing about what men, above all white men, in their male subjectivity, have decided is important (p.2).

Nearly four decades since Rich (1977) delivered her speech, the words echo the oppressive legacies of higher education that have continued to dominate and complicate women’s learning experiences in the college classroom. According to St. Rose and Hill (2013), through the 1960s, the demographic of undergraduate students was predominately white males, though also included a small percentage of females. The majority of those students were from middle and upper class homes. From 1970 to 2010, enrollment in higher education reversed traditional gender and racial demographics and reflected student bodies with a female majority and a doubling of students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. In 2010, there were 4,152,999 women enrolled in community college, compared to 3,159,666 men enrolled in community college. Of those women, 3 out of 10 identified as a woman of color. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported rises in racial and ethnic diversity across

college campuses. Between 1976 and 2012, the number of Hispanic undergraduates went from 4 percent to 15 percent, while the number of Asian and Pacific Islander undergraduates enrolled went from 2 percent to 6 percent. The number of Black and African-American undergraduates went from 10 percent to 15 percent. American Indian and Alaska Native undergraduate numbers went from 0.7 percent to 0.9 percent. During that same time span, 1976-2012, the number of White undergraduates dropped from 84 percent to 60 percent.

Since the 1970s, in comparison to four year colleges and universities, the not-for-profit academic institution that has the greatest percentage of women, students of color, as well as low-income and first-generation college students, is the community college. With these demographics in mind, what is the significance of Rich's (1977) convocation speech for low-income women across social identity groups enrolled in community college in the current educational climate? What are the consequences of pedagogy for creating community college classroom spaces where low-income women can experience educational claims? The 2010 Complete College America report shared that only 1 in 10 community college students will graduate with an Associates degree in three years. Today, community college women must claim their education so that they can claim their lives. On claiming an education, Rich (1977) argues that "...for women it can literally mean the difference between life and death" (p.1).

My interest and commitment to researching low-income women undergraduates' experiences in community college classrooms stems from my own lived experiences as a researcher, educator, student, and woman. For me, Rich's (1977) speech is also a call to action for social justice education researchers. If, as Rich (1997) argued, what women

encounter on college campuses is an “erasure of women’s thoughts and experiences from the curriculum,” and a social organization that excludes and marginalizes their engagement, then in order to claim their education women undergraduates must be represented not only in theory, which is in and of itself an important precedent to this work, but in empirical studies that explore and illuminate their intersectional experiences engaging with, and working through, pedagogy in the classroom. As a researcher with social justice commitments, I was interested in focusing on a project that could create a space for women’s voices to narrate their experiences in a community college classroom and from which the data might offer pedagogical insights. As a researcher with previous college teaching experience, I was interested in focusing not on my teaching, but on the embodied perspectives of students through use of qualitative methods that would explore and honor that the participants held epistemic points of view on their position in the community college and knowledge of how their positionality impacts their participation in the classroom and outside of it.

My first year of teaching in higher education was in 2010 when I entered an Introduction to Sociology classroom on the campus of a Central New York community college. It was at the same point in time that I was engaging my graduate studies at Syracuse University in Cultural Foundations of Education and Women’s and Gender Studies. Across graduate classrooms I was engaging with pedagogies that were anchored to social justice curricula, instructional techniques that illuminated the complex histories and present experiences of marginalized groups, and named, resisted, and spoke back to power, privilege and systemic inequalities, thus creating spaces for transformative learning experiences that could disrupt colonial legacies in education. Commitments to

disrupt normative pedagogy in turn radicalized my vision of what pedagogy could be for students in undergraduate classrooms. In addition, I was engaging and inspired by empirical examples of researchers who studied their own classrooms such as Tatum (1992) whose content analysis of journal writings from a course she taught led to identifying major sources of student resistance to talking about race and learning about racism, while including strategies for overcoming this resistance. My learning process as a graduate student has been key to my growth as an educator in the college classroom, and these experiences have been critical to the direction I have chosen as a researcher of decolonial and feminist studies in foundations of education. I now had a vision for researching my own feminist, social justice classroom.

I taught the course that is the focus of my dissertation, *The Sociology of Gender*, during spring of my third year at the community college, and thus my third year in graduate school. I had experience facilitating a class on the topic of socioeconomic inequality in education through Syracuse University's Intergroup Dialogue program under the direction of Dr. Gretchen E. Lopez, and thus incorporated dialogic pedagogy into the community college classroom because I had seen how transformative that process was for the students at Syracuse. Why wouldn't community college students also benefit from dialogue? I wondered. Over the weeks of teaching *The Sociology of Gender* at the community college, the same phrases were echoed from the students. "I love dialogue," was the popular phrase called out around class time. But privately, the silent confessions from students were whispered to me after class, or during encounters on campus: "This is the first time I've ever been able to speak in class," "I've never been asked to share my opinions," and "I didn't know I had so much to say."

In addition to patterns I noticed around students' feelings about dialogue, there were consistent patterns with respect to remarks about the readings in the curriculum. I had chosen a multicultural anthology, Estelle Disch's (2009) *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, and abandoned the traditional textbook. For me, the curriculum in those courses was transformative because these anti-racist, feminist readings centered stories and experiences that were diverse and intersectional, and are often marginalized in neoliberal spaces such as US higher education. As a social justice educator, being democratic meant drawing from decolonial feminist pedagogy and challenging the narrative for teaching at a community college. This meant that in addition to dialogue, I sought to anchor my curriculum to antiracist, feminist texts that challenged racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and capitalism. The more students from *The Sociology of Gender* read the anthology, the more they critically engaged the stories in the text and the stories of their peers' lived experiences, as well as their own. By now the private admissions were becoming more public as students started to announce in class, "I've never read a book with stories like this before," or "I have never read about so many types of people," to "I'm going to miss this book," followed by urgent questioning: "Why?" "Why don't we read things like this in other classes?" "Why don't we relate the book to our lives in other classes?" "Why aren't we asked to speak in other classes?" "Why is this my first time taking a class taught like this here?"

The moment mid-semester when the critical questioning came into place in the classroom was a moment when pedagogy, power, and the politics of knowledge was illuminated for me. It was also a moment where I felt a new sense of communion with my students. I held shared social identities with many of the women from *The Sociology*

of Gender. As a low-income woman there was common ground in many of our experiences. As a single mother working toward a degree, I related to many of the other moms in my class. When they talked about the exhaustion of waiting for their children to go to bed so they could work on papers, I understood. When they looked like they were holding on to their learning for dear life out of fear of what letting go would mean for their family, I got that too. Yet, I also knew how things were different. If it didn't work out for me in my PhD program, then I had other degrees to fall back on. And my Whiteness had carved out a separate place for me in society, a space that advantages me in ways that are completely undemocratic, but yet they exist. This was not the case for many of the students in my classroom. So when the questioning began from them, it made sense that my questioning began to. Why weren't these incredible, intelligent, and talented students engaging in dialogue and critical thinking across classes at the community college? Why were their lived experiences made to feel insignificant to the learning in the classroom? Where was the opportunity for them to engage in collective leadership and action projects? While it could be happening in a few classrooms across campus, how was it that so many of the students claimed to not have experienced pedagogy similar to that used in *The Sociology of Gender*? What was so different about my students at the community college compared to my students in the Intergroup Dialogue classroom at Syracuse? The biggest difference I can see is access to resources and a college classroom where they can claim their education and achieve what they are capable of as students. In my time teaching at the community college, I began to strongly sense that the students were part of a system that predetermined the conditions in which they would learn, and thus the conditions by which they would live their lives. This

dissertation is a political project about claims to education, but more so, about claims to life.

Community colleges across the United States (US) are considered historical sites of educational access and mobility for students (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). With an open-enrollment policy, lower costs than four year institutions, and a breadth of vocational and academic programs, community colleges are spaces that host diverse learners identified as “non-traditional” by the balancing of their educational trajectories with multiple social roles in groups and institutions such as the family, the workforce, and the military (Morest, 2013). Currently, community colleges are drawing national attention resulting from President Obama’s (2015) proposal to provide universal no-cost community college education to students enrolled at a minimum of part-time who maintain a 2.5 GPA and graduate within three years. This attention has been building in recent years as community college discourse has centered on the importance of the institution in developing human capital through bestowing academic credentials to students (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014) and bolstering an uncertain US economy (Obama, 2012). There is much at stake for US political and economic stakeholders whose agendas include promoting student completion from community colleges in an effort to foster capital gains. However, less is known about the student stakeholders who seek an academic credential *and* a quality, engaged learning experience in the community college classroom. Furthermore, there is a lack of information on the ways political and economic agendas politicize knowledge in the classroom. The lived experiences of students in US community college classrooms are symbiotic with the structure of the educational institution. Examined under a critical lens, community college students’

classroom experiences can illuminate and speak back to the structure of the community college, with specific attention to dynamics of race, ethnicity, class, gender, nation, ability, and faith. Moreover, a study of students' classroom experiences can highlight the differences within common experiences that result from intersecting social identities. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the classroom experiences of low-income women in community college in the context of the educational institution and query: *In what ways do the lived experiences of low-income women undergraduates in community college classrooms inform the understanding of, and response to, institutional practices at community colleges?*

One approach to research on community college students' classroom engagement experiences and institutional practices is to explore the relationship in context of power and pedagogy. Research on US undergraduate classrooms reveal classroom learning spaces to be sites where colonial legacies of racism, sexism, and classism are often reproduced and sustained (Dei, 2010; Kuokkanen, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Shajahan, 2005; Tejada, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003, Willinsky, 1998). As sites of conventional Eurocentric traditions and accommodations, college classrooms often reproduce colonial legacies through pedagogies that privilege and empower dominant social groups while oppressing marginalized students. Colonial legacies in the classroom space include but are not limited to syllabi, curricula, and instructional strategies that center and privilege whiteness, patriarchy, and affluence, and exploit marginalized students' experiences through the privileging of Western hegemonic narratives (e.g., the exclusion of readings about and/or authored by people of color).

This research explores the relationship between *colonial legacies in higher education, decolonial feminist pedagogy, and community college students' experiences in the classroom*. This study, methodologically framed in feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1986, 1991, 2000; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1983, 1988; hooks, 1984; Jagger, 2004; Smith, 2004), offers a qualitative inquiry of two undergraduate community college classroom sections that engaged with a praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy: a pedagogy anchored in the theoretical frames of decolonial and feminist theories. The study uses mixed qualitative methods including open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and content-analysis of student coursework. The use of a mixed qualitative methodological approach in the study was informed by the constructive use of mixed methods in the ethnographic studies of Erdreich and Lerner (2005), Luttrell (2003), and Tsui (2002) that focused on examining feminist and educational research topics. In these studies, the use of mixed methods was a strength because it engaged the particularities of participants' experiences and created a space in the research for a holistic exploratory inquiry into the ethos of education.

More broadly, this dissertation draws from a collective body of significant scholarly works framed in feminist, post-colonial, decolonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, intersectionality, and social justice theories of education, pedagogy, and knowledge (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Dei, 2010; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003; Willinsky, 1998). In an effort to analyze the classroom engagement experiences of community college students, this project deliberates and attends to the embedded institutional culture of higher education in relation to community college students' classroom encounters. Furthermore, this

research works to center community college students' voices and testimonies on student engagement, claims to epistemic authority, and classroom experiences. To that end, this research aims to radicalize pedagogical praxes in US higher education through a close examination of decolonial feminist pedagogy in a sociology classroom at a community college. Nevertheless, disrupting hierarchy and traditional claims to epistemic authority is not something that can be completely achieved through pedagogy alone when undergraduate classes operate within structures whose histories and realities are infused with what hooks (1994) names white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. And so, this research looks for and addresses limitations and barriers within the classroom and the structure of higher education as they are present in the learning experiences of community college students.

The site of this research was a community college in Central New York. The community college is an important site for this study because the students learn within a structure that is perceived by society to be the least prestigious of higher education's institutions. Along with the students it serves, community colleges hold low ranking in the educational hierarchy (Brint & Karabel, 1991). Thus, community college students are at risk of marginalization resulting from their collegiate identity, as well as the various targeted, non-dominant social identities they hold. This study primarily focused on two classroom sections that engaged a decolonial feminist pedagogy to frame the course *The Sociology of Gender*. Data was also collected from a course other than *The Sociology of Gender* course that did not engage with a decolonial feminist pedagogy. By decolonial feminist pedagogy, I mean a socio-political educational praxis that builds on feminist thoughts and visions of classroom spaces that promote student consciousness raising,

voice, empowerment, action, and transformation (Shrewsbury, 1993; hooks, 1994). Anchored in anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist curricula, decolonial feminist pedagogy incorporates instructional strategies in the classroom that promote critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) by fostering the interrogation of dynamics of power and privilege. Decolonial feminist pedagogy works to resist the domination and oppression of marginalized students (e.g., women, students of color; students from the Global South; low-income students) and create spaces where marginalized students' voices and experiences are centered, and they can claim epistemic authority (Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003, Buttaro, 2007). Moreover, pedagogy framed in decolonial feminism speaks back to structures that sustain colonial legacies of racism, sexism, and classism through systemic inequality embedded in the institutional culture (Mohanty, 2003).

The Sociology of Gender class, the course of focus in this research, was formerly taught with a traditional textbook that covered gender topics, terms and meanings in absence of a multicultural and intersectional identity approach. Once resumed, the spring course offering attracted 30 students while the summer course offering attracted 10 students. Within the two course sections of this research site, the curriculum drew from Estelle Disch's (2009) multicultural anthology, *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, which shared the diverse experiences and perceptions of numerous individuals through an intersectional lens. The course also drew from films on the social construction of gender across cultural contexts. There were a range of student course assignments and assessments that included: 1.) weekly critically reflexive journal writings addressing course reading content and in-class dialogue; 2.) a gender action project where students worked in small groups and organized gender awareness activities

for the campus and community; and 3.) a final paper on the gender action project experience. Instructionally situated in dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1970), students were immersed in sustained dialogue across social identity groups as they independently and collectively explored gender and intersectionality topics. In addition, students engaged with leading small group facilitation over the course of the semester.

This dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

- What is the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy praxis on students' experiences and learning outcomes?
- How does the praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy disrupt traditional hierarchies and claims to epistemic authority in the community college classroom?

A feminist standpoint methodology (Collins, 1986, 1991, 2000; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1983, 1988; hooks, 1984, Jagger, 2004; Smith, 2004) was the strongest approach to the methods of data collection and analysis in this study. This study drew from feminist theorists (Collins, 1986, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984) that built on early feminist standpoint theory and added voice to examine women's experiences through an intersectional lens that highlights the many differences within common experiences in diverse classrooms. In this study, feminist standpoint worked to center the voices and diverse experiences of the community college student participants. This research aims to explore the particularities of female community college students' experiences as they speak back to systems of power, privilege, and social inequity in the space of US higher education. This empirical study promotes the inclusion of community college students in knowledge production, and fosters the transformation of traditional pedagogical praxes across community college classrooms by illuminating the consequences of decolonial feminist pedagogy for community college students.

Research Significance

Contemporary scholarship on decolonial pedagogy in education focuses heavily on theorizing about the relationship between colonial legacies of hierarchy and domination and the normalizing of Eurocentric traditions and epistemological approaches that privilege dominant social identity groups and oppress targeted social identity groups (Davis, 2010; Dei, 2010; Grande, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Shajahan, 2005). In addition, contemporary scholarship on decolonial pedagogy in education has limited literature that presents accounts of the praxis of decolonial and feminist pedagogy as experienced from the author's personal instructional location as a faculty member in the college classroom (Fisher, 2001; Omatsu, 2009; Omolade, 1987; Toth, 2007). However, there is an absence of, and need for, empirical literature that examines the relationship between decolonial feminist pedagogy, students' classroom experiences, and the relationship between power and privilege in US community colleges. Just as it is important to explore pedagogical benefits that include claims to epistemic authority by community college students, critical consciousness, identity development, empowerment, collective leadership and action, and solidarity, it is also important to examine pedagogical limitations and explore experiences of struggle, discouragement, and frustration. This qualitative study of two sections of a feminist sociology classroom, *The Sociology of Gender*, at a community college contributes to current decolonial, feminist, and social justice education research. In addition, this study fosters the inclusion of community college students in knowledge making in US undergraduate classrooms. Moreover, this research spotlights the role of decolonial feminist pedagogy as a contributing force in the socio-political, economic, and pedagogical struggle to disrupt Eurocentric traditions of hierarchy, power and privilege,

and claims to epistemic authority, and speak back to colonial legacies and systemic inequalities rooted in racism, patriarchy, and classism in US higher education. The research works to contribute to the radical transformation of pedagogy through a decolonial feminist pedagogical framework grounded in anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist critique, and fundamentally reclaim the promise of democratic learning experiences for students across social identity groups in US community college classrooms.

Chapter Outline and Summary

In chapter 2, I share the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform research on community colleges, colonial legacies, and critical pedagogies. In chapter 3, I focus on research methodology. I present the rationale for the study, followed by a discussion of the research site, participant recruitment, and participant sample. Mixed qualitative methods for data collection are offered which include open-ended questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and content-analysis of student coursework. Moreover, I speak to how rapport was managed in the study followed by a discussion on data analysis, risks and ethics, and limitations. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the research findings chapters. In chapter 4, I discuss the relationship between decolonial feminist pedagogy and student outcomes for the classroom of engaged learners. In chapter 5, I illuminate *The Sociology of Gender* student participants' experiences with gender awareness and gender identity stemming from a discussion on critical moments related to the female experience in public spaces. Then, I go on to examine the participants' feminist standpoint development as connected to a decolonial feminist curriculum. In chapter 6, I discuss the relationship between pedagogy and student engagement in

community college classrooms and turn the discussion to normative vs. decolonial pedagogy practices. I highlight the community college classroom experiences of students who did not take *The Sociology of Gender*, followed by an illumination of the experiences of *The Sociology of Gender* students who reflected on their engagement in community college classrooms outside of *The Sociology of Gender*. Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude with a discussion of the research implications, make connections to current literature in the field, address research limitations, and offer recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

*“Most everyone is struggling here, it’s just a matter of how bad that struggle is”
-Ami, community college student*

Community College Background

The demographics of community college students have changed drastically since the institution known as “Democracy’s College” became part of the higher education landscape in the early 1900s (Boggs, 2010). Prior to the 1970s, research shows that community college students were primarily host to white middle class students who entered for the purpose of transferring to a four year college. Moreover, these students demonstrated the ability to do work at the college level without need for remedial classes to prepare them (Beach, 2011). Around the 1970s, the student demographic shifted to what remains today: a diverse student body representative of many racial, ethnic, and national identities, and first-generation college students many of whom must first enroll in remedial courses due to being underprepared by their high schools to take on college level work (Morest, 2013). While there is some variance across social class identity, data from the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS, 2002-06) indicates that of the students attending community colleges directly after high school, 44% identified as coming from families whose income was under \$25,000 a year. A longitudinal study by Attwell, Heil, and Reisel (2011) found that 68% of students who started community college had not graduated after six years from the start of the study. While demographics of community colleges have changed since the colleges’ arrival in communities across the US, low graduation rates have persisted since the early 1970s.

Bauman (2007) writes “The community- college boom occurred a generation after World War II, as immigrants from places of oppression and economic devastation, as well as returning veterans, tried to improve their lives” (p. 14). Those lives, however, dependent on education for social mobility, would arguably be tied to politics as well as education. Zwerling (1976) argues that the community college agenda was political at the core. Bauman (2007) expands upon Zwerling’s (1976) assertion and writes that the political agenda of community colleges was to, “Flunk low-income minority students in droves or shunt them into low-status service jobs to prove their unworthiness and thus dampen social dynamite” (p. 14). Currently, community colleges are recognized as sites of educational access that can prepare students for vocations or to transfer to a four year college, promote social mobility, and enhance the US economy (Obama, 2012). However, Morest (2013) writes that “Nearly half the students who start at community colleges depart within 3 years without transferring or earning a degree or certificate” (p. 327) a finding that challenges ideas about the democratic design of US community colleges and symbolizes institutional practices of oppression that negatively impact students’ lives.

Research

Tinto (2000) argues that student engagement in the community college classroom has a positive impact on students’ processes of learning and academic success.

Qualitative research on community college student engagement focuses on personal factors that impact student engagement on campus such as having a job or family life and having limited time to spend on campus outside of class (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013). In a qualitative study on the engagement of women of color community college

students, Rose, Sellars-Mulhern, Jones, Trinidad, Pierre-Louis, and Okomba (2014) reported that the women who expressed interest in increasing academic and social engagement in community college were often the students who had experienced academic success in community college. However, there was a strong sense among other participants in Rose et al.'s (2014) study that student social (student clubs) and academic engagement (small group work; attending office hours) could be a distraction to their learning and meeting school responsibilities, and thus some participants preferred autonomous learning opportunities.

The understanding of the impact of pedagogy on community colleges students' experiences is also important when exploring student engagement. Currently, there is a lack of contemporary literature on the impact of pedagogy on low-income community college students' experiences in a social justice classroom. However, one example that demonstrates this relationship effectively is McCarthy and Larson's (2012) analysis of a pedagogy anchored in social justice education that utilizes the theory and praxis of intersectionality to promote students understanding of oppression, privilege, and social identity. The authors argue for an intersectional approach that "centralizes the principle that the diversity in our society produces multiple perspectives based on our dominant and subordinated identities and the particular ways that they intersect" (p. 86). Drawing from pedagogical experiences in the community college classroom, McCarthy and Larson (2012) support the use of "intentional community building" through ice-breakers that are "low-risk, structured interactions", student created guidelines, "dialogue across differences" and small group work over the semester. McCarthy and Larson (2012) discuss community college students' experiences in the social justice classroom using

intersectionality and argue that “Low-income students often cannot, or are reluctant to, see beyond their own struggles with economic inequality. For example, white students’ ability to recognize how institutionalized racism impacts people of color in today’s society is eclipsed by their own experiences with poverty” (pp. 91-92). A White adult female student in an Introduction to Sociology class wrote, “I’ve never felt privileged because I’ve lived in poverty my entire life” (p. 92). Through the use of intersectionality in the community college Sociology classroom there is the potential for students to “understand that they can experience privilege while simultaneously experiencing poverty” (McCarthy & Larson, 2012, p. 92). Moreover, McCarthy and Larson (2012) explain that after engaging a social justice pedagogy that used intersectionality, low-income community college students “come to realize that they do not need to minimize or deny their own class-based oppression in order to acknowledge that other groups of people also experience oppression” (p. 99).

Qualitative research studies on marginalized students’ higher education experiences. This qualitative study aims to reveal how community college students are “reading the institution” (Erdreich & Lerner, 2005). Understanding how students see the culture, values, and practices of the college, and come to understand their place within the educational space through their lived experiences, can serve to illuminate the relationship between colonial legacies in higher education, pedagogy, knowledge, and students’ experiences. I turn now to three research studies and their findings as they relate to my research study. The studies of Erdreich and Lerner (2005), Ford and Malaney (2012), and Better (2013) are empirical examples of educational research that used qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and content-analysis of student work to

promote the voices of students and explore their educational experiences in relation to knowledge and power (Erdreich & Lerner, 2005; Better, 2013) and pedagogy and racial awareness and identity development (Ford & Malaney, 2012).

Erdreich and Lerner's (2005) critical ethnography used methods of in-depth interviews to explore the ways that hegemony and social hierarchy are reproduced and maintained within the site of classrooms and across a campus at a Hebrew university. Erdreich and Lerner (2005) conducted two case studies for the purpose of examining how the marginalization of two different groups-*Russian Jewish immigrants* and *Palestinian-Israel women*-is connected to the participants' understanding of university knowledge. Furthermore, they explored how the participants' interpretation of knowledge impacted their experiences with social group positioning, (i.e. did it reproduce and/or change group positioning in higher education?). In speaking to their research goal of revealing how the participants in the marginalized groups came to understand university knowledge, as well as how they interpreted that knowledge in context of the social group positioning at the university, Erdreich and Lerner (2005) write,

Entering the university involves an encounter with a new institutional system, the deciphering and interpretation of its rules, and the clarification of one's status within it. The Russians and the Palestinian women read the university institution through a double lens: as a new educational institution structured on principles of control, study skills, and evaluation unfamiliar to them from home and as an Israeli institution that teaches them about their place in relation to and within Israeliness. (2005, p.545)

Erdreich and Lerner (2005) felt that the juxtaposition of the different marginalized groups was a methodological strength of the study because it allowed for the revealing of the particularities of how university knowledge is understood and experienced across marginalized social identity groups.

The in-depth interviews and juxtaposition of participant marginalized groups in Erdreich and Lerner's (2005) study revealed a sense of "otherness" (p. 554) and "aloneness" (p. 545) across each group, as well as similar participant group experiences of not knowing how to navigate the university and feeling out of place at the university. The particularities of these experiences, however, were different across the marginalized groups, and such differences leads to a more representative vision of the university culture. For example, Russian Jew immigrants viewed language and differences in communication as a barrier to their grasping knowledge, while also viewing knowledge as power. The Russian Jew immigrants felt driven to understand knowledge in ways similar to dominant groups at the Hebrew university for the purpose of changing their social group positioning on campus and in society (Erdreich & Lerner, 2005).

On the contrary, Erdreich and Lerner (2005) share that Palestinian-Israeli women experienced an exclusion of Palestinian collective knowledge from the Hebrew university's "universal" knowledge, which many felt aims to teach students, for example in a Sociology class, about *Jewish society*, and not *Sociology*, resulting in feelings of otherness that led to silence, disempowerment, and lack of epistemic authority. Erdreich and Lerner (2005) conclude that offering spaces in ethnographic research for marginalized students to express their interpretations of university knowledge, as well as their experiences at the university, can lead to a redefinition of the reproduction of inequality, for example, through "national hierarchies" (p. 544), as well as open up and promote possibilities of redesigning social positioning of marginalized groups within higher education.

Ford and Malaney's (2012) qualitative research included methods of content-analysis of student work. Specifically, Ford and Malaney's research (2012) explored the experiences of 31 undergraduate students of color who participated in intra- and intergroup race dialogues on the campus of a historically White US institution. Over the semester, the students wrote papers that explored their outlooks and awareness about social identities, structures, and engagement with dialogic pedagogy related to the students' "articulation of race, racial identity, and racism" (Ford & Malaney, 2012, p. 20).

From their qualitative, inductively derived analyses of student work samples, Ford and Malaney (2012) describe a positive relationship between the exploration of racial identity and awareness through a pedagogy framed in dialogue. The content-analysis revealed feelings of personal and social transformation from the student participants in relation to the dialogic pedagogy used in their college classroom. Additionally, as a result of the dialogic pedagogy, students found the classroom to be a space where their voices were heard and their thoughts were engaged. The findings illuminated the impact that participation in race dialogues had on students understanding of race, racism, and racial identity. For many students, the race dialogues raised ethnic-racial consciousness which led to students grasping the impact of race at both individual and society levels. For students of color (SOC), participation in race dialogues increased their ability to challenge the Black/White binary. "This experience provided a safe space for many SOCs, especially multiracial students, to develop a sense of empowerment and pride in their multiple and intersecting identities, and to use these identities to challenge racial binaries" (Ford & Malaney, 2012, p. 26). For example, Mariana, a study participant, self-identified as a biracial Latina woman who pre-race dialogues felt pressured to fit into a

racial category. After the race dialogues, Mariana expressed that she is aware of the politics of the social construction of identity and “will use my fractioned identity to challenge society's social binaries and embrace difference” (p. 26). Furthermore, as students dialogued on experience of racial inequalities on campus, they came to recognize that they are “not alone in the struggle for racial justice” (Ford & Malaney, 2012, p. 30). By the end of the semester, students felt empowered and responsible to be agents of social change at their own college and beyond.

Better’s (2013) qualitative research uses content-analysis of student work to analyze student experiences in her Introduction to Sociology community college classrooms framed in a pedagogy that centered students’ lived experiences as knowledge. Better (2013) drew from the final papers of students enrolled in her Introduction to Sociology classes over a two year period. The pedagogy in the classroom was anchored in a curriculum where students actively engaged their learning by collecting data on their own lived experiences and analyzing those experiences through in-class dialogue and a written assignment. Content-analysis of students’ written work revealed an important finding on student engagement in a Sociology classroom framed in a pedagogy that disrupted traditional methods of instructing community college students (e.g., lecture; rote memorization techniques) through actively incorporating students’ lived experiences as knowledge. Better (2013) found that this pedagogy was significant in the learning and engagement of the community college students and argues, “Through this course, particularly through the active learning components, students became engaged both in the classroom and in their communities. Before taking sociology, students saw things happening around them and to them, but had no context to explain why. Now, students

realized that they have a hand in shaping the world they live in” (p. 7). Additionally, Better’s (2013) research revealed that participation in a pedagogy that centered students’ lived experiences resulted in consciousness-raising on social injustices and inequalities at institutional levels, increased perspective taking, and feelings of social responsibility to be active agents of social change.

Erdreich and Lerner's (2005) study illustrates the benefits of in-depth interviewing for the purpose of revealing the classroom experiences of students across two marginalized identity groups: Russian Jews and Palestinian-Israeli women at a Hebrew university. While Ford and Malaney's (2012) study illustrates the strengths of content-analysis of student work samples in exploring the benefits of dialogic pedagogy on students of color and multiracial students' racial identity development, awareness of racialized experiences in education at a historically white institution, and promoting racial justice. Better’s (2013) study demonstrates the importance of content-analysis of student papers for examining the relationship between pedagogies that center students’ lived experiences as knowledge in the community college classroom and community college students’ academic and personal engagement and growth. These three studies serve as empirical examples that support the beneficial use of qualitative methods for my study of how participation in a course grounded in decolonial feminist pedagogy (i.e., *The Sociology of Gender*) impacts the classroom experiences of students at a community college, including patterns of student engagement and claims to epistemic authority.

Theory

Post-colonial and decolonial theories in education. This study draws from anti-colonial, post-colonial, and decolonial theories that frame the understanding of higher

educational institutions as political sites of colonial legacy. Anti-colonialist Fanon (1963) writes that colonial domination sought to deliver a native creed that colonialism was a flame of light, a flicker of hope, in the otherwise darkened, barbaric lives of the colonized. This ideology has guided colonizers and colonized alike and fueled centuries of European imperialist rule in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Cesaire's (1972) critique of European colonization builds on Fanon's argument, while also responding to the theoretical position of Marx (1848) on the ruling class. Cesaire (1972) purports that colonial rule was an attempt to assimilate the proletariat's way of life with the cultural ideals of the ruling class by structuring institutions with hierarchical rule so that the power of the reigning bourgeois was stratified and protected in its dominant state within a capitalist system. Cesaire (1972) believed that institutions, education amongst them, legitimized a society's ideological norms and the social constructions of inequality embedded within their cultures, including the colonial legacies of racism, nationalism, classism, sexism, and patriarchy.

Braa and Callero (2006) write that decolonial theory brings hidden history to the forefront and keeps people mindful of the effects of colonialism from the past and of neocolonialism today. They assert that decolonial theory is a process of refusing domination and force in socio-political and historical realities in order to reclaim the vision of democracy, critical-consciousness, and freedom for all people. Education is one institution where decolonial theories can be applied. Dei (2010), drawing from Fanon (1963), critically analyzes the institution of education and asks: *Who does the marginalized population's participation serve?* Dei (2010) argues that the institution of education reproduces social inequalities by serving the ideological and political interests

of the hierarchical elite and delegitimizing the knowledge and experiences of the oppressed. This subordination of marginalized students serves to further problematize, silence, and isolate the “other” in education.

Post-colonial writer, Willinsky (1998) likens British colonial impact on the West to colonial knowledge systems and writes, “It is not hard to argue that the whole venture has about it something of a great public education project intent on bringing the world together under the roof of European learning” (p. 121). This “European learning” Willinsky (1998) references is conceptually referred to as *Eurocentrism*, a cultural practice of reading the world, and the experiences located within it, from the standpoint of European values and familiarities of understanding. Quijano (2000, p. 549) defines Eurocentrism as,

...the name of a perspective of knowledge whose systemic formation began in Western Europe before the middle of the seventeenth century.In the following centuries this perspective was made globally hegemonic, travelling the same course as the domination of the European Bourgeois class. Its constitution was associated with the specific bourgeois secularization of European thought and with the experiences and necessities of the global model of capitalist (colonial/modern) and Eurocentered power established since the colonization of America.

It is argued that US institutions of higher education are Eurocentered sites where traditions of hierarchical authoritarian rule persist and support systems of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Omatsu (2009) interrogates the bind between colonialism and higher education by arguing that colonialism is an underlying fundamental assumption that serves as a *pedagogical foundation*.

Colonial legacies such as Eurocentric traditions in pedagogy can be revealed through an analysis of undergraduate syllabi and curriculum that reflect text and readings aligned with European histories and interests, and an exclusion of multicultural texts,

readings, and consequently, genealogies (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, 2010). McLaren (2005) claims that Eurocentric allegiances reflected in syllabi and curriculum only serve to reinforce white supremacy. Linda T. Smith (1999) views Western colonization as having a normalized epistemological approach in higher education---this approach, she claims, impacts how disciplines are formed, organized, and sustained, as well as influences how readings are chosen in curriculums, in addition to impacting the everyday practices of scholars and students within the academy. hooks (1994) and Mohanty (2003) deliberate on the location of specific courses in curriculum and within liberal college institutions. Connecting to research on diversity in education, Mohanty (2003) writes about a “sort of attitudinal engagement with diversity that encourages an empty cultural pluralism and domesticates the historical agency of Third world people” (p. 200). It is the attitudinal engagement with diversity that Mohanty (2003) urges people to disrupt. The necessity of disruptions of attitudinal engagement with diversity are likewise supported by hooks (1994) who has sought to advance a specific feminist participatory and liberatory pedagogy in response to systems of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that draws from and relates to race, gender, and class experiences across cultures. As an example, hooks (1994) argues that where diversity and multi-culturalism are considered, classrooms must progress beyond traditional add and stir strategies, and instead engage a community of learners in dialogue and critical thinking on the role that power plays in maintaining social inequalities, and the importance of dialogue and action for disrupting status quo knowledge constructs.

Anti-racist and anti-capitalist critiques. According to Derman-Sparks (1997), “Racism in the United States originated in the developing capitalism and European

colonial expansion of the 15th century and, more specifically, in the formation and evolution of capitalism in American society” (p.13). The colonial legacies associated with racism can be found in the structure of Western higher education through *institutionalized racism; cultural racism; and individual forms of racism*. Anti-racist scholars often interconnect these concepts and define racism as follows: “Racism equals racial prejudice plus institutional power” (Derman-Sparks, 1997, p.10). Andrea Smith (2009) writes, “Thus, racism and sexism in universities are not products of racist or sexist individuals in the system; they are endemic to the system itself” (p.40).

Two racist colonial inheritances in higher education include *institutionalized* and *interpersonal racism*. “Institutionalized racism is a systemic white domination of people of color, embedded and operating in corporations, universities, legal systems, political bodies, cultural life, and other social collectives” (Desmond & Emribayer, 2012, p. 54). Coming into power from the trickle down of institutionalized racism, *interpersonal racism* is “racial domination manifest in everyday interactions and practices” (Desmond & Emribayer, 2012, p. 55). As colonization is rooted in capitalism, it is imperative that an anti-capitalist critique is applied to Western higher education if we are to more deeply reveal and understand the colonial chains that bind pedagogy to the structural inequalities of the institution.

Smith (2009) in her work on decolonizing the academy writes that,

Louis Althusser argued that educational systems are an “ideological apparatus” by which the capitalist system reproduces itself ideologically. “Education” is not innocent or neutral; it is designed to teach peoples to accept their subjection to colonial and capitalist structures. (p.40)

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that education reproduces capitalist social divisions of labor by producing a work force to staff varying positions of occupation

within the capitalist system. It can be further argued that pedagogy reproduces the capitalist social divisions of labor through colonization and Eurocentric legacies. Gloria Joseph (1988) writes, “Schools and schooling in capitalist America are very little different from other institutions and their methodological processes in capitalist America” (p. 462). Joseph (1988) further asserts that student and teacher experiences in the classroom are rooted in destructive experiences where students wind up wrongly educated by teachers who use “disinformation” tactics and chicanery” to achieve “success in keeping the inequalities and hierarchies that characterize capitalist America” (p. 462). Bowles and Gintis (1976) write that a complete revolution would be needed for education to break free from the binds of capitalism and be truly democratic. Joseph (1988) argues that this revolution needs to be situated in race as well, as did Bowles and Gintis (1976) who further argue that education serves to produce workers for the divisions of labor in capitalism. Joseph (1988) argues that the workers described, though subject to class based inequalities, will likely be White, and she feels that people of color and people from the Global South are not considered in Bowles and Gintis’ capitalist critique.

To Joseph (1988), an anti-capitalist critique in education must intersect with anti-racist critiques as well. Illustrations of this intersectional critique can be seen in the ways that Joseph (1988) uses black feminist pedagogy in her classes to push back against white Western capitalist educational pedagogy. One example of black feminist pedagogy offered by Joseph (1988) was when she asked students to create a list of words that are linked with the “black ghetto” (p. 470). The outcome was that Black and Puerto Rican students created a list of word associations that included “corruption,” “police brutality,”

“slum landlords” “insensitive city officials,” amongst other words. Joseph (1988) explains that afterwards, the students of color professed feeling comfortable in a class where “the white way is not the only way or the right way” (p. 470).” White students showed signs of discomfort and silence at first experiencing not having answers to contribute to what Joseph (1988) names “Afrocentric thought or “thinking black” (p. 470). However, by the end of the semester Joseph (1988) writes that “Eventually the vast majority of students realize and appreciate the value of being exposed to the consistency of a perspective that gives credence and respect to all people of different cultures...” (p. 470).

Education is a system of reproduction and serves to maintain and reproduce exploitative capitalist systems (Apple, 1990; McLaren, 2005). The domination of the cultural elite can be seen through the cultures of consent and accommodation that plague Western higher education. This white capitalist supremacy reproduces the attitudes and actions of the members of the culturally elite: (e.g., White, middle and upper class, and Western people). In fact, there are narratives for social norms in Western higher education that I argue support and sustain hierarchy. For example, an authoritarian pedagogy that adopts the “banking model” (Freire, 1970) can result in limited to no challenges, and instead rewards student obedience and conformity as an academic skill set that is seen as necessary for students’ advancement into the world of the upper class. In this quest toward social class advancement, and happening within a system of white capitalist patriarchy, a false consciousness is developed that sustains the ideologies and practice of a hegemonic, “banking” pedagogy, and situates students in a specific narrative

where in the end their experiences are preparing them for certain types of labor and specific ways of classed life.

Education reproduces *cultural capital* in capitalist systems, and this capital is extremely symbolic in society. Sociologist Bourdieu (1986) contends that privileged narratives for social norms are situated in cultural capital, a form of domination that enables the hierarchal elite to claim epistemic authority for their personal advancement within the institution, (e.g., education) and beyond. While Braa and Callero (2006) write that solutions include the production of a counter-hegemony and culture that hold capitalist hegemony under a constant state of accusation and critique. Smith (1999) writes that “to challenge systems we must build and make our own power” (p. 43), which can be done by disrupting colonial legacies in college classrooms, and engaging the power of the lived experiences of the community of learners.

Critical theories of pedagogy. In Paulo Freire’s (1970) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he describes work with members of Brazil’s peasant class. Freire imagined a liberatory literacy program that would cultivate dignified learning experiences amongst the peasant adult learners by creating space and opportunity for them to claim epistemic authority. From this reimagined education, Freire (1970) crafted pedagogical strategies grounded in dialogue, critical consciousness where students “read the world” through a historical and soci-political lens, action, and reflection that would transfer knowledge, while also centering the lived experiences of the marginalized and lessening their oppression (Breuing, 2011). These disruptions to traditional claims to epistemic authority deeply mattered to the dignified epistemes of the peasant class of Brazil, and transnationally, to theorists imagining new visions for the educational worlds they had

come to know. In this way, critical pedagogy theory has been the foundation for other theories of pedagogy such as critical feminist pedagogy and decolonial pedagogy.

To Freire, schools impaired the poor in all ways: physical, emotional, socio-cultural, and political. Freire, a critical educator, viewed people as learners of the world. By acknowledging that human learners exist in context of their culture, Freire drew out a framework of critical pedagogy that was deeply situated in *lived experiences*. For Freire (1970), a first step toward examining lived experience, and experiencing liberation, was looking critically at the world around him, which resulted in his seeing the ways schools act in opposition to the learning and dignity of marginalized student groups. In reading the world, and urging students to do the same, Freire argued for a disruption of traditional oppressive models of teaching such as the “banking” model of education that transmits knowledge from teacher to student in automated and one-directional ways. To counter the "banking" model, Freire (1970) conceptualized a model of problem-posing education that supports a teacher-student relationship rooted in trust. This relationship situates both teacher and student as co-learners, thus reducing the hierarchical ranking of the classroom structure. Inspired heavily by Freire, and drawing early influence from the philosophy of Dewey (1916), critical pedagogy theorist Giroux (2011) argues for the importance of critical theory throughout education. Giroux’s (2011) focus is heavily rooted in understanding the institutional interests and allegiances of schools by questioning whose reality and whose futures are symbols of and symbolic to the school. Such a question is useful for a pedagogy project that analyzes the norms and values within the structure of higher education as they reproduce and sustain social inequalities and impact the lived experiences of marginalized students.

Critical pedagogy is a theory and praxis that has also drawn sharp criticisms. Ellsworth (1992) speaks back to critical pedagogy and asks: *Whose story and whose knowledge is right?* Can students truly be liberated when their lives have been compromised by institutional and systemic inequalities? Which students become empowered? Luke (1992) notes the essentialist qualities of critical pedagogy and calls them “androgynous” and “naïve.” The dominant voice in pedagogy has long belonged to men, and in the absence of feminist analytics there is always the risk of missing critical insights into educational and pedagogical experiences of girls and women, both as subjects and producers of empirical research and as voices in framing pedagogical theory and praxis. Luke (1992) questions the real power relations at play in critical pedagogy as she looks upon it as a project of disconnected methodology aimed at playing collective mind control over groups of people and marching them towards liberation in ways that exude power as well. Responses to such criticisms surrounding the lack of feminist and gender analytics in critical pedagogy included expanding upon the theory and praxis by developing a new conceptual framework known as critical feminist pedagogy.

Critical feminist pedagogy. Shrewsbury (1993) claims that empowerment, leadership, and community are the three primary conceptions of critical feminist pedagogy theory. Feminist pedagogy begins by bringing attention to the unequal power relationships that exist in schools, and then reflexively considers what empowerment means in the context of unbalanced outcomes of power in the hegemonic structure of schools. Critical feminist pedagogy looks at this unbalanced power structure and responds with a call for student empowerment through what Shrewsbury (1993) identifies as “power as creative community energy” which shifts the traditional understanding of

power as *domination* to power as *capability*. Through this model, critical feminist pedagogy theory argues that, “Our classrooms need not always reflect an equality of power, but they must reflect movements in that direction” (Shrewsbury, 1993, p.168).

Critical feminist pedagogy has been a foundation for many who hold feminist solidarities with marginalized identity groups in education (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Shrewsbury, 1993; Weiler, 1991). Yet, with good intentions at the core of feminist solidarities and commitments, a critical question that feminists must continue to raise is: *Whose experience does this research project speak to?* Second-wave feminism was criticized as being feminism for and by white sisters. Critical pedagogies have the capacity to foster transformative pedagogical praxis; yet with feminist history as a cautionary tale it is necessary that critical feminist pedagogy be scrutinized to see if it advances essentialism and exclusion. For example, Villenas, Godinez, Bernal, and Elenes (2006) assert that while critical pedagogy and critical feminist pedagogy address important issues in education, all too often the voices and lived experiences of Latinas/Chicanas are excluded. It remains important to question if critical feminist pedagogy analyzes women as women with the same female experiences, or if it considers women as females whose identities intersect with other social identities like race, ethnicity, class, nation, faith, ability, and sexuality.

Critical feminist pedagogy has made important contributions to research and praxis yet it does not exist in absence of critique. One critique with critical feminist pedagogy relates to the concept of coming to voice. Can someone bring another person to voice? Gur Ze’ev (2005) criticizes critical feminist pedagogy with being overtly paternalistic and authoritative when expecting students of color to participate in dialogue.

Similarly, Orner (1992), critiques the experience of coming to voice as problematic because marginalized voices may serve the interests of the dominant group in ways that are not exemplary of liberation, but rather domination and exploitation and thereby sustain systems of hierarchy and power. While Gore (1993), comparably to Luke (1992), critiques feminist pedagogy's aim of empowering all student learners by drawing from Foucault's (1980) claim that power is inescapable from our lives. Therefore, in the classroom there may always be relationships of power that create barriers for the goal of empowering all students. Gore (1993) and Luke's (1992) concerns then center on the question of which students become empowered, and at whose expense.

Grande (2007), in a position similar to hooks (1994), argues for a progressive critical feminist pedagogy that includes intersectionality as a method to reduce the risk of marginalizing people of color, people from the Global South, working class/poor, and queer persons. Intersectionality is a theory and a methodological tool that helps one get at the social interactions of individuals across social identity groups, and reflects the diversity of common experiences of marginalized people at the crossroads of various social identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). Moreover, feminist post-colonial theorists such as Mohanty (2003) have urged for the progression and decolonizing of pedagogy in feminist projects. Mohanty (2003, p. 201) writes,

.....decolonizing pedagogical practices requires taking seriously the relation between knowledge and learning, on the one hand, and student and teacher experiences, on the other. In fact, the theorization and politicization of experience is imperative if pedagogical practices are to focus on more than the mere management, systemization, and consumption of disciplinary knowledge.

In context of US higher education, taking seriously the relation between knowledge and learning demands understanding the role of colonial legacies such as Eurocentric

traditions in the classroom, and grasping the impact of those traditions on the diverse and intersecting lived experiences of students.

Decolonial pedagogy. Decolonial pedagogy, based in Freirean (1970) traditions of critical pedagogy, and Fanonian (1963) traditions of decolonization, “responds to the history of colonization, the neocolonial presence within the US and global contexts, resistance, agency, and methods of decolonization through educational praxis” (Dei, 2010, p. 23). Dei (2010) urges for the creation of a decolonized learning space. To achieve a decolonized learning space, participants must address questions of power, history, knowledge, identity, and representation. Activism and the resistance of colonial legacies of power and domination must be rewarded as positive interactions. Graveline (1998) believes that disrupting Eurocentric traditions in Western higher education, which include pedagogical traditions situated in curriculum and instructional strategies, is synergetic with a transformation of Eurocentric consciousness. Tejada et al. (2003) proclaim that decolonizing pedagogy recognizes pedagogical hegemony. This implies that decolonial pedagogies would result in further revelations of Eurocentric traditions and accommodations in US higher education: institutional social inequalities embodied in syllabi, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and the structures of Western higher education that reproduce and sustain internalized colonization in classrooms where dominance and exploitation are rewarded and resistance remains an unsettled reward. Decolonizing theory, methods, and research must be put into action. In decolonizing pedagogy, one should work to excavate the “othered” history, and create spaces and opportunities for listening to and engagement with the voices, testimonies, and experiences of marginalized students in US undergraduate classrooms. Buttaro (2007)

reasons that decolonizing pedagogies must create critical consciousness-raising for working class, indigenous, and people of color. Buttaro (2007) urges for a pedagogical praxis of storytelling and centering students' voices that transforms consciousness and support democratic learning spaces.

Iseke-Barnes (2008) writes about introductory decolonizing activities for the undergraduate classroom that “engage students in the initial steps in understanding the systematic structure of colonization” (p.123). Understanding of these steps which include “experiences, processes and effects of colonization and its historical and current realities.....serves as the basis for understanding from which to draw out understandings of colonization” (p. 123). For example, Iseke-Barnes (2008) describes an activity she uses annually in teaching Aboriginal or Indigenous studies courses at a Canadian university. First, students are asked to imagine two separate societies. The first society is characterized by principles of separation, hierarchy, and competition. The second society is organized by values of connection, equal value, and cooperation. The students must work together to create a chart that illustrates the processes and outcomes of society 1 taking over society 2. Students work through their ideas about life in those societies, and descriptions of each society, and then share out their findings. In a follow up activity, Iseke-Barnes (2008) has student groups write up another chart where they imagine they are members of society 1 and are tasked with overtaking society 2. Each group must write down the colonial strategies they would use to colonize society 2, and then they chart out the consequences of their colonial tactics on the lives of the members of society 2. The outcome is a repeated pattern of students identifying the “interconnected nature of systems of oppression and colonization” (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 136). Finally, in-depth

dialogue occurs on what the students shared out followed by the instructor (Iseke-Barne) asking the students how they know so much about being colonizers. Results include students' consciousness raising about the lack of knowledge they have received throughout their education that illuminates the histories and realities of Indigenous people. Students also begin to understand their social location in a North American country with a colonial history. In addition, students seek to engage decolonial theory and praxis in effort to make change from their locations as students in higher education sites where colonial legacies persist.

Another example of decolonial pedagogy is Omatsu's (2009) assignment of political community tours to students in his Asian American Labor studies class. Omatsu (2009) uses political tours of communities as a decolonial pedagogical tool in the undergraduate classroom. This pedagogical strategy requires students to organize and lead a political tour in the local university communities of Southern California where Asian Pacific immigrants work and/or live. Students then write an essay addressing a series of questions that begin with critical reflection on the knowledge they hold on Asian Pacific immigrants gained from their previous Asian American and Ethnic Studies courses, followed by a description and analysis of the knowledge they gained from the process of the political tour, and finally, by envisioning an extended role for university students in the local community. Omatsu's (2009) strategy of decolonial pedagogy disrupts traditional claims to epistemic authority by dominant groups by centering the communities and Asian American immigrants as knowers, and dislocates Eurocentric hierarchical instructional traditions in Western higher education. It is critical that the relations to power and hierarchies in higher education are drawn into deep consideration

so that historically underrepresented groups such as Asian American immigrants-whose experiences are often studied from within the rooms of the academy or through tourist and voyeuristic tours that include visits to landmarks, but rarely from political tours- can be understood in terms of a historical and socio-political context that reveals local meanings of past and present experiences that disrupt the meanings assigned to those experiences by dominant groups.

Decolonial pedagogy and feminist theories of knowing. Pedagogy situated in Eurocentric traditions serves to sustain claims to epistemic authority from privileged groups and thereby reproduce the colonized/dominant structure. In response to the legacy of colonized higher education, critical scholars have responded by transforming their scholarship and pedagogical praxis to reflect anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchy ideals situated in a decolonizing pedagogy framework. The transformation of scholarship and pedagogy is a method of colonized resistance and is a symbolic act of social justice for decolonizing higher education. Decolonization can happen at the theoretical, methodological, and applied praxis level. In social justice scholarship, the choice to engage the decolonial results in knowing that there is a different landscape to be experienced and understood *within* the colonized structure (Buttaro, 2007; Davis, 2010; Dei, 2010; Dei & Asgharzadesh, 2001; Graveline, 1998; Haig-Brown, 2009; Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Kuokkanen, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Omatsu, 2009; Smith, A., 2009; Smith, L., 1999; Tejeda et al., 2003; and Zavala, 2010). It is important that this landscape is presented through the voice and narration of the marginalized and not from a fast snapshot offered by the hierarchical elite who might prompt an interpretation of the

landscape that is narrow and lacking in epistemic authority across diverse social identities.

One significant epistemological approach that could be applied to a decolonial pedagogical framework is *feminist standpoint epistemology* which is a practice of centering the relationship between knowledge and power. To explore what happens when knowledge is made and produced from the hierarchical elite vs. oppressed and marginalized persons, scholars across academic disciplines, such as Smith (2004), Harding (2004), and Collins (1991), have applied a feminist standpoint epistemology to their scholarship. For the sake of students' staking equitable claim to epistemic authority in the community college classroom, it is critical that students are positioned to build knowledge in specific and relevant ways, as demonstrated in Better's (2013) aforementioned research, so that they may produce a new vision of reality that pushes back against traditional Eurocentric claims to pedagogical experiences and situated ways of knowing. Feminist standpoint epistemology is one approach to deeply understanding the relationship between power and knowledge in educational contexts.

As argued before, pedagogy situated in Eurocentric traditions serves to sustain claims to epistemic authority from privileged groups and thereby reproduces the colonized/dominant structure. Foucault (1980) theorizes the relation of knowledge and power; knowledge is a machine that drives power in Western cultures. With attention to the historical narrative of Western higher education, there may be resistance to attempts to disrupt the traditional "knower" in Western higher education, yet it is critical that these disruptions are engaged. The next chapter illustrates a research design and methods for this study as it moves toward an examination of decolonial pedagogy in the community

college classroom and explores if decolonial feminist pedagogy disrupts traditional claims to knowledge in the community college classroom and the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy on the experiences of community college students.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methods

“For the first time now, I’m looking at some of my other classes and the way we are taught, and I’m questioning that. I’m thinking, why aren’t we being critical thinkers and critical writers? Why don’t they see us as people who can do that work?”

-Nevaeh, community college student

This research examines the impact of pedagogy on low-income women undergraduates’ experiences in the classrooms of a Central New York community college. Two samples of students were identified: students that participated in two sections of *The Sociology of Gender* course which was anchored in decolonial feminist pedagogy, and students who did not participate in *The Sociology of Gender* course. Mixed-methods of qualitative research included open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and content-analysis of student coursework to take up the research questions that guided this study.

The research questions included:

- What is the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy praxis on students' experiences and learning outcomes?
- How does the praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy disrupt traditional hierarchies and claims to epistemic authority in the community college classroom?

In-depth interviews were conducted with community college students across two sections of the course *The Sociology of Gender* and weekly critically reflexive journal writing pertaining to course readings and in-class dialogue were analyzed. As an addition to the primary focus of the study, open-ended questionnaire results were collected from a classroom of students at the community college who did not participate in *The Sociology of Gender* course. This chapter provides the rationale for the research study and includes the research methodology and researcher social location in context of the study. A

discussion is then offered on the research site and recruitment of participants, description of sample, data collection and analysis, risks and ethics, and limitations of the study.

Rationale for Study

This dissertation utilizes qualitative mixed-methods including in-depth interviews and content-analysis of student coursework to explore women undergraduates' experiences across two course sections of *The Sociology of Gender* at a Central New York community college. Open-ended questionnaires were used to further the understanding of undergraduates' experiences with pedagogy in courses other than *The Sociology of Gender*. The study was designed with mixed research methods to create a comprehensive picture of what the student participants experienced in context of the community college site. A holistic account of students' experiences across classrooms can further understanding of the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy on women undergraduates' experiences. This understanding can produce evidenced based support of the role decolonial feminist pedagogy plays in engaging and transforming students, and informing pedagogical praxis in US higher education. A strength of qualitative research methods is how the analysis of data illuminates findings that open a window on the *particularities* of students' classroom experiences, including constructive moments of learning and engagement, as well as barriers that arise from liberatory techniques aimed at engaging marginalized voices and empowering marginalized students such as low-income women undergraduates in community college classrooms.

Methodology

For the purpose of excavating the lived experiences of the students in the classroom site, the research used the methodologies of *feminist standpoint theory*.

Harding (2004) describes standpoint theory as a natural and social science philosophy. Moreover, she explains that standpoint theory is an epistemology, as well as a methodology, and also engages the political. Feminist standpoint theorists Collins (1986, 1991, 2000); Harding (2004); Hartsock (1983, 1988); Jagger (2004); and Smith (2004) among others, developed feminist standpoint theories that promote a science that excavates past the surface of social terrains that men and women occupy relationally, reveals a variety of social identities and lived experiences, raises critical-consciousness, and promotes social change in hierarchical relationships between people and places.

Smith (2004) argues that the women's perspectives cannot be a post-script to a dominant discourse, because without a centralized position, the women's perspective risks uninterrupted marginalization. Feminist standpoint theory claims a place for women to situate their local, social knowledge *at the start* of theory, research, and politics. "The only way of knowing a socially constructed world is from knowing it within. We can never stand outside it" (Smith, 2004, p. 24). Feminist standpoint is critical because it reveals the experiences of the oppressed (e.g., women), while also revealing the structures of the ruling class (e.g., "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1994). Jagger (2004) argues that historically, the worldview---which is in part shaped by social science research---reflects the dominant group's values and interests. Feminist standpoint theory is a tool for disrupting epistemic authority, and advancing the epistemic privileging of women. By epistemic privilege I mean, the situated knowledge that establishes women as knowers in specific ways. The very oppressions of women, when voiced and understood, can speak back to the structure of dominance in hierarchical systems, (e.g., higher education). In this important way, "...standpoint theories map how

a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage” (Harding, 2004, p.7-8).

Utilizing feminist standpoint theory as my research methodology promoted the creation of spaces that foregrounded and illuminated the experiences of community college students, and centered their voices and testimonies. By centering participants’ voices through such methods as in-depth interviews, and analysis of student work that captured their voices and feelings about their lived experiences, the study aimed to create spaces for community college students to be the authorities of their lives and claim epistemic authority. The step of centering participants' voices reduced the researcher bias that may have come with my role as the sole researcher interpreting the participants' experiences. This was especially critical because while I may share similar social identities and locations with the participants (e.g., female, low-income, single parent status), I also have social identities and locations that differ from some of the participants (e.g., White, European, late-thirties, graduate degree level of education) which could have impacted my analysis. The researcher risks and limitations of this study will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Research Site and Participant Recruitment

This study took place at a Central New York community college. This community college has a diverse student body comprised of students of many races, ethnicities, nations, social classes, genders, sexualities, faiths, abilities, and ages. Historically, the college was founded in the 1940s as a two year public college and was part of an experimental run of post-World War II community colleges. Per the college website, the aim of the school was to prepare students for jobs that were technical and

categorized as semiprofessional. In the late 1940s, the college was officially recognized by the state as a “community college” and was sponsored by the local county in the early 1950s. The college has expanded in past decades and currently offers academic courses to prepare students through vocational programs, career programs, and transfer programs. The community college is located in a small city with a history of strong industry through textile mills and tool and die. However, in the post-industrial era, the small city experienced major loss of industry and financial distress connected to job and population loss. Currently, the small city is home to many refugees of war from countries such as Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq.

Diversity is a buzzword across many campuses and holds specific meaning with regard to community colleges. Phillippe and Patton’s (2010) “National Profile of Community Colleges” illustrates the diverse demographics of US community college students. According to Phillippe and Patton (2010), forty-six percent of community college students are 25 or older, while thirty-two percent are at least 30 years old. The average age of community college students is 29. Fifty-eight percent of students are women. Twenty-nine percent of community college students have annual household incomes less than \$20,000. Eighty-five percent of community college students balance their studies with full or part-time work. More than half (fifty-four percent) have full-time jobs. Thirty percent of those who work full time also attend full-time classes (twelve or more credit hours). Among students in their thirties, the rate of working students climbs to forty-one percent. Finally, students of color constitute thirty percent of community college enrollments nationally, with Latino/a students representing the fastest-growing racial/ethnic population.

For this study, the community college student is an important participant. As reflected in Phillippe and Patton's (2010) profile of community colleges, students' social identities often situate them in marginalized social identity groups. The diversity of the student identities in *The Sociology of Gender* ranged across identities of race, ethnicity, nation, gender and sexuality, faith, and ability. There was less diversity across social class status with the vast majority of students from *The Sociology of Gender* self-identifying as low-income (e.g., working-class and poor). This information further identifies the community college classroom as a space where students hold at least one marginalized identity. It also points to the complexity within the research site. For instance, in a marginalized educational space, who is marginalized and how is this marginalization experienced? An intersectional approach to the exploration of decolonial feminist pedagogy contributes to an analysis that recognizes there are differences in how marginal statuses manifest in marginalized educational spaces, and in how students experience the community college classroom.

There were different classroom settings within the research site of the study. The study was primarily focused on two classroom sections of the course *The Sociology of Gender* at the community college, and secondarily included students from a classroom outside of the *The Sociology of Gender*. With respect to *The Sociology of Gender* course, I had previously taught the prospective participants from two past class sections of *The Sociology of Gender*. This study was approved by Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board. Importantly, recruitment of former students was ethical because none of the students were enrolled in my classes at the time of the research

study, and I will not be teaching these former students in the future due to the nature of my course assignments being at the introductory level.

I sent a recruitment announcement to former students from *The Sociology of Gender* via email. In the email, I communicated my interest in doing an analysis of their experiences in *The Sociology of Gender* with attention to their coursework (e.g., journal writings), the gender action project, and in-class dialogue sessions. All recruited students were informed that the study was voluntary and that there was no obligation to participate in the study. For the case of recruitment from *The Sociology of Gender*, students were asked to respond to me via email if they were interested in participating in the research study and giving their permission to have their student coursework analyzed, as well as agreement to participate in a one to one in-depth hour long interview session. The recruitment email communicated to the students that the in-depth interviews would be recorded. Moreover, the recruitment email stipulated participant anonymity. Additionally, the email discussed the fact that the interviews would be transcribed, labeled with a code, password protected, and stored in a locked location. Students were informed about the process of receiving an informed letter of consent upon agreement to be interviewed for the study. Contact with the participants for the purpose of arranging for an interview occurred via email and in the order that the letters of consent were received. One to one in-depth interviews were conducted in a private conference room in the community college's library.

I offered the informed consent letter to the participants at the start of the one to one in-depth interview session, and explained that I would answer questions as needed. Participants were given time to ask any clarifying questions. The informed letter of

consent addressed the anonymity protection of student participants, as well as the right of research participants to stop participation in the study at any time, which they were reminded of prior to beginning the interview. The informed letter of consent included a sentence stating that conversations that occur organically pre- or post- the in-depth interview would be considered an extended conversation from the field and would therefore be usable in the research study, while following research policies of anonymity. I told the students that a potential benefit of participation in the study was that their responses could help inform social justice educational research and praxis.

The students did not receive any type of exchange for their participation, such as a small gift or token of appreciation, as I did not feel that an exchange would have impacted the student participation rate. Former students from *The Sociology of Gender* classes had regularly approached me and sought to engage in conversations about the course topic of sociology of gender, and/or hold conversations about the meaning of classroom dialogue and classroom interactions for their role as students in other classes as well as related to experiences in their personal lives. Those social interactions gave me a strong sense that the students' experiences in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom were positive. Therefore, it was my sense that those affirmative feelings would create an interest in participation in a study related to students' course experiences and an exchange for participation seemed unnecessary.

I also recruited student participants to complete an open-ended questionnaire in an effort to gather data related to students' community college classroom experiences in courses outside of *The Sociology of Gender*. The open-ended questionnaire design was chosen so that participants' responses would be in their own words and lend toward

revealing multiple experiences. To recruit participants and administer the open-ended questionnaire, I approached a colleague who had previously expressed similar scholarly interests and whom I believed would likely grant me access to her classroom for the purpose of inviting students to be participants in my study. The average class size at the community college is thirty students, and so I anticipated the recruitment of twenty-five to thirty students. On the day of my visit, I made a short announcement to the students in the class that I was looking for participants to answer an open-ended questionnaire of approximately four questions related to their experiences in classrooms across the college. If students were interested in participating in my study, I distributed a letter of consent that followed the procedures outlined above for *The Sociology of Gender* participant recruitment processes, and then proceeded with handing out the open-ended questionnaires which were completed and collected during the class session. When students were done, they placed the completed open-ended questionnaire and signed letter of consent in a manila envelope that I had on an empty desk at the front of the classroom.

Description of Sample

Students from the sociology of gender. Stemming from the positive conversations I had with students on campus after the completion of their enrollment in *The Sociology of Gender*, I anticipated the response rate of approximately 65% (n=25) from students who took the class. It was important that I recruited all students from the class so as to most fully grasp how pedagogy impacted students' experiences in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom in relation to diverse, intersectional social identities. While some students took the course in the spring of their final year and no longer used

the college email system, it was the case that I had student contact information through my faculty resource page (e.g., primary residence addresses and secondary email addresses) that I used to access students who were no longer affiliated with the college due to graduation, or resulting from an interruption or conclusion of their educational studies.

The Sociology of Gender classrooms reflected diverse social identities. The classrooms were comprised of approximately 25 self-identified females and 5 self-identified males (first class section) and 9 self-identified females and 1 self-identified male (second class section). In both course sections, there had been active participation from both female and male students. In the participant sample (n=25) that drew from across the 2 class sections, 100% of the students self-identified as female and there were no male participants. Approximately 60% of the students were White, and 40% of the students were students of color (SOC). Approximately 10% of all students self-identified as being homosexual¹, while approximately 90% self-identified as being heterosexual. Across both course sections, approximately 80% of the students self-identified as working-class, 10% of the students self-identified as poor, and 10% of the students self-identified as middle-class. Across both class sections, students self-identified their ethnic identities in the following ways: African, African-American, Bosnian, Dominican, Irish-American, Italian-American, American Indian, Polish-American, Puerto Rican, Sudanese, Tunisian, and Thai-American. Across both class sections, approximately 10% of the students self-identified as recent immigrants and/or refugees of war living in the US. These students occupied diverse national statuses and represented countries from

¹ Homosexual was the term students themselves used in self-identification.

² The Clothesline Project is a national project to raise awareness about violence against women through the visible testimony of female survivors on the

areas of North America, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Across both class sections, the students were approximately 35% Catholic, 30% Christian, 15% Muslim, 10% agnostic, 5% Jewish, and 5% Protestant. Across both class sections, students self-identified themselves as able-bodied, while approximately 5% of students across both class sections self-identified as having socio-emotional disabilities such as depression and social anxiety. (Appendix 1)

Students from a class outside of the sociology of gender. There were a total of 30 students who completed the open-ended questionnaire. The course instructor informed me that the students in the course had completed a minimum of one academic semester at the community college prior to taking her course in the spring semester. I did not ask the students from the class outside of *The Sociology of Gender* for demographic information. While students completed the questionnaire I counted 18 women and 12 men. This identification was based on the participants' visible appearance, and I acknowledge that the participants may have self-identified their sex and/or gender in a different way.

Methods for Data Collection

I used in-depth interviews, content-analysis of student coursework samples, and open-ended questionnaires as tools to gather data for this qualitative study. Leedy and Ormond (2010) describe *ethnography* as the in-depth analysis of a research site. The focus of the ethnographic research is not solely on the individual, but instead, focuses on the culture of the site (e.g., the culture of the community college classroom). To collect data, ethnographers employ site-based observations, in-depth interviews, and content-analysis to unearth the principles, values, beliefs, and way of life of a particular site.

While this study did not use participant-observation, it drew from critical ethnography's other data collection methods (e.g., in-depth interviews and content-analysis) in effort to build on the post-Enlightenment theoretical customs of exploring research participants in their natural context (e.g., undergraduate students in community college classrooms). Informed by critical ethnography research methods (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2012), this study takes seriously the relationship between knowledge and socio-cultural politics in effort to contribute to knowledge on decolonial feminist pedagogy and social justice education in US community colleges.

In-depth interviews. One research method for this project was in-depth interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) write that in qualitative research, "the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the research can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p.103). Participants were asked a series of in-depth, open-ended interview questions that covered topics such as how the students experienced dialogue on controversial gender topics; how the students experienced raised awareness and perspective taking on gender topics; and how the gender action project impacted students' critical consciousness, identity development, empowerment, collective leadership and action, and solidarity. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time. (Appendix 2)

Content-analysis of student coursework samples. As a second method of research, I gathered student coursework from two course sections of *The Sociology of Gender* at a Central New York community college. The materials included: critically reflexive journal writings, in-class written responses to intersectional prompts related to gender, and a final reflection paper on the gender action project (a small group, semester long assignment where students organized campus and community wide gender

awareness activities). The data of student coursework samples was not produced by research methods but through pedagogical practices. Each week, students were asked to write critically reflexive journal writings connected to course content and in-class dialogue. The course content grounded the sociology of gender in decolonial feminist pedagogy and drew from multicultural readings most of which were anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist. Classroom dialogue evolved from the weekly critically reflexive journal writings on the weekly reading assignments. Dialogue ranged from whole class discussion to small group dialogue circles. Students also wrote about their social locations in relation to the week's topic through self-examination that offered an intersectional analysis of gender in society.

Open-ended questionnaire. The third method for this study was the use of open-ended questionnaire. I distributed the open-ended questionnaire to a sample of students in a sociology course separate from *The Sociology of Gender* at the same community college. The open-ended questionnaire asked questions related to the students' classroom experiences across classes at the community college. By including students from outside of *The Sociology of Gender* classroom in this study, I was open to including data on additional themes about the lived experiences of students as they relate to pedagogy in community college classrooms. I felt that the open-ended questionnaire could illuminate student experiences at the community college and could inform me of student outcomes stemming from classroom experience. Additionally, I believed that the open-ended questionnaire data could strengthen the understanding of the impact that decolonial feminist pedagogy can have on student engagement and experiences in settings such as the community college classroom. (Appendix 3)

Managing rapport. I worked to establish and manage a strong and positive rapport with all of the research participants. Going into the study, I sensed that one challenge to rapport might be that the participants who were my former students from *The Sociology of Gender* might not see me as “researcher” but as “instructor.” Likewise, I also needed to switch hats in these research interactions and approach students as research participants, while presenting myself as a researcher, in addition to being their former instructor. Therefore, I engaged on familiar yet professional terms during all interactions with the student participants. I feel that professionally managed rapport was critical to establishing myself as a respectable and credible researcher in the participants’ eyes. Likewise, I showed respect for the educational experiences of the participants, including respect of their narratives and their student coursework samples. I treated the research site and all participants the way that I would wish to be treated if I were acting as a participant in someone else's research study: organized, engaged, patient, and grateful. I also stressed the anonymity and rights of all participants through oral communication and informed consent forms.

Data Analysis

I wrote memos from the field immediately after conducting a one to one in-depth interview. The transcription process occurred upon interview completion and the coding process subsequently followed. I found the transcription of the in-depth interviews to be an important process in the data analysis as it allowed me to recall a type of researcher’s memory. Listening to the participants’ voices evoked feelings from during the interview sessions and brought back important memory of the body language and facial expressions that accompanied the participants’ responses. For example, while

transcribing a portion of an interview where a participant described the challenges of speaking in most college classes, I recalled the way she looked away, then down at the table, and how her eyes were misted over when she eventually made eye contact with me. Clearly, describing this dialogic challenge was painful for her. In review of my post-interview memos, I realized that I had not jotted down notes of that moment from the interview. I was surprised that I had omitted an important, telling moment. Therefore, the transcription strengthened my overall analysis.

The data analysis lead to the identification of patterns from which the construction of categories, followed by a coding system, was developed. Analyses were used to identify and expose the processes, dynamics, emerging categorical themes and theories of my study. Specifically, the data analysis was performed throughout the time of data collection. The content-analyses of the open-ended questionnaire responses, transcribed interview data, student coursework, extended conversation from the field, and memos from the field were coded and recoded until clear categorical themes were established for the purpose of the study.

The coding of the open-ended questionnaire responses, sets of interview transcriptions, student coursework, and memos from the field was an on-going process. Similar to the processes of Ford and Malaney's (2012) aforementioned qualitative study that used inductively derived analyses of student work samples to explore the racial identity development of undergraduate students of color and multiracial students engaging in race dialogues at a historically White institution, and coding processes of Erdreich and Lerner's (2005) qualitative study that used analyses of in-depth interview data to explore the reproduction of hegemony and social hierarchy in classrooms at a

Hebrew university, my data was analyzed by a careful coding and re-coding process through line by line reading multiple times with the purpose of categorical identification. Ford and Malaney's (2012) and Erdreich and Lerner's (2005) data analyses produced thematic evidence to support the need for critical attention to race and class matters in higher education. An important objective of my research study was for the analysis of pedagogically grounded data to illuminate emergent themes that would respond to the overarching research question on how female students experience a community college classroom anchored in decolonial feminist pedagogy. The data analysis produced thematic conclusions on the relationship between decolonial feminist pedagogy and students' experiences in community college classrooms.

Research findings were compared to pre-study researcher assumptions that were written down prior to conducting methods of research. The recorded research assumptions were not revisited until after the data analysis was complete and the findings were captured in writing. A fuller discussion of the researcher assumptions in relation to the research findings is offered in the conclusion of this study.

Risks and Ethics

This qualitative research was centered on ethics of securing participants in ways that were safe and minimized control and negative outcomes for the participants. There always exists the risk of exploitation in studies like this feminist research project because feminist research results in close contact between the feminist researcher (me) and the participants (my former students). DeVault (1996) draws from Scanlon (1993) who raises concerns with "imbalances of power" in feminist research projects (p.38). These concerns, and the potential for research limitations, are necessary for any person using

feminist methodology to address within their research. These concerns were addressed in the study through an understanding of the vulnerability, as well as strength, of the community college student population, and the importance of taking steps to ensure that participants were not taken advantage of. In the case of the participants from *The Sociology of Gender*, this understanding included an awareness that participants, as former students of the researcher, may try to be “pleasing” to the former instructor/researcher, and feel obligated to participate because of the former instructor/student relationship. In addition, in-depth interviews with former students may have impacted participants’ responses to the interview questions. Students may have responded differently to a former instructor/researcher versus how they would have communicated to an unknown researcher. There may have been a case where a participant did not reveal negative classroom experiences during the interview due to the previous teacher/student relationship with the researcher, but would have revealed those moments to a researcher that she did not know. For example, a student with negative experiences may have withheld them from me because of my former instructor/researcher insider status at the college, a status that may have made disclosing negative information about college experiences a perceived risk to them. Likewise, in being familiar with me, the student may have “over-performed.” By this I mean the student may have overcompensated during their interview responses because they knew I was observing and wanted me to think that they were being a “good” student. In this example, “good” means participatory and providing answers that the student assumed I would want to hear. This was also a risk with the students from the course outside of *The Sociology of Gender*. While those participants were not former students, the request to participate in

the open-ended questionnaire happened during their scheduled class time and in their instructor's presence. This meant that students may have participated because they wanted to be a "good" student in front of their instructor by engaging with the questionnaire. To minimize these types of risks and promote research ethics, all student participants were retold prior to the interview and questionnaire that participation was voluntary and reminded that they did not have to answer every question, and could stop participating in the interview or questionnaire at any point. Finally, as noted earlier, due to my teaching assignments at the community college being introductory courses, there was not, and will not be, a possibility that I will have these students in any future classes at the community college. While it is critical that I speak to and address the risks and limitations of the study, it is also critical that I share that after significant reflection I concluded that the potential benefits of this research far outweighed the risks and limitations of the study. Identifying and resisting colonial legacies by engaging research that explores the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy on the lived experiences of low-income women undergraduates in community college classrooms is important and necessary work for social justice education classrooms.

This research project took place at my site of current employment, and my social location of employee/instructor therefore put me at risk of researcher bias and false assumptions. I was motivated by Tsui's (2002) use of reflexivity to record her assumptions about the four academic institutions that were the focus of her empirical research. I felt that to minimize bias there were a few necessary steps for me to take before the data analysis. First, I wrote down my assumptions about the students' experiences in context of *The Sociology of Gender* community college classroom. Next,

I captured my expected research outcomes. For example, students from *The Sociology of Gender* often discussed with me during class sessions, and after the course had concluded, that participation in the course was the first time in their community college careers when they were offered the opportunity to engage in dialogue that drew from their lived experiences and positioned them as "knowers" in the classroom in relation to the course topic of study. From such student feedback, it was my assumption that the majority of other classes on campus did not engage with pedagogies that disrupt traditional claims to epistemic authority and center students' voice and experiences in the community college classroom. Tsui's (2002) study reminds me of the danger of researcher bias when performing research "close to home," so to speak. Through reflexivity, I uncovered that I held assumptions about what participation in a classroom engaging a decolonial pedagogy classroom would look like for community college students' experiences. By capturing the assumptions in writing before doing my data analysis, and sharing the assumptions in the conclusion chapter, I worked to address potential researcher bias and ensure balanced interpretations of the data, and valid and ethical discussions of the findings.

Lastly, I will address how I negotiated insider/outsider status. As an instructor at the community college and specifically of *The Sociology of Gender* course that is the focus of this research, my position at the college made me an *insider*. The implications for my insider status included potential benefits and limitations. One benefit of my insider status was that I had a sense of the students and the culture of the college from my direct experiences teaching there over four years. However, as mentioned earlier, a limit of my insider status was that I may have had students who agreed to participate in my

study because they wanted to be pleasing to me as their former instructor. Furthermore, my whiteness, ethnicity, and my educational status positioned me as an *outsider* to many of my students. I did not want to recreate colonial legacies of being the White person of European descent who exploits and uses marginalized groups to advance my own position and contribute to systemic oppression in education. Instead, I remained committed to research that could frame students' experiences in context of systemic oppression in education, and work toward unbiased findings that could advance the interests and needs of the participants and the population of students they represent in higher education contexts.

Like Luttrell's (2003) role as a White researcher who held an *outsider status* in her ethnographic inquiry of pregnant students, who were predominately students of color, in an education program, it was imperative for me to sustain trust with my research participants throughout the study. The sustained trust was built on trust established through my previous relationship with the participants as students in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. For instance, dialogic pedagogy in the classroom was a method used to work toward breaking down hierarchy and barriers, building classroom community, and establishing trust between students and each other and also between students and myself. This is an example where I believe my previous instructor/student relationship with *The Sociology of Gender* participants benefited me because it gave me trusted ground to build on when engaging the data collection method of in-depth interviews with the participants.

Luttrell's (2003) ethnographic study revealed the significance of researcher-participant trust across social identity groups in research that illuminated the female

experience and served as a model for how this study addressed negotiations of insider/outsider status. Luttrell (2003), a White female researcher, expressed interest in having her research site be at the Piedmont Program for Pregnant Teens (PPPT), a program which is predominately students of color. The PPPT is operated within a country school where White students and students of color have been traditionally divided. From the onset, Luttrell was aware that her identity was a limitation and that her whiteness mattered at the site. She first came to know this after negotiating for 18 months in her efforts to gain access to PPPT as a field site. From there, she would have to work to achieve trust from the girls in each of her social interactions. The participants were identified as African-American, Chicana, and White, and at the intersection of social class, a majority of these students were from single family homes, and of those, the majority of the girls were African-American students. Luttrell's whiteness positioned her as an outsider amongst most of the group. Luttrell created an on-site space to connect with and include the pregnant student participants in research on their lives, and for their lives, through methods that explored participant representation of self from their location. Forming trust based relationships with participants is a common aspect of feminist research projects such as Luttrell's (2003), and especially important for myself and other researchers negotiating a dominant racial identity.

Limitations

The objectives and scope of the dissertation research are limited in a few ways. First, this qualitative study took place at one research site: a Central New York community college. By focusing the research project on a single site, this research excluded the classroom experiences of other community college student participants from

various undergraduate classrooms across different types of academic institutions, not only in the US, but also globally. Future research studies could include a cross-site analysis of students' experiences and draw from community college and four-year college institutions, and/or examine students' experiences in higher education across different geographic regions. For example, the Central New York community college site of this study is an urban community college in the Northeast US and thereby excludes students' experiences in rural and suburban schools located in different regions of the US. Therefore, a future study might be one that includes students' experiences in community college classrooms from rural or suburban areas, and/or from different regions across the US. In a global context, future studies could be framed in ways similar to the work of Erdreich and Lerner (2005) that explored the marginalized student experiences of Russian Jew immigrants and Palestinian-Israeli women studying at a Hebrew university. Future studies of this nature might produce data that illuminate new themes, or could spotlight new themes that surfaced in the dissertation research in another way, and could speak back to how systems of power and privilege operate otherwise across different educational institutions and in relation to different social identities and cultures across various geographic locations.

A second limitation of the study is in relation to the research design. This study primarily focused on a specific community college course, *The Sociology of Gender*, which engaged a decolonial feminist pedagogy. The study included interviews that explored participants' attitudes toward their classroom experiences at the community college, but only in context of the one course. A future research study might adapt this research method design by focusing on a sample of students that the researcher observes

in two different classes: one where a decolonial feminist pedagogy was practiced, and one that used a traditional “banking” pedagogy, as a way to further delineate between the two types of pedagogy and related student classroom experience outcomes. Also, this research did not include observations of the participants across multiple class settings because the research site was my place of work and I felt there would have been challenges faced in gaining access from colleagues to observe the participants in their classrooms. Moreover, there would have been logistical issues in trying to observe participants across two or more class sites. For instance, as *The Sociology of Gender* classes have concluded, some of the students are no longer taking college classes but participating in on-campus apprenticeship programs such as through the nursing program. Cross-site observation would not have been feasible. For this reason, I created interview questions that asked participants about their experiences in other campus classrooms so as to understand students’ interactions with pedagogy, power, and the politics of knowing at the community college. The inclusion of interview questions of this nature stemmed from repeatedly listening to students describe oppressive experiences in the college classroom (e.g., rote lectures that failed to engage student voice and experience, and feelings of disengagement and disempowerment). These questions also complemented the open-ended questionnaire questions asked of the students in the class outside of *The Sociology of Gender*. By answering these questions, students offered their perspective on their experiences in context of the structure of the community college, and this fostered further awareness of the impact that participation in a course framed in decolonial feminist pedagogy can have on students' lived classroom experiences. As a qualitative interview design, the choice of using open-ended interview questions was important

because this type of inquiry “allows the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow up” (Turner, 2010) which served to center the participants’ experiences and standpoints in the study.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I outlined the research design and methods of my study. I described the methodology, research site and participant recruitment, research sample, methods for data collection, data analysis, risks and ethics, and limitations. In the next three chapters (chapters, 4, 5, and 6) I will present my research findings and describe important themes that emerged from open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and content-analysis of student work.

Chapter 4

Dissident Student Border Crossings in the Community College Classroom: Critical Consciousness, Empowerment, Action, and Solidarity

““But no model wearing hijab is political to me!” I said to them”
-Nadja, community college student

Student engagement experiences at the community college remind us that education is not a neutral process. Community college classrooms are potential sites of decolonial feminist struggle where pedagogy can be either a tool of status quo conformity or revolutionary liberation through critical reflexivity, action, and transformation (Freire, 1970). Alexander and Mohanty (2010, p.238) claim that for every curriculum and pedagogy, *there is a story*. They write,

The way we construct curricula and the pedagogies we use to put such curricula into practice tell a story---or tell many stories of gendered, racial, and sexual bodies in work and home spaces, prisons and armed forces, board rooms and NGOs..... “Stories” are simultaneously “maps” in that they mobilize both histories and geographies of power.

This chapter works to tell the stories of low-income women of diverse racial, ethnic, national, faith, and sexual identities in *The Sociology of Gender* community college classroom that was anchored in a decolonial feminist pedagogy. Mohanty (personal communication, 2014) recommends that pedagogical projects centering decolonial feminism illustrate how students move from point A to point Z. This chapter works to explore the path the community college students took from point A to point Z over the academic semester and reveal what procedures were “encoded and normalized” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p. 238) in the decolonial feminist pedagogy classroom, and the implications of those procedures for the classroom experiences and lives of the community college students. Through providing an analysis of in-depth interview data and student coursework, this chapter illuminates patterns of student engagement with a

decolonial feminist pedagogy in the community college classroom with a focus on *student experiences, challenges, and outcomes*.

Student Experiences

Community: From apprehension to trust. The group of students that I interviewed revealed similar experiences and outcomes resulting from their engagement with a decolonial feminist pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. One important experience among the students was involvement in building and sustaining classroom community. To many students, the building and sustaining of classroom community was integral to their engagement in the course and to promoting their understanding of gender. Over the semester, students learned to not only trust in each other but to trust in the process of community building in the decolonial feminist pedagogy classroom through such techniques as horseshoe seating arrangements, dialogue in diverse, small and large groups, and critical reflexivity.

For some students, the instructional approaches and techniques were challenging and while students did not express resistance to building community, they did express initial apprehension. Malia said,

I was a little apprehensive about taking this course. But after coming to a few classes, I learned quickly what was expected from us, a lot of participation and talking, and I had no problem adhering to the rules. But, it was still hard because it wasn't something I'm used to.

For Malia, the idea of sitting in a large circle or small groups stirred mixed feelings. Moreover, Malia's language on the expected "rules" of the classroom reflected the propensity of community college students to view their educational experiences as part of rigid systems of hierarchy.

Tasha and Morgan also found the expectation to talk with peers to be daunting during the first weeks of the semester. Morgan recalled an initial peer-peer activity where students introduced themselves and discussed something related to gender they had noticed since the last class. Morgan said,

I remember looking at her and thinking, Oh my god, this girl is weird. She was dressed very preppy. She was *very* bubbly. I didn't think I would have anything in common with her. *But* by the end of the semester, she is now one of the people I'm closest to and that's because we had to build that relationship of respecting our peers.

Moreover, Tasha had mixed feelings about a class where instruction was largely dialogue based. To Tasha, the instructor had always been the sole source of knowledge and expertise, and the textbook came second. "I didn't feel comfortable thinking that I could add something that would be as important as what an instructor had to say. So why talk?" After Tasha participated in small group dialogue over the first month, she noticed her "why talk?" attitude shift. She elaborated,

I realized it wasn't just talking to talk, or getting participation points, it was talking because our voices matter here, and our experiences matter here for learning about how everyone experiences gender in their own way. You need to know my story and I need to know yours. We got to complicate things around here. No one can speak my truth better than me, so I got to talk.

Carol discussed how at first the ice-breakers and personal reflection assignments that were shared with the whole group felt like frivolous additions to the classroom learning. "To be honest, I felt annoyed the first few weeks. I still participated because I wanted to get a good grade. I also didn't want to hear everyone's baggage. I have enough of my own! I feel like a teacher's job is to give us a long lecture with lots of information to write down for us to memorize." Malia also expressed initial feelings of annoyance at the lack of lengthy direct instruction. "I remember feeling uncomfortable

that I wasn't leaving with pages of notes like in my other classes. So at first I was like "What is this?" when we would put the desks in the horseshoe shape. Everyone else seemed to love it. First question people would ask when they walked in was "Are we getting in a circle today?" For Monique and Malia, as the classroom community built, so too did their appreciation of the instructional methods. Monique shared that by the end of the semester she started feeling different about coming to class. She said,

I actually realized that I wasn't annoyed anymore. There was something happening there that I couldn't describe. It just felt like this really comfortable space. I also saw a pattern with your teaching. There was always a mini-lecture, and you always used that as a guide for the class discussions, and you always came back to those important points of the day.

For Malia, the other students' "baggage" took on new meaning. She said,

It was like a series of those light bulb moments all semester. People would talk and I would think, ok, their baggage is full of shit that makes it hard to be a woman. I remember a classmate saying "I'm a woman who gets tired of being a woman!" and we all just laughed and laughed. But there was that kind of feeling of pain in my laugh, if that makes sense. It just hurt. Maybe that was why I wasn't into it in the beginning. It really worked though. That class really worked.

Numerous students spoke about "loving the way the class was instructed" and shared that they "loved how much we got to know each other though doing so much dialogue in class." Kassi said that the more people went around sharing their experiences the more she began to trust the group. For Sierra a significant aspect of the class was the building of community in order to hear other people's thought and opinions. The community was what she felt "made the class fun and made me excited to participate each class. I actually looked forward to coming here every time." Similarly, Nevaeh expressed, "Each class was like going to a room of people that might not be my friends, but for some reason I had grown to really care about them."

In addition to the enjoyable feeling that a sense of community provided for students, in many cases it was also linked to feelings of importance and value. As Morgan explained, “Since I was so comfortable in class, my hand shot up in class all the time. I compare that to my other classes and have to ask why don't we have conversations in other classes? Why don't we introduce ourselves? That feeling of community is a huge thing, and without it I feel like it's worthless to be in that class, but with it then I feel like I'm really important to the class.” Morgan, like many students, revealed a critical awareness from her experience with a decolonial feminist pedagogy and demonstrated the disruption of colonial legacies such as the “culture of silence” (Freire, 1970) by questioning the pedagogical frames of community college classrooms. Morgan engaged her dissident voice and asked questions that many other students like Malia, Tasha, Caitlyn, Nevaeh, and Nadja asked during their interviews: questions about the ways classrooms are pedagogically framed and why there are not different pedagogical narratives in the classrooms of community college students like them.

For Lisa, the classroom itself felt like a “social construct” where she explained a “friendly, peer-advised learning style, with personal communication matched unlike any other normal course at the college.” Camila claimed, “The teaching style created a personal environment where people could express their personal opinions and create larger, diverse learning experiences where many voices were heard and listened to.” Moreover, Ling described how comfortable she and her peers felt sharing opinions with one another over the semester because of the community that stayed intact. She recalled a moment of critical reflection half-way through the semester. Ling said,

There was a time when our small group just paused and realized how much we had just shared with one another. Someone laughed and asked if we could imagine doing this in any other class where you do not know anyone. Meeting so many new people in Gender class and really getting to know each other through different activities and dialogue meant that everyone could voice their own opinion and also stop to really listen to what other people thought.

Additionally, Caitlyn made explicit the relevance of classroom instruction founded on community where the priority was group discussions and social interaction in diverse settings. She said,

I could not imagine class instructed any other way. Class was instructed in a group setting most of the time which allowed the class to become comfortable with each other and share opinions, knowledge, and personal experiences with the class. I think this was the best way to conduct a class specific to gender because everyone has something different to bring to the table, which allows us to not only learn the curriculum materials but also the fundamentals of life experiences through others' eyes.

Dialogue circles, engaging dissident voices, and border crossings. The students interviewed revealed that their voices existed within them all along. Many students felt that the decolonial feminist instructional approaches that included small group dialogue circles and critically reflexive journal writing linked to intersectionality and a social justice curriculum that drew from anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchy readings were responsible for fostering the *engagement* of their voices. Students described the student voices belonging to the students and authors as “diverse” and “dissident.” Caitlyn expressed the challenge of *engaging* her dissident voice. “I have always liked to talk in front of people. I find it to be exhilarating, but talking on personal topics related to being female was nerve racking to me at first. Though soon I overcame it and was happy and willing to share with a group of people who were not just finding but really using their own voices as well.” While Morgan said, “I was shy in the beginning of the class because I didn't know anybody. By the end of the class, I was

comfortable being myself and opening up to everyone. Our class became a room where everyone's voices were heard and everyone looked to each other to add on to the conversation."

For most all of the students interviewed, dialogic pedagogy was the foremost important instructional strategy related to engagement of dissident voices in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. The students interviewed felt that the engaging of dissident voices through small group dialogue circles increased their perspective-taking because it created spaces for crossing classroom borders established by legacies that historically separate students and reinforce social hierarchies in the classroom. For Ling, "Voicing my own opinion in class enabled me to critically connect and analyze gender issues that I myself didn't think of prior to hearing others opinions." Likewise, Alison felt that dialogue helped her see different sides and perspectives of gender experiences that she had never thought about before. She said,

I viewed gender a certain way in several films, t.v. shows, even in music, but listening to other people's views and experiences helped me see other sides of a story. You know, things like it actually means something when you grow up only seeing mostly White women in media. I'm a White woman and I never thought about what it would be like to grow up never seeing yourself represented. I took it for granted. Now I can honestly look at situations and see what is present and what is left out.

Tasha also felt that participation in dialogue circles increased her understanding of gender issues and inequalities through perspective taking. She explained that the mini-lectures that historically situated the gender content, combined with the multicultural readings, and being able to hear the experiences of her classmates increased her understanding of gendered experiences in context of social identities, and systems of power and privilege. For example, Tasha said,

It was surprising to hear males discuss their weight, and females who were pretty discuss struggling with their image. The class definitely was diverse enough where people could discuss those things as they also related to their race and ethnicity. As a Black woman, it was nice to know that I am not the only one who struggles with such topics of image and identity. And for the White girls, they even said it was something they hadn't thought about as effecting us because you know the media and stuff really acts like it's a White girl's thing. But all girls need to be thinking and talking about this. It's just there isn't always a place for us all to do that."

Ling found it important to be in a dialogue group with males and females. She explained,

This way you get an idea of how both people of different genders feel. Being a female, I found it so great to know how men felt in society. I was surprised to learn about their struggles too. I was also surprised at how they showed real concern for our female experiences. It made me connect back like we did in class to things at the bigger level. Ok, this guy in front of me is part of this power system. He is expected to be this way as a man like I'm expected to be this way as a woman. Talking together just might help things more equal. Eventually you realize that men and women are both part of the messed up power system.

Malia also felt dialogue helped her understand other people's views on the same topic. She said,

Whereas some men won't notice the bias in media, some women feel very strongly about it because that bias impacts their self-esteem which impacts their actions in society. Talking about that in dialogue meant that a small group of men now know why women can be insecure sometimes or why women do this or that. Also, it means a group of White women who are still affected by media, can hear about how us Black women, and Latina women, African women, what have you, you know, how it hurts us in ways that are similar, but also ways that are very, very different. And for us women who aren't White it means hearing that they have struggles too, you know lot of them don't have a lot of money, have family problems, don't have good self-confidence, don't even like themselves.

Sierra found that her participation in dialogue helped her rediscover herself and understand herself so that she could share her views to a greater extent. For example, Sierra discussed how a dialogue circle on the pressure to fit media's image of "ideal beauty" created space for her to reflect on her younger years when she would obsess over

models in magazines and find shame with her own “brown body that lacked curves and definition.” Sierra said,

That dialogue circle, and hearing all of the different women speak about their experiences, was like *déjà vu*. All of these memories flooded back to me, and I found myself talking them through with the other girls in the class. It was like we each held a piece of the puzzle and were trying to piece up our experiences so we could see the big picture and make some sense out of it.

For Alison, making sense of the big picture that Sierra described was through understanding how her whiteness had been privileged by the media as “ideal beauty.” Tasha and Jada saw a big picture that rarely included women of color, and when it did, the complexions were always a light shade of brown that never matched their darker complexions. Caitlyn, Morgan, and Sierra drew out the privileging of capital through the marketing of material designer goods and cosmetics that even after a high school summer’s worth of work they knew they could never afford. Moreover, Nadja noted that beauty was never Muslim. She described a classroom dialogue experience where students had brought in magazine images of women for analysis and were asked to discuss the politics of female representation.

Have you ever seen a Cover Girl wearing a hijab? (Nadja recalled asking her dialogue circle.) That actually means something to me. None of the people in my group had thought of that. So, we started to dialogue about it. What would it mean for a model to wear hijab? Why don’t models wear hijab? It would just be too political to have them wear it, so they would never do that. “It would make too many people upset,” said one girl. And all of a sudden it was like a wave crashed on me. “But no model wearing hijab is political to me!” I said to them. I remember I cried a little and had to stop talking. The group was quiet. So then another girl said, “Ok, let’s talk about how the hijab being invisible is political.” That was good. No one was debating whether it was political or not. I said it was to me and that was all these girls needed to hear. I felt like we moved forward that day.

Brenda felt her voice growing stronger each week after dialogue sessions. From her perspective, dialogue across intersectional gender differences challenged her to be a

critical listener and thinker. Brenda expressed that she used to “talk without thinking first.” Dialogue circles in class created a space where Brenda was able to “listen to different experiences for the goal of understanding. I also could really tell that people were listening to me. Feeling valued made me feel more confident to share my feelings and experiences too.” Tasha also noted the significance of listening in dialogue circles as a gateway to border crossing. She said,

I could look at people and you could know people. You could express yourself and you don't have to worry about people judging you because everybody's listening. You're all in the circle and they give you affirmation: that's good, clap for you, make you feel like you are doing good. That's why I loved that class. It doesn't matter your race, gender, we all can come together.

Moreover, Tasha discussed how sustained dialogue across social identity groups fostered border crossing and promoted student solidarity over the semester.

Day 1: you can tell the separation. You have all the Black kids sitting in the back, all the Bosnians over there, you have the Whites, if you want to call 'em that, all over there, then you have some emo kids over there. I say emo because they are all acting down. Then once the circle forms you see people switching sides. Some are over there, some are over here. It's not all the Blacks together, all the Whites. Everybody's in different spots. Then as soon as we started getting in the small groups you really see the change in the classroom. It's like everybody loves each other. Everyone's like, "Oh I never thought I would talk to you because I've seen you in another class, but now it's like hey, we've got a lot in common." It's so different because we were in a group and it was like we were made to see each other, that's what changed it, and I think that is why everyone did so good in the class...like hey, guys what are we going to do together? It was a group, it wasn't just one individual. If you needed help everyone was there to give you a hand.

For Morgan, dialogue was at the core of her educational experience in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. She said,

The dialogue I think was how I learned. It wasn't like, Ok, you are going to read this and then come into the class and just hear about how the teacher interprets it. When I was reading the articles, some of the things at first I didn't understand, and so when we went into groups it would help me understand it more to listen to how others interpreted it and what it meant to them. Then I could figure out my view on it. I liked that even if we felt differently about things, we didn't disagree to

debate it. We were just there to keep dialoguing about it in order to understand where everyone was coming from.

The dialogue circles were an important instructional tool of decolonial feminist pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. As the students expressed, however, it was not just the act of dialogue for hearing one another's personal experiences that mattered, but rather the act of dialogue and learning how personal experiences are grounded in systems of power and privilege that reflect historical oppressions and impact the reality of people's lives today. From this process, students began to engage their dissident voices, center marginalized narratives, establish trust and community, break down classroom barriers, and disrupt and dismantle hierarchies as they crossed over the colonial legacy of borders that divide, segregate, isolate, and exploit in institutional spaces like the college classroom. Through these border crossings, students exemplified feminist solidarity that promoted personal, academic, and social transformation. Consequentially, claims of epistemic authority shifted to non-dominant identity groups such as students of color and Muslim students.

Critically reflexive writing. The majority of students interviewed discussed the importance of the decolonial feminist pedagogy strategy of critically reflexive journal writing for developing their dissident voices. Ami shared that while dialogue was most important to her process of understanding gender, it was the journal writings that encouraged her to think more complexly. She said, "When I wrote, I began to see and analyze situations in ways that I usually wouldn't." In addition, Malia noted that critical journal reflections helped her to "take a step back and analyze situations as a whole, after working through my focus on microscopic gender topics as well." Nancy felt that the

journal writing helped her to challenge her thinking on the weekly gender topics which ultimately led to her gaining a deeper understanding of gender.

Brenda viewed the journals as a gateway that “opened doors for my critical thinking and analysis, and led me to reflect on my own feelings and identity.” Ami shared how journals made her realize things through “writing my feelings to the surface” that she hadn't thought about, or felt she might never have thought about had she not had not “quiet time to write my thoughts out.” Caitlyn discussed surveying her journals from beginning to the end of the semester and seeing the academic and personal transformation that occurred upon having reflexive space to react and connect to the readings. Likewise, Malia and Nancy described the journals as a space where they could process issues of gender inequality, and their reactions to the readings and corresponding classroom dialogue. This space was especially important for Kassi who explained that sometimes after a reading or dialogue, “I just needed to get it out and express it, and you know sometimes there are some thoughts you want to just keep for you or work through on your own.”

For Alison, the journals captured her personal transformation as she worked through the challenge of engaging her voice in early writings, though flourished in engaging her voice through writings over the semester. Alison said,

Being able to write down my thoughts about myself, and what we were learning, was a struggle at first. I hadn't been allowed to do that before. Once I got comfortable with it, it was so refreshing. I could say if something was bugging me, and get it out, and not hold it in. The more I did that in my journals, the more I found myself doing it in class dialogue.

Tasha noted that many of the stories shared by the women in class, including herself, stemmed from journal writings. “The readings and journal writing,” Tasha said,

“those brought out our real experiences and made us feel we could speak up about our lives and that we *had* to speak up because it really mattered that our stories be heard too. Remember there was the mother in class talking about her baby? And the one who talked about growing up and her mom was an addict?”

Ami shared that the journal writings helped her become more critically reflexive in class before she spoke. She also learned to appreciate the “quiet pauses” because she could sense that the other students were not “being lazy, but working in their minds” before engaging gender dialogue. Malia referred to the reflexive moments in class as “journaling in my mind.” She said, “When I shared in dialogue, it was from a new place. Writing weekly journals helped me locate myself in the class and that made the dialogue stronger.” Additionally, Ami described how the more “thoughtful” dialogue became, the more her ability to take on different perspectives increased in class. She said,

The journals gave me a place to discuss gender topics that were so different from my own gender experiences, and even different from the experiences shared by others in class. When I wrote, I could try to make connections across the experiences. The journals force me to truly analyze situations differently than I usually would. Overall my perceptions on gender have changed drastically because I was able to write about and understand them more.

Many students interviewed felt that the instructional strategies of critically reflexive writing assignments balanced the dialogue and enhanced the community building for the class. Jada recalled the “Who am I” poetry assignment where each student was asked to write a poem describing their gendered self by using an intersectional approach. Jada discussed how hard that assignment was for her. “It was over a month into class. Who am I as a woman? It was a time when I had to sit and think about something that I hadn’t really thought about before. It really helped me in class though when we started talking about gender identity.” In the end, Jada’s poem

illustrated her experiences being stereotyped as an African-American student mother and included such lines as: *They said she wouldn't make it, They said she wouldn't win, I still remain, I still remain, She proved them wrong once again.* Jada continued, "All of those writing assignments helped me plant my feet first in my own shoes. After that the dialogue became easier and easier. When you have space to figure out *you* then it becomes easier to contribute to the conversation. The writing helped me figure out me."

Numerous other students felt that critically reflexive writing assignments enhanced their sense of self and identity which impacted their confidence when dialoguing with their peers. Nevaeh recalled a final reflexive writing assignment where students wrote their own adaption of the poem "Ain't I a Woman," by Sojourner Truth (1851). Nevaeh said, "I wrote about myself and I read it proudly at the mid- semester when we did the poetry circle in class. I thought about if I should add my race in the poem. I wouldn't have done that in other classes. I just would have wrote about myself as a woman. When I wrote the poem for this class I thought I could do it." Nevaeh's poem includes the following excerpted lines: *Pretty lips, Thick hips, Pretty eyes, Head held high, and Ain't I a woman? Strong, beautiful, brown skin woman.* Nevaeh continued, "Everyone snapped loudly and I cried. I wouldn't have looked around at those faces in the beginning of the year thinking all these different girls would be part of my circle but they were." Many other women in the class used writing as a space to explore their intersectional female identities, disrupt the idea of all women having the same female experiences, and contribute to the unsettling of colonial legacies that privilege the narratives of women of European descent. The writings offered a space for students to examine, demonstrate, and share the diversity and difference of the female experience,

and contributed to the shift in claims of epistemic authority to female students of color, and low-income women.

Challenges

Students' interview responses illuminated the impact of dialogue and critical journal writing on positive student engagement experiences in the feminist sociology classroom. Nonetheless, these experiences did not exist in absence of challenges to student experiences. While students were quick to proclaim that dialogue was the most important pedagogical technique of the class, across student interviews, an emergent pattern was the challenge that engaging in group dialogue circles presented to the students. Malia explained, "Personally, dialogue was the greatest classroom challenge for me, mostly because I've never been expected or encouraged to voice my opinion in class. It felt really strange to me for a while." Alison also noted the challenge of engaging in dialogue for fear of not doing it right. She said, "I'd never been part of a dialogue circle before, and I was never sure if I was doing or saying the right thing. It came down to feeling comfortable with the group. Once I felt comfortable then I started to speak more." Helen expressed that as liberating as the idea of dialogue circles sounded the first day, the process of participating in dialogue circles was not as easy as she imagined. She said,

I remember thinking, this is going to be easy. Just sit and talk with the other girls. But the first few classes were really hard. It's like, okay you can go drive the car when you're 16 but your parents never gave you the keys to practice before. I love, love dialogue, but it was a bit hard because no other teacher had ever wanted to me to do that and hear my real thoughts.

In addition to lack of experience with dialogic pedagogy in community college classrooms, students' revealed the challenge of listening and perspective taking. Most

students' directly correlated lack of dialogic experiences in the classroom to the challenges they faced with listening to one another and perspective taking. Brenda discussed how lack of dialogue with her peers meant that she was able to be with her own opinions without understanding other ways of thinking and feeling. She explained that it was very difficult to not be on the defensive when she first participated in dialogue circles because she translated every different opinion as an attack on her own faith-based opinions as a Christian women. She elaborated, "It was sometimes difficult to try and stop correcting people's viewpoints. At some point it clicked that their viewpoints were not saying my viewpoint was wrong. It was just a viewpoint. I had to really listen and respect where they were coming from." Ami also identified listening as her greatest challenge when it meant she had to hear views or arguments that were dissimilar from her own. She said,

For the most part, I tried to keep an open mind. But it was tough. For example, at first I disagreed with girls in the class who tried to piggyback on some book readings and talk about how their ethnicity made it hard for them as women. I am White but we struggle with money. I started to finally be open to the idea that our experiences were different as women after doing all the dialogue and hearing sometimes very, very similar stories and experiences. Experiences that I hadn't had and couldn't really recall my friends having experienced.

Furthermore, Nancy's challenge of listening to differing points of views were coupled with the challenge of recognizing self-participation in acts of stereotyping.

Nancy said,

Personally the greatest challenge I experienced in taking this course happened after I began really listening to my peers. The challenge was admitting, and changing certain things about myself. I admit I have fallen into the traps of stereotyping. I am a type of person that has a hard time accepting and admitting things to myself, which is not healthy. I realized this during this course while doing dialogue and then writing and connecting personally to different situations.

Caitlyn identified the challenge of transforming herself. She said, “The hardest part of dialogue was that after mid-semester I knew had a lot of work to do on myself if I wanted to really be myself. So I try to stop getting involved in being what the media or other people think I have to be so that I can be who I want to be.”

Brenda was among many students interviewed who began to recognize that *engaging one’s voice is a process and not a competition*. While Tasha recalled a time when a student wasn’t speaking and another student was pressuring her to speak. She shared,

You could see this girl just crumple inside and out. I said, wait now. If she isn’t ready, she isn’t ready. One thing dialogue circles showed me was that everyone needs to do things on their own time. You can’t force someone to speak. It wasn’t that she had nothing to say. We learned later on in the semester that she had a lot to say, real important stuff too. But if we had kept pressuring her instead of just letting her know that we were ready to listen always, then who knows if she ever would have shared at all. That’s what I liked about dialogue compared to my other classes. It wasn’t a race to talk first or be heard, it felt more fair. The people who think they know it all are always shouting out the answers in the other classes so after a while you start to think they have all the answers. But look at that girl in class, she had the answers too, and after a time they came out.

Meanwhile, Ling was a student who was used to being quiet, and accustomed to the feeling that she was so deep into her own silence that people in school must expect that she had nothing to say. She expressed how challenging the process of engaging her voice had been in the beginning weeks of *The Sociology of Gender*. She identified herself as silent in the beginning and felt that small group work was the most helpful step in the process of engaging her voice with others in the whole class. Ling explained,

The group work we did really helped me socialize with people and practice how to interact through speaking with others. When you have been quiet in class for so long in school, you really don’t even know how to participate in the discussion. Small groups were small communities and I felt safe to start speaking there which really helped me out in all of my classes.

Tasha noted that “In other classes, everybody's worried about themselves, even the professor acting like, "I don't care about other classrooms, this is my classroom." Along with Ling, Tasha felt that the community built through the decolonial feminist strategy of dialogue led to undoing classroom hierarchy, and fostering collective, not competitive, engagement that promoted classroom solidarity and the valuing of one another's voices, experiences, and knowledge.

Student Outcomes

Critical Consciousness. The community college students interviewed shared a set of common student outcomes resulting from their experiences with a decolonial feminist pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. A first student outcome was raised critical consciousness. For Beth, critical consciousness was experienced through experiences of perspective taking. Sylvia felt it was the ability to use her sociological imagination in dialogue circles that provided her with a small amount of understanding the many ways people experience their gender inequality. Kassi discussed a conversation where her peers shared interpersonal encounters at work with co-workers. She shared that from dialogue circles she gained new insights into female experiences in the labor force. She said,

Well, I understand that men think they run the show! I've noticed this now at work. The men do the sales and women do the secretarial work. At work, the man is the breadwinner and they go out on the road to make the sales and bring in the money and when people call in they hear a women's voice who is supposed to help them and take care of them. I think that is why they do it, when people call in maybe they feel more comfortable hearing a women's voice. This is something that I wouldn't have thought about otherwise if I hadn't talked about this in class.

Additionally, Kassi shared a conversation that sprung from the conversation in the same dialogue circle as an example of her critical gender consciousness through an intersectional lens. She said,

It was hearing how difficult it was for Malia to be one of the only Black women at work and hearing how long it took for her to feel accepted by her co-workers. I realize I take those things for granted as a White woman, and then hearing about other hard things she faces at work as a result of being isolated made me realized that being a female worker, and you know, making less than men, well there is more to that. It's ten times more complicated if have another thing about you that people see as, (quote marks with fingers), different.

In addition, Malia credited *Sociology of Gender's* dialogue circles, intersectional, multicultural readings, and intensive critical writing with giving her a better view of the reality of gender inequality and the capacity to see the things she had never noticed before.

Malia shared that she had never been concerned with gender topics such as the social construction of masculinity and femininity prior to taking *Sociology of Gender*. For Malia, the lack of representation of women of color in the media had alienated her from feeling that she was a part of the gender topic. Malia shared that she never was interested to understand gender topics because she never felt that gender, as she saw it represented in the media, related to her. She explained, "For the most part there is no similarity. The women in commercials are usually young White women, with two parents in the household, or on a t.v. show in a big family where they just never seem to have a bad time with anything or their problems always get solved. That doesn't relate to me in the least bit. Even if they were Black, still doesn't relate to me much."

Kassi's critical gender consciousness was reflected through her raised awareness and increased perspective taking that led to her call for action.

Dialogue with other students meant I had a place to become more aware of how other girls were experiencing things I face, and realizing that there is a whole world out there that everyone experiences differently because of the way they were born. There are harsh realities out there for all of us, but they affect people differently. Some people, like girls from poor homes, the harsh realities affect us to the extreme. We all have to do more than look at the realities, but act on them.

For Camila and Ling, *The Sociology of Gender* was a self-described “eye-opener.” For instance, Camila said, “The dialogue circles, movies, and readings opened my eyes to women who experienced gender issues like *me* not just like the White, middle-class looking women on the t.v. It’s crazy to think that there are so many people who actually feel the way you feel.”

Morgan said that increased discussion in collaboration with critical writings raised her awareness about gender inequality and moved her to address gender stereotyping when she heard it first hand from friends and family. “If we had just read a textbook with vocabulary on gender, I would have learned the words, but not really understood how they related to the real world. At first I wouldn’t point out gender stereotypes because I didn’t recognize when they were happening. Now if I notice it with my friends and brothers then I speak up about it.” Nadja noticed a change in the discussion of men in the class as well. “I think it’s amazing that the few guys there were in the class talked about how they will treat their girlfriends differently now after taking this class and understanding how gender really impacts everyone and puts really dangerous expectations on us all.”

Critical gender consciousness was strongly linked to the gender identity development of many of the students interviewed. Tasha discussed how really “getting into” gender helped her look at gender related issues in a new way. “I have always tried so hard to fit a mold, like oh, I’m a tomboy girl, or later on, oh, I’m a girly girl. For some

friends it's, oh, I'm a tranny. It's a lot of *work* though to fit those molds. I didn't realize that until we started reading all of the readings and talking in our groups." The work of occupying gender roles that Tasha and other students became conscious of reflects the complexity of the multifaceted role of being a woman.

Empowerment, collective leadership, and action. From the students interviewed, empowerment was identified as an outcome from participation in a community college classroom culture grounded in decolonial feminist pedagogy. *The Sociology of Gender* students interviewed identified the gender action project as a part of the decolonial feminist pedagogy curriculum that was highly influential to the second student outcome of empowerment. Morgan described the gender action project as a first encounter with collaborative work. She found that working with other women toward a common activist goal helped her to build on the classroom community. Morgan and her group shared clips of the film *Miss Representation* (2011) in Introduction to Sociology classes across campus, and facilitated dialogue with the students on the role media plays in the misrepresentation of women in the US and across the globe, and the consequences for women's participation in leadership positions. Also a member of Morgan's group, Caitlyn's sense of empowerment was linked to the disruption of public space through classroom visits to share clips from *Miss Representation* (2011) and the co-facilitation of dialogue with the student audience. She described the experience as personally and academically empowering and said,

I think it matured me in a sense that I was able to show and critically analyze a movie with my partners in front of a college classroom in a professional manner. Also, I think all college students should experience how to adapt and work with other students to stop and produce a form of education out of the classroom. The take-away for me was that together we brought what we learned about female misrepresentation and the media into another classroom on campus. It wasn't just

presenting in front of our classmates the last day, you know, people who know this stuff already. So that felt like real change to me, and I felt very, very empowered after that.

Malia honed in on the specific experience of collective leadership through the gender action project as a key factor in her feeling comfortable and empowered to participate in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. Moreover, Ling noted the collective leadership connected to the gender action project was crucial to her experience and development of feelings of empowerment. She reflected on her group's gender action project, "The Clothesline Project²," where blank t-shirts were available for women affected by violence to write a testimonial message that was hung on clothesline and strung across commons spaces in main building on campus. Ling said,

I stepped back after the event and kind of reflected on what we all did. It was amazing! To look at all of those t-shirts hanging on the clothesline with all the messages from domestic and dating violence survivors made me really emotional. It was the experience of working as a group and even collaborating with faculty members and administration on our Clothesline Project that made feel capable and accomplished. And to see students who might not take the class be reading the women's messages and learning something on their way to the computer lab made me see how we could teach people things anywhere on campus.

Tasha shared that collective leadership was crucial to her sense of empowerment as she learned to believe in her efforts, handle resistance from the institution, and bring a feminist project into a public space to decolonize community college education through organizing a drag queen and king show for the college community followed by a presentation and dialogue on the gender stereotypes that was led by the drag artists, as well as stereotypes encountered by members of the drag community. Tasha said,

Oh my *goodness*. I never knew what a pain some of those administrators could be about this. Wow. We can talk about these things, race and gender, in the

² The Clothesline Project is a national project to raise awareness about violence against women through the visible testimony of female survivors on the medium of a t-shirt that is added to a clothesline for the public's view. The Clothesline Project began on Cape Cod, Massachusetts in 1990 and continues to be practiced around the globe. For more information, please visit: <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/>

classroom, but don't you dare share that knowledge with others at the college was the message I got. My group was so excited to organize the drag queen and king show and we got so many great people to volunteer to be in the show, and then to talk about their experiences afterward to the crowd so that, you know, we can break down the barriers and stereotypes for that group of people. But, nope. Administration wasn't having any of it. Damn. *Worried about needing security. Worried about there being fights. Worried it's not polite.* That's what I heard. The fact that we could work through all of that and put on the FIRST DRAG SHOW at our school [emphasis on words expressed by Tasha during interview], completely organized by us, and that the room was packed with a lot of different people. There were people from class, people from other classes, people were just coming from the dorms. It was like, look what we did. Everyone that participated was like, "Look like what we did!" It was beautiful. I will always have that experience to remember and will remember that if I want to lead, I can lead. I feel like if I can do that project, that now I can bring together people for other things.

In addition to the gender action project, many participants illuminated the importance of decolonial feminist pedagogy instructional strategies of dialogue and collective learning as important aspects of their empowerment. Tasha felt that the classroom became a space that enabled her to see people as more than just bodies in seats, but motivational learners. "The people in this class, the way everyone exposed their truths. The way we learned to see what was the same about us even though we may seem so different. The way we put our difference aside and came together to make things happen. The people here motivated me. Everyone made me want to do better and I did better." Beth linked her empowerment to increased small group dialogic pedagogy and said,

The more we did group work the more confident people became. I would think things to myself for the longest time, and then in groups I was like, "Ok, I am going to just go for it and say it out loud," and people would be like, "Yes, that's awesome. That is important. That makes me think about x, y, z." And then other people start adding on and building off of what you are saying. It is like the best feeling now when there are too many hands, and lots of voices. In other classes, I'm just the girl listening. That never felt bad, it was just the way things are. But now that I participate and feel what that can be like, I feel sad for the old me who never mustered the strength to speak.

While Subin's experiences influenced her ability to connect the classroom to her present lived experiences, for Sylvia the importance of the pedagogy was that it created a classroom culture that developed her feelings of empowerment and raised her expectations about spaces she wishes to participate in during her future. Kassi shared,

Honestly, just showing up to class felt rewarding. For me it wasn't getting the grade or making it through the semester. It was just that feeling that I had, like so excited to be in that seat and waiting to find out what would happen that day. That made me feel like, empowered. And I want to remember what that feels like so I can go to work at a place that feels that good too.

For many participants, *The Sociology of Gender* experience of learning by way of a decolonial feminist pedagogy created feelings of empowerment about their capabilities as college students. As Malia said, "It's easy to hold onto a lot of the fear that goes along with being in schools where people don't expect you to do well. You start to second guess yourself. This class freed me from that fear and now I can look at myself and feel comfortable seeing someone who is smart and can really think about important things." Alison linked her empowerment to finding "a certain feeling of freedom with talking about my experiences as a female. I feel a lot more comfortable in my own skin."

Nevaeh's experience with the classroom culture empowered her to stay with the class.

She said,

I'm proud that I found the strength in me to stay in the class and not give up as I have done in the past even though I was sick a few times and had my issues with school. I am proud of myself for staying on track as a student. I knew I had to come back because I imagined you were all waiting on me to relate my experiences to what we were talking about. Felt like you all missed me being there.

Nevaeh discovered a part of herself through the classroom that empowered her to hold high expectations for her educational experiences at the community college. She said,

For the first time now, I'm looking at some of my other classes and the way we are taught, and I'm questioning that. I'm thinking, why aren't we being critical thinkers and critical writers? Why don't they see us as people who can do that work? I *know* I can do that type of work now. I don't want to prove that though. I'm a college student. I would like people to expect that of me.

Solidarity. Solidarity was a third outcome that the interviewed participants identified as a consequence of their participation in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom anchored in decolonial feminist pedagogy. Malia discussed how engagement in the gender action project led to solidarity across the members of her group. She recounted her group's action project which was co-facilitating a dialogue on sexual orientation and gender identity for an Introduction to Sociology class at the community college. Malia reflected,

I had met my two assigned partners outside of class the day before I found out I was in their group. I was like, "Oh, they're different." Then when you put me in the group with them I was like, "Oh". But in the end I'm glad they turned out to be my partners, I couldn't have asked for better ones. I'm glad you paired us with strangers. I never would have talked to them otherwise, and I wouldn't have realized how much we could have benefited each other and worked toward our project goal if we hadn't had the chance to come together the way we did.

In a separate interview, Malia's partner, Ami, reflected on her engagement in the gender action project as solidarity provoking too. She said,

I knew my one partner from all of our work with the Gay Straight Alliance club, so I wasn't worried about working with him. I didn't mind working with Malia, but I couldn't tell if she was comfortable working with us. We really came together though, and that's probably because of all the dialogue we did in class. We had some understanding that we could be completely different people, but we were still fighting for the same cause.

Speaking on experiences with solidarity in *The Sociology of Gender*, Ami shared,

The greatest outcome was the overall vibe of the class especially in the end when I realized how much of an impact my peers had on me and also how much of an impact that I had on them. There were so many different individuals from different walks of life and being able to have an entire classroom bond on the

level that we did was an amazing experience. Never have I participated in a class where there was a strong sense of unity and togetherness.

Sylvia said, “I realized that coming together in the class in solidarity, that wasn’t because we were studying gender, but the way we were studying gender. Every class was set up in a way that was about another interaction for us and in the end we were all together talking about gender and calling out the inequality.” Moreover, Kassi felt the collective engagement and solidarity and described it as falling on a spectrum of fun to heart wrenching. She said,

Everyone was engaged and trying to figure out how gender is constructed. We were trying to figure things out together. There was one moment when we made our own questions, and we had two minutes with a partner and then we rotated until we went through everyone. Everyone was chatting a mile a minute and it was so fun. There were also times when people cried in the class. The day of the testimonials...Jada, wow, hers was amazing. For someone to share something like that, so personal, to stand up and tell people her story. I don't know, just very strong. It makes me think of my mom in certain situations. Just so strong. You know we didn't go through her journey, but we got to this point where we could empathize with her, like a family.

Many students interviewed echoed Kassi’s feelings. While community is clearly illustrated in Kassi’s quote, so too is solidarity. For Kassi and the other students, solidarity resulted from listening and responding with empathy to the experiences of women in the readings, through the films, and in the classroom. Moreover, solidarity resulted from the students’ raised critical gender consciousness which enabled them to understand gender experiences through a socio-political lens. Thus, the students’ own testimonies made visible the multiple, different struggles that women experience through systems of power that manifest in racism, sexism, and capitalism. In solidarity, the students used elements of *The Sociology of Gender*, such as the gender action project, as a decolonial feminist tool to shape their shared political vision for disrupting normative

institutional practices and ideologies at the community college, and to work together to accomplish these political goals on campus.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at student engagement with decolonial feminist pedagogy in a sociology classroom at a community college. Student experiences that stemmed from engagement with pedagogical strategies for disrupting colonial legacies included community building, critical reflexivity, and the engaging of dissident voices. The challenges of student engagement with decolonial feminist pedagogy were discussed. Finally, the transformative student outcomes that resulted from the classroom experiences presented earlier were shared in context of a pedagogical framework grounded in the disruption of colonial legacies anchored in eurocentrism, hierarchy, domination, division, power and privilege.

The students interviewed recognized the classroom as a place of community building, critical reflection, and engaging dissident voice. These experiences illuminated the potential for student border crossings in an educational site of struggle such as the community college classroom. Most of the students interviewed credited *The Sociology of Gender* classroom community with redesigning the classroom as a space where students could listen to one another's lived experiences in context of a decolonial feminist course curriculum and through the engagement of dialogue. Arundhati Roy (2004) writes, "We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." Dialogue that centered on an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist curriculum promoted hearing and bearing witness to the testimonies of marginalized groups, while illuminating the role of

dominant identities (e.g., male, White, upper-class) in maintaining and sustaining systems of gender inequality. This experience impacted students' critical consciousness, sense of empowerment, and engaged solidarity. These outcomes support the role of decolonial feminist pedagogy in transforming student's academic and personal lives.

The students revealed a sense of care that came over them for one another's well-being and academic growth. They credited the role of dialogic pedagogy in promoting the visibility of *all* students in the classroom, and in making visible both oppression and privilege. Through critical reflexivity and dialogue, the students were able to grasp how intersectional identities shape the complexity of female experiences, thereby diffusing essentialist ideas about gender and promoting gender awareness and identity development. Students crossed classroom borders through dialogue and critically reflexive writing that fitted them with a decolonial feminist lens through which to view gender experiences. The decolonial feminist lens contributed to decentering dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal narratives that many students had become accustomed to throughout their education, and instead centering marginalized narratives in a space where voyeuristic learning by dominant identities (e.g., male, White, upper-class) was rejected, and work across all social identity groups was expected. The students interpreted this as an expectation to connect discussions on lived experiences to historical contexts and further engage discussions on the condition that all students were committed to doing the work necessary to promote understanding of gender inequality for the purpose of fostering consciousness as well as action.

Audre Lorde (2007) writes, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Students identification of the significance of community for student

engagement revealed community building as a decolonial feminist pedagogy tool for community college students recognizing and disrupting capitalist ideas of competition, dominance, and division in the classroom which led to transforming the students' concept of value in context of educational experiences. As the students' interviewed disclosed, value was anchored in one's knowledge and/or truth in *connection*, not in *competition*, with the other students. Lugones (2010) writes, "Our possibilities lie in communality rather than subordination; they do not lie in parity with our superior in the hierarchy that constitutes the coloniality" (p. 752). Traditional classroom hierarchies that caused separation and segregation amongst the students in the beginning of the semester were disrupted. Furthermore, shifts in claims to epistemic authority occurred as knowledge became hinged on the lived experiences of histories and realities such as those of women of color and Muslim women who shared their prior invisibility within both curriculum (e.g., readings and film) and physical classroom space.

Interviews with students revealed the challenges of participation in a sociology classroom framed in decolonial feminist pedagogy. Feminist scholarship on challenges and limitations of dialogic pedagogy argue that dialogue can disempower marginalized students by creating a voyeuristic space where dominant identities do not have to do any of the work and marginalized identities are viewed as objects of study (Gore, 1993; Luke 1992). Decolonial feminist pedagogy addresses those concerns by actively creating spaces where students with dominant identities must interrogate their own experiences to understand the ways they benefit from privilege. For example, White female students of European descent worked to understand how the privileging of whiteness works to oppress people of color across ethnic and national identity groups, and thus creates many

differences, and inequalities, in common female experiences such as being a college student. The challenges raised in interviews with students who engaged a decolonial feminist pedagogy illuminated new perspectives. For students who at first had difficulty participating in dialogue with other students, the primary reason for the challenge was that dialogic participation was a new classroom practice for them. Malia explained that as a community college student, she was not used to a classroom design that incorporated marginalized voices into the curriculum and through instructional strategies like dialogue circles. Monique's discomfort and self-described annoyance with dialogue revealed an unfamiliarity with strategies and techniques that centered and valued her voice and experiences. Fear of not doing things right were heightened because classroom spaces had provided no training of how to share what students called "real thoughts."

Other students from *The Sociology of Gender* noted that the work that comes with decolonial feminist pedagogy (e.g., critical reflexivity) was difficult; in fact, according to some, "it hurt." The hurt, as many explained in their interviews, was tied to the recognition of one's social location as either part of privileged groups that oppress, or part of groups that experience oppression through Western hegemonic narratives that have fueled the shaping of educational experiences. This also included feelings of hurt associated with awareness about the slow desensitization to the silencing of students on the margins of higher education who locate themselves in community college classrooms. Nonetheless, the students expressed that the value of engaging a decolonial feminist pedagogy was that it created spaces to dialogue and take on new perspectives as well as listen to all voices and testimonies so that no one's experience or knowledge was denied in the classroom.

Students' academic and personal growth experiences such as critical consciousness, empowerment, collective leadership, action and solidarity fostered many transformations. As Morgan and Tasha shared, the need to transform came from within them, not from someone in a position of power telling them they had to transform. Students developed their own agency and arrived at the transformation on their own time and in their own way. Moreover, the students noted that initial fears of not doing things right turned into feelings of liberation from that very fear. Nevaeh wrote that through critical reflexivity she found a place to enter the conversation, and through dialogue she was liberated to talk fully about her female identity. Moreover, she felt empowered to stay a student in *The Sociology of Gender* and keep with the dialogue. As students said, their experiences in *The Sociology of Gender* were deeply rooted in the *process* of how they learned the material through a decolonial feminist pedagogy where the procedures of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment contributed to normalizing the interruption of colonial legacies and radicalizing students' knowledge on gender from the ground up. Through this process of learning, students journeyed from point A to point Z and experienced growth at the personal and academic level, as well as at the structural level through transforming a community college classroom.

The next chapter draws from in-depth interview data and content-analysis of students' coursework (e.g., weekly critically reflexive journal writings, poetry) to gain a more critical understanding of students' processes of gaining gender awareness and developing a decolonial feminist standpoint as they worked further toward locating their own places, centering their own experiences, claiming their own truths, and transforming their own worlds.

Chapter 5
Lives Worth Knowing:
Pedagogy, Standpoint, Episteme, and the Value of Women's Truths

*“To me, home is Africa. And here in America, home is just in a room away,
knocking my door to say how I should be”*

-Subin, community college student

“For knowledge, the very act of knowing, is related to the power of self-definition” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 195). How might a raised gender awareness, self-reflexive identity, and a decolonial feminist standpoint give students the opportunity to challenge and disrupt their previous epistemic knowledge and shift epistemic authority in the community college classroom? This research aims to map how students moved from point A to point Z in the community college classroom pedagogically framed in decolonial feminism, and in doing so it works to reveal how students came to the knowledge of past lived experiences moving through various spaces and in relation to the past curricula of their life history. A decolonial feminist pedagogy that includes curricula and instructional strategies that draw from multiple, diverse experiences can impact the spaces that students move through, both inside and outside of the community college classroom. This chapter centers the students’ voices to explore their critical gender moments related to movement and space and draws conclusions on how decolonial feminist pedagogy shapes students movement within the many spaces of their lives.

In this chapter, I explore the decolonial feminist standpoint development of students from *The Sociology of Gender*. To do this, I analyze in-depth interview data and students’ weekly journal writings to explore how decolonial feminist pedagogy impacted processes of gender awareness and gender identity development. In addition, I will spotlight the role of intersectionality in students’ writing and

consequences for the emergence of decolonial feminist standpoint. This inquiry is important because it promotes understanding of how students engaged an anti-racist, social justice curriculum. Moreover, this work is critical to the conversation of pedagogy because it illuminates the relationship between decolonial feminist pedagogy, the disruption of classroom hierarchies, and politics of knowing in the classroom. Finally, this chapter offers insight into the experiences that students in a non-Eurocentric classroom have through the instructional methods of *critically reflexive journal writing*, and reveals consequences for shifts in epistemic authority, while offering a new entry point into future discussions of the praxis of dialogue in feminist classrooms. This new entry point can challenge people to think about whose voices are traditionally deemed credible in college classrooms, how people come to think of certain voices as credible, and how this marginalization and privilege is sustained in college classrooms. This chapter is framed around critical moments in the classroom that tie back to the aforementioned goals and speak to the importance of the process of the classroom and writing space for the women's understanding of how they have moved through their life spaces, and in a way that is important to them as female students moving through educational spaces.

The community college students began their journey in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom with written reflections on their initial understandings and feelings about gender identity. At large, the students held a small grasp on gender identity, yet expressed shared interest in future engagements with the subject. Moreover, the students revealed a sense that future engagements would feel safe and be comfortable for them. While the group was diverse, the students felt an easy sense of relation to one another

because the majority shared a female identity. Finally, students did not view gender as complex or a topic that might bring upon challenges. As all the students described in their gender identity reflexive writing assignment, *I am female*. On first impression, it would appear they had a sense of where this located them. However, most of the students interviewed felt that learning about intersectionality, and applying intersectionality as an analytical tool to the study of the gender, revealed dynamics of power and privilege that operate in constructing gender identity, including their own. As a methodological tool, intersectionality fosters students' critical gender consciousness by challenging normative assumptions about gendered experiences and inequalities across identity groups. The students interviewed identified intersectionality as an integral component of increasing their own gender identity development and gender awareness. Through discussion around critical moments in the classroom, this chapter explores how the community college students came to understand and develop their own decolonial feminist standpoints through processes of gender awareness that promoted perspective taking and gender identity development that was anchored in unraveling and understanding systemic oppressions of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism.

Critical Moments: Awareness, Identity, and Public Space

Female experiences in dance and cheerleading. The students felt that the first step to understanding gender was to understand how they embodied gender. The majority of students' journal writings on gender embodiment reflected a pattern across female experience examining the way the participants occupied spaces of cheerleading and dance with respect to their social identities of gender, race, and class. In her interview, Alison recalled looking down at the gender embodiment in-class writing

prompt and reading the guidelines to reflect on the ways our bodies, be it female bodies, male bodies, trans bodies, are socially constructed, or used, or expressed. Alison said,

I remember thinking well, I use my female body in a certain way, and I express it in a certain way, but the constructed part, even though we had learned about social construction, I still couldn't get that. Well, I wrote about my experiences cheerleading, and others did too, and some about dance. And then we were in small groups sharing out our experiences, and off went the light bulb. The way we all used our body was sometimes the way others expected us to use our female bodies. It was so often constructed by society's standards, like we learned in class.

Like Alison, Ami reflected on her embodied experiences as a female cheerleader.

Through her critically reflexive journal writings, Ami described herself as a "tomboy" since childhood. Still, she was drawn to be a cheerleader during high school. Of Thai descent, Ami considered what it would mean to be in a place where teen girls held a certain level of power in the school social scene. Yet, Ami found herself getting distracted from her role of cheerleader, and instead spent her time on the sidelines engrossed by the actual playing of the game. As she wrote, "I paid too much attention to watching the football game and not enough attention to standing there bouncing around and looking pretty." Ami wrote, "I still remember my cheerleading coach losing it on me one night in front of everyone. She yelled that perhaps I should instead join the football team versus cheerlead. That was the last day I ever cheerlead!" Examining her participation in cheerleading through an intersectional lens, Ami's journal writings captured elements of power and privilege that operated in constructing her gender identity. In reflecting on her gender at the intersection of her Thai ethnicity, Ami wrote,

I think that being a Thai woman, I am expected to be exotic and "pretty." I don't personally agree with that idea but when I say I'm Thai, men have a tendency to treat me differently, obviously not all the time, but I have heard "Oh, I love Asian women." I don't really act any different because of it, but, there is always this feeling that people see me in a sexual way and that's not always welcomed.

At initial understanding, it seems Ami describes what feminist theorist of film Mulvey (1975) calls “the male gaze.” This is the positioning of women as the objectified other whose performance is designed with the male viewer in mind. While Ami wrote that as a teenager she couldn’t name the “male gaze” as the reason that she pushed herself to the margins of cheerleading, and instead focused on learning the game of football, she continues to write that “At some subconscious level, I’m sure I felt that it just was uncomfortable for me. That cheerleading made me feel like I was putting my body on display. I’m sure I wanted to separate myself from how society expected me, the tiny Asian female, to be physically.” Ami’s quote complicates the concept of the “male gaze,” because in actuality her experience is not just a matter of female representation and the centering of the male subject, but illustrates the centering of practices and ideologies framed in patriarchy and Orientalism. Ami was being viewed by a patriarchal, racialized, and Orientalized “gaze” where her performance as a cheerleader was linked to her body being for men: football players and the male crowd, but where she also felt exoticized and eroticized due to her identity as a Thai woman in Western cultural spaces.

Like Ami, Jada also described her embodied experience as a female cheerleader in high school. Through critically reflexive journal writing, Jada demonstrated the use of intersectionality as a tool for grasping her gender embodiment as a Black female. Jada’s initial reflections on cheerleading included the memory of the “preppy, bubbly” image the girls on her squad were expected to express as cheerleaders. She explained that the rituals of cheerleading practices involved the rehearsals of cheer and dance routines. Moreover, the rituals included the girls’ rehearsal of a gendered performance where their success as a cheerleader was measured by if they were “being girly enough.” The bubbly

image was further established by a uniform of heavy make-up and hairspray, perfect posture, and a forced smile that Jada said caused pain in her cheeks. The make-up presented a complexity to her embodied experience and demonstrated how cultural frameworks of power impact the relationships people have with their bodies and the presentation of self. Jada demonstrates the complexity through her critically reflexive writing and states,

Out of the varsity and jr. varsity squads together, I was one of 3 black³ girls. We were forced to wear red lipstick at games. To me, red is a no-no on a black face. I hated the red lipstick I had to wear to look the part of the ever-smiling cheerleader, happy and bouncing with every step. At the time it was my role so I just adjusted to it, but now I look back and as much as I loved cheerleading, I wish I could've been my own type of female and shine with my own personality versus the fake girly personality they wanted.

Tasha shared the importance of the gender embodiment critically reflexive writing assignment in creating a space for her to reflect on and recognize the aspects of performance in her femininity. For example, through her writing Tasha captured the competing and similar gendered expectations associated with her hip-hop, jazz, and ballet classes. In ballet class, Tasha was expected to be lady-like in ways that were reflected by straight posture and demure facial expressions. In jazz and hip-hop, however, the expectation was to show a "lively" facial expression. For recitals, Tasha was expected to wear heavy make-up. Across dance styles, Tasha wrote that she always had "cute little skirts and hats." Still the cuteness, she noted, was coupled with a gendered performance and her writing honed in on the expectation to "move in a certain way that the few boys in my class were never expected to move." Progression in dance coupled with her aging from childhood to adolescence meant an increase in the practice of moving her female

³ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

body for "my audience." Tasha wrote that dance taught her "how to be pretty and dress up, and wear make-up for the crowd." Tasha's gender embodiment and socialization experiences as shaped by dance are reflected through an awareness that with age comes power for how she chooses to be female. Tasha wrote,

I don't let it control my life. I do it cause I like it, but I always told myself it's okay not to get dressed up all the time for other people. It's okay to be a female who dresses down and is still beautiful and isn't always "on" with a performance for society. I can say that, but I don't know all dancers can say that and believe it.

Similar to Tasha, Kassi experienced a dance culture that taught her how to "be female, be a lady," through ballet classes in the rural hamlet of her hometown. "We lived in a small town, but the teacher was *very* well known, so that meant the rich girls from the other towns made the trek to us for ballet class." Kassi described her relationship with her female body as "on guard" and claimed to feel like she was always "suffocating." Kassi wrote,

First off, the teacher lets you join class after a weigh-in. So your first introduction to this world of ballet is through a scale. Sick, right? And she would weigh us often. I wonder if my mom knew that, because it is so messed up. Second, in ballet you just wear your tights and leotard, and she always said we couldn't wear underwear. She would pinch the back of your leotard when you were at the barre to make sure you were following the rules. That was weird. I hated that. When you are a teenager obviously you wear underwear if you have your period. But how awkward because then she knows you have your period. It was just, my body, our bodies, were always an issue and I just wanted it to be about the dance.

Kassi's experience raised the discussion of agency over one's own body and how women experience their bodies in different spaces where there are obvious hierarchies (e.g., dance teacher). Through her writing, Kassi captured her oppressive experiences with dance through the intersectional analysis of gender and social class. "As children, me and my friends would just try to laugh off the "weird" rituals of our dance teacher," she wrote. Kassi and her friends might leave studio and walk down to the corner store

and get an ice-cream cone on their way home from dance class. However, the girls from the area suburban towns, Kassi wrote, were like "ghost girls." She described their expressionless faces and lack of small talk before and after class. Kassi wrote,

It was just so much stress. It's easy to have an expressionless face at her studio. Your body really isn't yours in that place. I love dance. It's like my life. But I know when I go in there she feels like she has some power over me because you know, I'm connected to the work. To the dance.

For Malia, gender embodiment was linked to gender socialization. Even though Malia "enjoyed what the boys were doing more than the girls," she reflected on her experience in the female space of her ballet class. Malia recalled an early memory of gender socialization in reflecting back to the age of 8 when she experienced her mother's aim to socialize her as female during her childhood. Her mother put her into a ballet class around 8 years old because as Malia stated, "I guess my mother thought I was too "boyish" and tried to "girly me up." Malia's reaction was to cry loudly throughout the whole first class in "early protest" of a space where she was expected to "twirl and swirl and smile and be something I plain didn't want to be." She wrote,

Needless to say, my mother never brought me back there. And right at this very moment I'm realizing how much my mom loves me. She tried to get me to act more like a girl, but if it seemed like it hurt me more than anything else, she wouldn't do it.

While the students' parents may have socialized their daughters in ways that determined what their daughters could participate in, there was also a pattern across parental expectations surrounding what daughters should *not* participate in: soccer.

Female experiences in soccer. In her interview, Nadja stated, "When it came to sports, my parents gave me the decision between volleyball or tennis, not soccer like my older brothers." The in-depth interviews and content analysis of students' critically

reflexive journal writings revealed how an intersectional analysis of gender embodiment and socialization promoted students' increased awareness of their gender inequality and gender identity. One theme across the journal writings was the complexity of the patriarchal "gaze" for refugee students with transnational family identities.

Schmalzbauer (2004) describes transnational families as those families (nuclear and extended), who live in two or more countries and are still strongly connected to their homeland. The transnational family status of Nadja, Subin, and a fraction of other students from *Sociology of Gender* contributed to the complexity of gender socialization when cultural norms conflict across nations.

Nadja's critically reflexive journal writings revealed that her desires to play soccer were stifled by her parents' decision that soccer was too masculine and competitive of a sport for their daughter to play. Seen through the patriarchal "gaze," her parents expected that men should be at the center of the sport. Nadja further identified intersectional cultural forces that she felt impacted her parents' process of socializing her as not just female, but as a Bosnian female. Nadja wrote,

My brother and my father always watched soccer games together. Whenever I would try to join them, my mom would call me into the kitchen to help her with something. In a Bosnian household the mother teaches the daughters to take care of the cooking and cleaning, though if my brother helps out in the kitchen it's not frowned upon, but as the daughter I am expected to do these things. Most females of my ethnicity who do not learn these things are said to be lazy, are frowned upon and mocked. We do carry "traditional" female roles. The rules are often bent for the boys, so why couldn't I play soccer too?

Nadja highlights a common inquiry across the participants when reflecting on gender socialization: why are social roles inflexible and rigid for females? Nadja continued,

The summer after sixth grade was my summer of exploration. My gym teachers noticed that I had a lot of endurance and strength for my age. Growing up watching my brother play soccer, I wanted to show him that I could do it too. My

gym teachers encouraged me to try out for the girls' soccer team in the seventh grade. I told my mother that summer that I was going to try out for a team as soon as the seventh grade started. I had my eyes set on soccer. My mother did not allow it. She said that soccer was for boys. She simply narrowed my choices. She said that playing soccer would give me "crooked legs." So after that, I never wore a dress again.

Nadja explained that as refugee student in the US, she knew that soccer was not just for the boys in America. She watched as her female peers participated in a sport and were supported by their families to do so. Her act of resistance against gendered expectations was to not wear feminine clothing, such as dresses, that she was expected to wear. Nadja identified how systems of patriarchy and power exist across national boundaries, while identifying the challenges that refugee and transnational families face when raising their children. She writes,

I think back and know it was hard for my parents to make choices on what was rights for us as Bosnians and as Americans. Living here didn't take away our national identity. I didn't see it when I was younger. I only understood that we came from a war, and we live in this place now, so we are Americans. For my parents, that was not the case. Their decisions about what I could participate in were made with Bosnia always in mind.

Subin identified as a Sudanese immigrant. Like Nadja, Subin holds a transnational family identity status. However, unlike Nadja who is in her upper teens, Subin is a woman in her forties, married, and raising four children. Subin's critically reflexive journal writings reveal her experiences as a mother raising daughters in the US. As recent Sudanese immigrant to the US, Subin noted her increased awareness about the challenges her family continues to face as they assimilate to gender roles in the new city she, her husband, and five children call home. In her critically reflexive journal writing on gender socialization, Subin wrote, "As a girl I couldn't play much sports. Like sports in my culture, girls can't play soccer." Weeks later, Subin revisited this topic in one of

her journal writings, but instead of writing about her own experiences as growing up female in Sudan, she wrote from the location of her role as a mother to Sudanese born children now living in the US. Her writing captures how cultural forces created challenges for the handling of her daughter's request to play soccer at her new US high school. Subin wrote,

When I become a mother I understand why it is so hard to answer some questions that your kids ask. And how to answer the question in good manner or in way that kids can understand. My nine year old daughter she come to me one time and told me she want to join girls soccer team, in my mind and the way that I learned from my parents soccer is for boys, but here in America girls can play it. I told her in our culture soccer for boys. She said: (I don't care I just want to play. I like soccer. I am not in Africa. I am here.) Then I can't say anything. Just I don't used to see girls playing soccer. That's the way I grew up our custom and tradition don't accept that. But my kids they don't understand because now they are living in different culture and seeing different behavior. To me, home is Africa. And here in America, home is just in a room away, knocking my door to say how I should be.

Subin's journal writings captured the challenges that transnational, refugee family's face when raising children in host nations. For Subin, Nadja, and other transnational students, the journals were a space where reflexively, the students located themselves as women who were expected to embody their womaness in two separate, and at times contradictory ways: as women of their the home country (e.g., Bosnia, Sudan) and as American women. One variable remained present in their journal writings about their experiences embodying transnational female identities, their experiences did not exist in national "vacuums", but they did exist in systems of patriarchy. In Bosnia, Sudan, the US, and other nations, the female embodied and socialization experiences of activity (e.g., cheerleading, dance) and sport (e.g., soccer) were subject to the male, patriarchal "gaze," as well as patriarchal practices and ideologies, where power was implicit in the management of the women's experiences.

In addition to students with refugee and transnational status, other students spoke to the challenges they face raising children in the US. Jada wrote critically about her parenting practices and raising her son. She analyzed the male experience in organized sports, a topic she discussed reading and learning about from the *The Sociology of Gender* course reading, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities" (Messner, 2009) which looks at the relationship between hierarchy, competition, and young male athletes sense of self-worth. Jada interrogated how she embodied her gender as a mother, and the implications that her embodiment had on her childrearing. Jada's embodiment of the strong female identity carries through in her parenting and has framed her experiences with her son.

My son wanted to play soccer; I wanted him to play baseball. Soccer isn't a tough enough sport apparently is what I thought at the time. However, I allowed my son to play soccer. On the field I was the worst parent out there. I would yell from the sidelines, "Kick the ball!" or "No! Pay attention and the kick the ball harder!" Mind you these were 5 and 6 year olds. They were supposed to be having fun and I was forcing the competitive edge into my son. I wonder how I made him feel by placing so much pressure on him.

The pressure to encourage competition at a young age, while common for many parents of athletes in the US, came from a specific place for Jada. She wrote, "I am a black⁴ woman and as a black woman I face daily challenges. The greatest is constantly having to prove my worth and capabilities. It's the expectation to fight your way through the day to show you are worth it." Exploring her experience at her son's soccer game through an intersectional lens, Jada examined the intersections between males, Blackness, and lower class status. She wrote,

⁴ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

It's bad enough that when he goes to school as a black⁵ male he is going to be expected to play a sport and win. As the reading explained, when coming from a lower-class, males are expected to be the star and "make it out of the hood." It's terrible to think that young minority males are taught that in order to be someone they have to be good at a sport. In knowing this, I will introduce my son to other things and allow him to choose his own path.

Jada's writings revealed that as a Black mother to a Black son in a society that privileges White bodies, the idea of allowing her son to choose his own life path is one that she has struggled with. Nonetheless, she recognizes the importance of her son having agency in his own life for positive personal and social growth. Internalized feelings of fight, struggle, and survival were common themes throughout Jada's journal writings. Through the writing process, Jada recognized those subjects were common in her past lived experiences, and impacted her choices on how to socialize her son. Through critically reflexive writing, in conjunction with intersectional readings, Jada demonstrated her own agency and empowerment to raise her son by her standards, and not by the standards set by US society, while noting that does not erase her awareness of how society expects her son to act.

Female experiences with hair. The content-analysis of students' journal writings revealed an understanding of how female gender identity is connected to physical attributes such as hair. Moreover, students' writings demonstrated an awareness of how their female identities were politicized through expectations connected to their presentation of self through hair. Ami, a female of Thai descent, wrote about a moment between her and her mother that tied back to the gendered expectation for her to look pretty as a woman with long hair. Ami shared in her journal writings that at eighteen she

⁵ ibid

decided to donate her long, straight black hair to Locks of Love.⁶ With her hair cut short, Ami chose to embrace a new hairstyle: a Mohawk. She recalled getting an angry message over email from her mother who was stationed in Afghanistan at the time. Ami wrote, "She said, "How could you do this to me? And on Mother's day!"” Ami described the cultural meaning she felt assigned to her hair, and felt that she understood early on that hair held value in society. Ami was aware that her hair was powerful, she wrote, and connected that feeling to *The Sociology of Gender* course reading "The Fairest of Them All," by Jill Nelson (2009) who writes about the value of hair in racist society. Ami felt a kinship with Nelson. As women of color, Ami felt she understood that Nelson cutting her hair shorter and shorter was in Ami's words "...a woman's epic journey to finding peace.” Ami felt that the feeling of short hair allowed Nelson to experience spaces in greater peace, and that desire for moving through public spaces in peace was something Ami craved for herself even if her mother did not understand. Ami wrote, "When I cut my hair down to nothing in the Mohawk, I realized I had the privilege of not caring at all about trying to have "white”⁷ people" hair.” In fact, cutting away what society deemed valuable to her female identity shifted the power into Ami's own hands and gave her control over her body and developing identity as a woman of Thai descent moving through US spaces.

Helen, an American Indian student, wrote her critically reflexive journal writings on gender embodiment with a focus on the socio-emotional impact that the White, skinny, tall and blonde Barbie doll she was gifted with as a girl had on her. Helen wrote,

⁶ "Locks of Love is a public non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children in the United States and Canada under age 21 suffering from long-term medical hair loss from any diagnosis" (retrieved from: <http://locksoflove.org/> on January 31, 2015).

⁷ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word White is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

I remember thinking, this is what I was to play with, but mainly, this is what I was to strive for. However, being an American Indian I didn't lay out in the sun and get a tan like the "white"⁸ girls in the summer. I had thick dark hair. I once actually dyed my hair blonde when I was older. Right away I felt like I had lost my heritage. I dyed it right back. I am not Barbie, I am a strong American Indian woman.

Through her writing, Helen drew out the dynamics of racial/ethnic power at play in her example of hair and female identity. Helen gained early awareness through material culture (e.g., Barbie dolls) that beauty was defined by society as White beauty. Helen grasped that hair is symbolic and that all girls in the US are held to Western standards of beauty. As Ami had cut off her hair to free herself from White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994), Helen quickly changed her dyed-blond locks back to the thick dark hair that identified her as a “strong American Indian woman,” thereby disrupting spaces defined by White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994), and reclaiming her intersectional female identity on her own terms.

Johanna’s critically reflexive journal writings illustrated an understanding of her embodiment at the intersections of gender and religion. Johanna analyzed the symbolic meaning of hair in thinking of how she occupies public space as a Muslim woman who has immigrated to the US from Tunisia in recent years. Johanna wrote,

I have some Muslim friends who don't cover their hair in the US, but there are many of us, including me, who do. I think some people view this as weakness. I am in America now, so as a Muslim in America I should free myself of this thing. Well, you see, it's not a burden to me. It is my choice. That to me is my American freedom, no?

Johanna’s statement is another testament to the ability women have to alter White supremacist capitalist patriarchal (hooks, 1994) spaces, in this case, in the US. Moreover, Johanna’s reflection grasps how US women look at other women’s hair through an

⁸ *ibid*

imperialist, colonial “gaze.” The Western female eyes may have looked upon the hijab as a symbol of powerlessness because as women they have likely been socialized to think of visible hair as holding power. Johanna’s writing exemplifies how resistance to White supremacist capitalist patriarchal (hooks, 1994) systems of US power and globalism can lead to the reclaiming and redefining of female gender embodiment, empowerment, and identity development in US spaces.

Female experiences in media. All students interviewed were asked to describe an instructional tool from *The Sociology of Gender* that raised their awareness about the role of media and the communication of gender messages about female experiences in relation to dynamics of power and privilege. Through student interviews and content-analysis of critically reflexive journal writings, the students’ responses overwhelmingly illuminated the important role the film *Miss Representation* (2011) played in their development of feminist standpoint through increased gender awareness and gender identity development. Through watching, dialoguing, and critically writing about *Miss Representation* (2011), students shared that they were able to make connections to their early lived experiences through an intersectional lens of gender and race.

Jada wrote,

...the knowing that media, you know the movies, the music, the t.v., all of it is about power and the more you really watch and listen to the message, the more you see there is a lot of things that aren't right, and a lot of things that are unequal, about how people, how women, are represented. It also made me realize that I live by what the media shows. Even as an adult I want the bigger butt and to wake up and my stretch marks and are gone. There has been this image flooding females heads of what a female should look and act like and a lot of females including myself unknowingly try harder and harder to live up to that image instead of valuing and embracing our unique beauty.

Nevaeh said, "If I wouldn't have watched *Miss Representation* I wouldn't have realized how women are negatively portrayed in the media and how this hurts women's opportunities to be leaders." Additionally, throughout the interviews, time and again the students explained, "I saw myself" in the film *Miss Representation*. Sierra remembered being a teenager who idolized models and singers and felt depressed for not looking "pretty" like the women advertised. She wrote, "That's how I lived as a teenager. Always feeling not good enough. I was that girl." Caitlyn remembered trying to emulate the women she saw on t.v. shows who were always "pretty and happy," such as Jennifer Aniston. Tasha said, "That's exactly how I felt growing up," when relating to striving for perfect beauty.

Ami, Beth, Subin, Helen, Camila, and Jada shared the struggles of raising girls and young women in a society that focuses on the ideal female. From sexualized clothing options in the department store, to lack of positive female role models on children's television shows, to lack of diversity through media, each woman described how these factors had negatively impacted their self-esteem and left them feeling not good enough. Moreover, they each worried that these factors would negatively impact their own daughter's self-esteem.

Alison was asked about the film *Miss Representation* (2011) in her interview, she directed her response toward a journal she had written on the topic. Echoing responses from many students, she said, "I think having to write in this class really got to how I felt the most. It gave me space to really think about it." Alison's journal reflection on *Miss Representation* (2011) spotlighted critical moments of the film and critical points of

critical gender consciousness with regard to media and gender communication. She wrote,

The specific type of "beautiful" woman that the movie shows us is one that we see all the time without maybe realizing it. The image is really a distorted image and causes lots of harm to women's mental and physical health because we all feel this tremendous pressure to be something that the movie explained only under 1% of the population can actually genetically be.

Beth was shocked and disgusted to learn that the images that she has absorbed are digitally enhanced to levels of "ultimate perfection that are truly impossible to achieve." Sylvia wrote that holding women to an impossible standard is all about patriarchy and power. "Girls measure themselves up against an impossible ideal that they see in the media, and the ideal female image in media causes men to measure women by this same impossible standard." What's more, Sylvia wrote, was that women become human capital. She explained, "The media says that the value of women is determined only by their body. When girls and women are seen as objects, then everyone starts to see them that way." Speaking personally, Sylvia wrote,

The culture tells me that I need to be beautiful to have *value* and be loved. I learn from the media that the only way to do this is to *buy* a certain product, be thin and dress provocatively, and have perfect hair, skin, and make up. I am a human being with flaws, and my worth does not lie in my physical appearance.

The theme of value and the colonial legacy of capitalism also resonated with Nevaeh who wrote,

Something that was communicated to me in this documentary is that women's bodies are really important to capitalism. I couldn't agree more. These women, their bodies are exploited in photo shoots, on magazine covers, in movies...At first I thought these women didn't care, all they wanted was money. Maybe some of them need that money though and because of the way women are always viewed they haven't had equal chances to do other things. Now I see, it's not just like they are exploiting themselves, which I used to think. No, they are being exploited by someone else, by business, by media, and so others can make money! Off their bodies!

Morgan described her understanding of the film as the first time she grasped the role abstract power plays in women's lives. "How is the power abstract?" was a question that Morgan answered in her interview. She said,

The thing that really got to me was how women don't have as much power as men in their relationship with the media. In the past I've had a very unstable relationship. It was bad. There was a power and inequality between men and women that I really could understand in that relationship. But with the media, unless you really look for it, or have someone explain it, you might never know the crazy damage it is doing to you as a women every day, for years. I mean how many women can't explain why they feel so depressed about the way they look? The damage is done and you can't explain it because it's just the media and media is this abstract source.

Nancy's reflection captured her feelings about the film's footage of "degrading and unequal" treatment of female politicians in the media. Since the film she notices that a male politician's language is described in powerful terms such as "stated" and "proclaimed" versus the description of female politician's language as "whined" and "complained." Nancy wrote, "This unequal language just feeds the stereotypes that the film talks about. Men come across as strong and powerful and women are whiny bitches. Sure doesn't motivate me to get into politics!" Alison illustrated her raised awareness of the unequal representation of male and female politicians and discussed similar awareness of how media assigns emotional verbs to women politicians, and not for men, when the same thing is being stated by both parties. Moreover, she noted how women in politics are described by the media in terms of being good looking or "ugly," instead of describing their political contributions. According to Alison, "This devalues women and diminishes their accomplishments." While Beth notes that there are women leaders all over the world, and comparatively, the US falls far behind. Beth wrote, "We (US) as a nation are quick to condemn other nations for their poor treatment of women, but

somehow we are able to overlook our own indiscretions when it comes to the treatment of women, which include blocking them from the political arena." Finally, Camila draws on a quote that was the most referenced across the students' journals on the film, "You can't be what you can't see," wrote Camila. She continued, "The quote really made me think a lot about media's role in how we think about ourselves and the power we have over our life. It reminds me of growing up and being taught by my family that girls should be "seen and not heard." It's heartbreaking to think that the big message for girls from the media is that *you, as you are, are not worth enough*. The media is one place that disempowers women."

For Tasha and Jada, the message *you can't be what you can't see* in the media was significantly connected to their racial identity. In her journal, Jada wrote about her struggle growing up Black when all of the images she saw in the media were predominately White. Tasha agreed and during her interview she asked, "How come even here in college everything always comes back to White people? This (*The Sociology of Gender*) is the first class that has shared many stories of all types of people." Jada reflected on the impact that racial misrepresentation, and lack of representation, of people of color in the media has had on her life. She wrote,

If I wasn't seeing me on TV, then the white⁹ kids weren't seeing me either. I hated my skin color for a long time growing up in a middle-class and mostly white¹⁰ neighborhood. I didn't get to just jump in the pool with all my white friends. Because of the chlorine I would have to lather my thick hair in conditioner so that the chlorine wouldn't take my hair out. None of my white¹¹ friends had to do his. My friends didn't get ashy after getting their skin wet. They would lay out and get tans, obviously that wasn't fun for me. I had to accept the fact I would never be like them and that was it. I am a fan of chemical hair relaxers to straighten my

⁹ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word White is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

hair. I tried the natural look but it was ugly to me. Is it because of how society portrays the nappy look that I absolutely hate it? I wonder if I were to see afros on the TV and in magazines everyday if I would then follow suit. Black women are just never good enough when compared to white women.....Society wants us to think we're not good enough and I refuse.

Helen wrote that she never can remember seeing any woman of color in the media while growing up. She wrote, "If I did see a woman of color then she was portrayed in a certain way: often poor, single, a lot of drama. Then there is the type who is a larger woman who doesn't put up with anything. There are so many other personalities that are never on the screen. Media really makes so many people invisible." In her interview, Tasha discussed how she had noticed women of color are visible is in the media outlet of music videos. However, as gender is communicated negatively through these videos, she found the visibility to be problematic. She expressed,

If you look at the latest music video all you see are girls with mostly no clothes on shaking their butts and men around them throwing money. Their sex is what makes them worthy is the message. I hate that because when me and my friends are at parties, some girls show up half-naked and be shaking their butts all over the place and men are attracted to that. They don't respect women who dress with clothes on that cover their body. We are more than that and should teach young girls at an early age they are more than that too.

Jada recalled being one of those girls attracted to dancing provocatively because "I saw that boys loved those kinds of black¹² girls. Too bad it was demeaning. My interest in dancing like that didn't last long. That wasn't the person I wanted to be seen as. I wanted to be valued for other things."

Most all of the students interviewed described moments of increased gender awareness related to gender embodiment as being the recognition of their poor self-body

¹² Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

image and poor relationships with women's own bodies that resulted from the consumption of negative gender images communicated through the media. Kassi said,

You know what really stuck out to me? There was the day we did the big circle and we went around sharing things from our gender embodiment writing. Most everyone hated their bodies, or hated some part of their body. I couldn't believe it because there were some girls who looked perfect in that class and I was shocked to think, "How could she not like herself?" That was so eye-opening to think of how many of us have a bad relationship with our own self.

Kassi's assertion of poor body image across the student group was reinforced by the gender embodiment journal writings. Ami wrote, "I don't like my weight. I was 100 lbs. and after I had my son I went up to 120 lbs. I am not comfortable with my body whatsoever." Beth wrote, "My body is not my favorite thing in the world. I am always wishing I was thinner and prettier. But I'll never be that pretty girl. Overweight women are second-class citizens in the eyes of the media and the media is what matters it seems." Alison described seeing herself as "chubby" and also made connections to media's role in her self-image. She wrote "I gained a lot of weight in my twenties, it greatly bothered me at first. I know my being bothered was in part due to the media's perception of attractiveness being associated with thinness. Also, I am very fair skin with strawberry-blond hair and freckles. As a child I was teased so much for being different looking. Not having a perfectly clear complexion. It really hurt my self-esteem." Sylvia described being self-conscious of her weight as well as her "yellowy skin tone." Additionally, she drew out media's connection to her self-image. "The media definitely makes me dislike my body more rather than love the way I am. The media makes me feel pressured to lose weight. I always feel too large because of the unrealistic image of beauty that media pushes." Nancy described herself as "overweight," and noted the pressure media puts on females while also stating she wouldn't want to look like the

"sickly models." Moreover, she wrote, "I am a little self-conscious about my body knowing that I am overweight, but I have learned to live with it."

In Nevaeh's interview she shared how collective the feelings of poor self-image were in the classroom, "When we shared during our group dialogue circle about this, we all, every one of us, we all had something we felt wasn't just right. And most of us all brought it back to what we saw on t.v. or in media. That was one of those times I felt like I was part of something that I hadn't known my whole life. Like I was in some trap game or something." Like many others, Nevaeh recognized how her individual experiences are shaped by systems of power in the media.

Caitlyn recalled feeling scrutinized by her peers and initially feeling guilty for sharing her poor self-image in the classroom space. She said,

I remember thinking they are going to hate me. Because, you know there were some girls in the room who were heavier and shared how that made them feel sad a lot and depressed. And I know that I am not fat but to me my body feels that way. I just remember sharing that in class and feeling cold stares, but then more people my size started sharing the problems they had with their body too, and I felt better.

Ami said, "I could feel the eye rolls! When I said I hate my body and feel overweight at 120 pounds I wasn't kidding. You had girls sending me dagger eyes! But it's how I feel." Tasha recalled being one of the girls to "roll my eyes!" She said,

How you going to sit there and say you are too fat? I mean, come on. When you got girls in the room who really are fat and who are saying that have mental depression and cut themselves. Oh, that made me so mad to hear that from the skinny girls. How could they not love their body? They had, you know that perfect body that you see in the magazines. They probably can get boyfriends. I just couldn't wrap my head around that. But then the more the skinny girls started saying that, and the more us big girls started saying that, I though uh-huh, there is something going on here. And then we watched that film and I thought, no, I can't hate on those girls for feeling that. I was starting to get it. There was more to it now. How can anyone of us love our bodies, big or small, when you got the

world telling you that you aren't good enough? It's not about your body size. That's not the problem. Girl, it's because you're female.

Just as Tanisha described the “trap game” of being a female held up to media’s negative standards for women, Tasha came to recognize that the body is politicized in media which negatively impacted most of her peers’ ability to love their bodies. The students came to recognize that media communicates ownership and power over the female body.

Critical Moments: Decolonial Feminist Pedagogy and Standpoint Development

Lessons from gender analysis of intersectional and multicultural readings.

The students’ critically reflexive journals illustrated the experiences of increased gender awareness that stemmed from reading the gender embodiment experiences of Latina women in Thompson's (2009) article, "A Way Outa No Way": Eating Problems among African-American, Latina, and White women.” Nancy explained that up until reading Thompson's (2009) article she had never thought about how race and ethnicity altered female experiences with eating disorders. Sylvia honed in on the "culture of thinness" celebrated across the media. The message, she felt, was that women should take up no space at all. While Subin offered a perspective different from the reading, and wrote that in her native Sudan, women are expected to be "chubby" which shows they are "well cared for." Helen, who has had weight struggles, wrote, "As a woman, I understood how it affects me. But I can't say I know how women of other races feel." Nancy explained her lack of thinking about eating issues and weight as anything but a White woman's problem. She shared that she remembers reading books or seeing a t.v. show where the protagonist had an eating disorder. Nancy said, "The girls were always White. I never thought about it being an issue that impacted other women." Alison drew out of the

reading a research fact that many of these women had experienced traumas of sexual abuse, poverty, and racism, and most held a LGBTQ identity status. Alison wrote that this knowledge raised her awareness also because she had only viewed shows about teenage anorexics or bulimics who were trying to get thin for a boyfriend. She shared, "It's like a slap my head moment. Why wouldn't there be lesbian women with eating disorders? Why is this only shown to be a white¹³ straight women's disease?" The reading was a snapshot for Jada who wrote, "I never associated eating disorders with Blacks and Latinas the way I do now after reading this article. And that leaves room for me to question who else is enduring this that the article doesn't talk about, like Middle Eastern women, and even men." Ami supported Jada's expression and wrote, "I really appreciate the women that this article focuses on, especially because we don't hear enough about the experiences of Black women and definitely not of Latina women. But what about all the other women out there? Will there be an article about Thai women like me? I think Asian women, we sometimes seem to be expected to be quiet and blend in to the surroundings, but we need to be noticed too."

Building from their gained awareness that the body is political and framed in systems of power and privilege, the students' quotes and reflections above illustrate how the decolonial feminist reading promoted gender awareness through the lenses of anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-capitalism. Framed in intersectional analysis of gender and race, the reading created a space for the students to identify multiple power systems that frame feminist body issues such as eating disorders and to grasp the privileging of White bodies across Western society. As the students shared, prior to reading on the ways that

¹³ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word White is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

eating disorders impacted Latina, African-American, and White women, they took the slanted representation of eating disorders as a White women's disease and society's privileging of White women's health and now have developed decolonial feminist standpoints from which they question: what about the women not represented? What about their stories? What about their health?

A second reading that emerged as critical to students understanding gender experiences in public space is embodied through an intersectional analysis of gender and race was sparked by the course reading "Just Walk on By" by Brent Staples (2009). The students interviewed repeatedly stressed the value of this reading in challenging their own stereotypes and racism, as well as fostering their awareness of gender embodiment at the intersection of racial identity. Alison explained "This was one of the most important readings of the semester and really helped me stop to think about how gender really isn't just about being female, but about all of those intersections that identify us---our race, our age, our religion---things like that." While Jennifer said, "I don't know if I've ever read something written by a Black man. Does that sound weird? Maybe I have. I don't know. I definitely haven't read anything about a Black man though, you know, that wasn't like something in history, like Martin Luther King or someone." Finally, Sierra described the reading as "an eye opener." She said,

Reading about racial profiling, and how Blacks are stereotyped as criminals is one thing, but reading about it through a man's personal story and how he hears the clicks of car doors locking when he passes cars a stoplight, or how people cross over to the other side of the street. That is crazy.

Alison wrote further about this in her journal writing and drew into question if things like racial profiling still happen in today's society. She wrote, "This story was originally

published in 1984, I would like to believe that Americans have advanced since then and are not so quick to stereotype."

Through journal writings, the students were able to contextualize their own gendered experiences of racial stereotyping. For Subin, Malia, Jada, Tasha, and Nevaeh the story evoked memories of times when as Black women their experiences in public spaces reflected the racially stereotyped experiences of Brent Staples (2009) in "Just Walk on By." Tasha wrote about her experiences in the workforce where she felt judgment passed on her by her White co-workers. "Nobody would eat lunch with me or invite me out to dinner on Friday's like the rest of them. I am sure they thought I was different because of my race." Nevaeh wrote about her experiences shopping at a *Bath and Body Works* in her area mall and reflected on her ability to "change spaces because I'm black."¹⁴ Nevaeh wrote,

A few minutes after being in the store I realized I was being followed around by the employee. She was an older Caucasian woman. Not only did this offend me but it also had me thinking, why me? Maybe because I'm a person of color. I was going to approach the woman and at the same time saw a casual dressed White woman steal something! I didn't say anything. I just left the store. I feel like if you think someone is going to be doing something negative don't make it so obvious because at the same time the person you think won't do wrong is usually the person that is doing wrong.

Subin described relating to Staples' (2009) experience while walking across her college campus and engaged her analysis through the intersectional lens of gender, race, and ethnicity. She wrote,

Sometimes I find myself in the same situation like this author, the way that I dressed and my looking. One time I wore my African clothes and I come to the campus for the classes. I heard behind me (Hey African woman. Why Africans

¹⁴ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

are so stupid and dumb?) That was a white¹⁵ male saying that. I didn't know what to say. I just continue walking.

Subin and Nevaeh described the experience and reactions to racial stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. For Nevaeh and Subin, their responses were to physically pass through the public space. These reflections pointed toward another pattern across the journal writings of the Black female students. After her experience, Subin wrote about it sometimes being necessary to change behavior if people are to accept her and so that people are "not harmful to others or us." Jada described that as a Black woman she makes a point to smile at others she walks past or begins conversation with a "friendly smile" so that they "can get a feel of my warm personality before they judge me. In writing through their experiences being raced as women in the US, the students grasped their positionality in relation to White people. Moreover, the students' writings demonstrated a decolonial feminist standpoint from which they not only read their oppressed gendered experiences but chose to respond to those experiences.

The White students interviewed responded that careful reading of Staples' (2009) experiences as a Black male and suspected criminal included a critical reflection into moments of their own lives in order to recall if they had participated in racism by stereotyping Black men. Beth wrote that while reading the Brent Staple's piece, she immediately thought about her own experiences with racial profiling. Beth wrote,

I once passed an African American male and I touched my purse. I truly did not have any motive with this movement other than making myself more comfortable, but the gentleman I passed must have believed I did because he made a comment. I began second-guessing myself wondering if I did place my hand on my purse out of fear of this man. I try to be more conscious now of my actions.

¹⁵ Per APA guidelines, when used as pronoun indicating a social identity, the word White is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

In her interview, Jennifer shared about listening to Beth's experience during her small-group dialogue circle in class. As a White woman she identified Beth's experience as "very similar to my own." Jennifer described how when she began sharing her story she stated that her action of taking the stairs at work instead of the elevator when a Black man was also waiting to get on the elevator was because he was a man, not because of his race. She recalled listening to other White women's similar shared experiences and noticed that they never involved White men. She said, "I had to start really questioning myself and why I had been fearful of not just men, but Black men."

Nancy raised the question in her journal: does race matter when it comes to fearing men? She wrote,

I remember when I first moved here, I'm not kidding when I say every time I walked alone or in the dark I would be scared every single time a black¹⁶ man crossed my path. I would feel bad about stereotyping, and I'd even feel racist by the time I got home safely. But still, it happened every time I went out for a walk by myself, or in the dark, yet again. Was I afraid of white¹⁷ men or even women? Sometimes depending on how close they were or if they "looked" like a menacing person, but the most of my fear came into play when the male was black.¹⁸

Nancy was left with many questions about how many times she had felt that way, and how many people she had hurt and offended in the process of racial stereotyping. She also had an intense sense of fear for her own son who she identified as "half-black."¹⁹ She said, "Would I want someone to be afraid of him? Absolutely not, and I would be angry if they were!"

¹⁶ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

¹⁷ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word White is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

¹⁸ Per APA guidelines, when used as a pronoun indicating a social identity, the word Black is capitalized. However, in this instance it remains uncapitalized because it reflects how the student wrote the word in her journal.

¹⁹ *ibid*

Caitlyn described a memory from high school when she and her mother drove to a nearby city for her soccer game and took a wrong turn trying to find the field. She recalled her mother coming to a stoplight where a man of color stood at a bus stop located a few feet away from the passenger door. "Instantly I pressed down the lock on my door which made a noticeable "click" sound. I peeked up and he was shaking his head." Caitlyn wrote about the symbolism of her experience,

I have to admit that I probably wouldn't have pressed down the lock if the man had been white.²⁰ After reading "Just Walk on By" I began understanding how what you think is a small thing, you know locking the door, actually causes people pain and feeds those stereotypes and doesn't give them a very fair life.

Caitlyn recalled the difficulty of sharing her experience of locking the car door when she saw a Black male with the others in her small group dialogue circle. "Oh man. I didn't want them to think I was racist. I just read from my paper. I kind of didn't know what to say. Should I apologize? It's hard to talk about race stuff. And then Monica stepped in and she was like, "Well, we've got work to do." I love that girl. There were about 8 of us. The 5 white²¹ girls had admitted being guilty of doing that. And the 3 Black girls had been on the receiving end or had men in their lives that they knew go through that. So Monique was like "Let's figure out why this is all going on."

The interviews with students from the same dialogue circle during the session that Staples' (2009) "Just Walk on By" and corresponding journals were discussed highlighted the groups' increased gender awareness. For instance, Ami said it was emotionally challenging for her to hear another woman during the dialogue circles describe her fear of her son being forever labeled a suspect, all because he is Black. The

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²¹ *ibid*

dialogue circles were also a space that revealed what feeds racial stereotypes of Black men. Jamie said, "Well, I spoke about seeing a lot of movies where I started to notice the "bad" guy is almost always a black²² male. This character is more likely to be violent towards his family, rob people, rape people. That's really the image that comes to my mind of Black men. It's horrible." Nadja discussed that she recalled adding to the dialogue session that in movies she has noticed that Black men are not professional looking and not presented as educated men. Also, she said, "In movies it feels like Black men have aggressive acting roles." Moreover, Caitlyn said that if she digs deeper into the impact that this has had on her thoughts and actions she realized that "Society has placed this image of Black males in my head that they are scary. And I hate that I have acted in ways that make me seem afraid of them all because media is basically telling me to be afraid." Jada added, "I think the media has shown that "real men" wear suit and ties and can hide their rage. When Black men aren't included in these roles in media than people actually start to believe that Black men aren't "real men" and start to treat them like they don't matter. They might start to believe it themselves." Jada continued, "But in our group we did talk about why this matters. The reading was a lesson in never judging a book by its cover." Tasha said, "It matters because its truth. Black men are viewed as criminals because of their race. This isn't just a onetime occurrence." Finally, Nadja agreed with Tasha that racial stereotyping of Black males isn't a one-time event. In a final journal on overall classroom experiences, Nadja wrote,

Our dialogue group the week of the "Just Walk on By" reading, really worked to "get it." It was hard, but it helped us think more about embodiment. It's not experienced the same for all males and all females. Those relationships are different. Our relationships with ourselves are different too. No one wants to

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embody fear. Many of us don't want to embody hate and ignorance either. Learning these things will hopefully change that.

Lessons from the gender analysis of music. Jackson Katz's (2009) "Eminem's Popularity is a Major Setback for Girls and Women" drew much critical attention from the students as evidenced through their journal writings. The Katz (2009) reading describes the movement of Eminem from rapper to a "larger-than-life cultural force" (p.518) whose misogynistic lyrics are downright dangerous to women. Specifically, students addressed the objectification of women in Eminem's music lyrics, as well as the communicated celebration of violence against women to which the students responded through a critical lens. Overall, students identified music lyrics as a popular culture media tool for transmitting misogynistic messages that construct and sustain gender inequality.

Ami wrote that it was not long ago when she was listening to Eminem's songs on the radio for entertainment. Ami described her new role as an LGBTQ community activist and noted that since embarking on "a road to activism" she had listened to lyrics and discovered not only degrading remarks toward females, but to those who she believes pose a threat to hyper-masculinity. "I listened to his rap where he says, *All you lil f****s can suck it, no homo,*" and I immediately skipped the song. My skin crawled. Since doing activist work, I am a lot less interested in music that boasts ignorance or is in any way offensive to women, gays and lesbians."

Nevaeh's journal described how much she valued Katz's (2009) critique of Eminem's lyrics and popularity because it raised her consciousness. Nevaeh wrote,

We have to challenge this popularity by educating ourselves about the meaning behind the lyrics, and then going out and telling everyone about it. The article quotes one song that he called "Kim" after his ex-wife. *Don't you get it bitch, no*

one can hear you? Now shut the fuck up and get what's coming to you. You were supposed to love me (sounds of Kim choking). This disturbed me because I used to listen to this song and admit that I had no idea what he was singing about. This disturbs me and makes me uncomfortable that I was so unaware. I feel like I have no choice but to tell people to pay attention to lyrics, and not support people whose music hurts women.

Nevaeh experienced increased awareness, and also showed development of her decolonial feminist standpoint by grasping that media is grounded in systems of capitalism and patriarchy that privilege men in ways that promote and sustain violence against women. Nevaeh went on to identify that a critical action of resistance against sexism and capitalism in media is to hold onto her purchasing power and disrupt spaces that support misogynist music that exploits and oppresses women.

Caitlyn identified the same song lyrics in her journal and wrote,

His lyrics are horrific. But they do tell us something about this crazy world, don't they? If violence and murder against women are celebrated in music by thousands of people, (which c'mon they are because this guy is a millionaire because somehow this music reaches people, as disturbing as that truth is) then what message does that send to men for how they can treat women in real life? It scares the hell out of me that people love his songs. Do they just love the thought of being the aggressor? Having that male power?

The real life consequences of misogynistic lyrics was described in Caitlyn's journal. Like Nevaeh, Caitlyn realized she had no idea the meaning behind the lyrics she sang until she stopped to read about them and then analyze them again for herself. Upon realizing the messages of female violence she was absorbing, she could not help but to think of a recent event in her life. Caitlyn wrote, "One of my sweet friends was brutally murdered by her boyfriend of two years. There are simply no words to describe hearing that news. Reading this article, I couldn't help but think of her." Caitlyn felt that is important to disempower rap artists like Eminem so that women will not lose their voices, control over their bodies, or their lives.

Additionally, Sylvia wrote, "Dissonant voices can come in many forms, some bold and some in the quiet refusal to listen to or purchase music with offensive lyrics." Sylvia wrote that there can be no room for hating females. She shared Nevaeh's idea that to disrupt sexist capitalist music spaces means to hold onto female purchasing power. The majority of students arrived at similar points in their critically reflexive journal writing. Engaging with dynamics of power and privilege related to gender promoted a transformation in the students. This outcome was witnessed through student journal writings written from a place of raised gender consciousness. The students writings also reflected the development of decolonial feminist standpoints as represented by their ideas of action to disempower sexist artists through holding their female purchasing power and raising awareness about female misrepresentations and consequences for gender embodiment and identity.

Lessons from their lives: Gender analysis of "letter to my younger self."

Through the decolonial feminist pedagogy praxis of critically reflexive writing, the students wrote to places of recognition of oppression in their lives. The students named and spoke back to the oppression through a writing assignment called *Letter to My Younger Self*. The students' letters captured the disempowerment of girls and adolescent women. In these letters, students used their raised gender consciousness and decolonial feminist standpoint to offer "words of wisdom" to themselves at early points in their lives.

Sierra wrote to her sixteen year old self, begging her not to waste time obsessing over magazines and striving for perfection. Ami wrote to teen Ami and advised her to stay unique and be happy, not stressed. She shared that lack of money meant not being

able to buy the latest fads and falling into media's trap. Caitlyn told her fourteen year old self to be guided by an intuition and not how she thought someone "cooler" than herself might act. And the majority of the letters illuminated the propensity for young women to have problematic and oppressive experiences with "first-loves."

Molly told her younger self, "No one deserves to be pulled on like a rag doll and pushed. You will come to realize that not every relationship is healthy, and not every guy is a "man," even though they will think they are." Sierra told her sixteen year old self, "STOP trying to chase after a guy who wants nothing to do with you and always says mean things to you. You will waste 2 years with him and find out he is a jerk. The world is tough, so be prepared. People will knock you straight down. Get up, Sierra. Work hard to get to the top." Nadja told her sixteen year old self,

I would advise you with all my heart to look the other way in the hallway when your middle school crush walks by. He will bring you more pain and confusion than you deserve. If you give this boy acknowledgement, a year from now he is going to fill your life with many sleepless nights. He will bring you the biggest heartbreak of your life. By now, he will have told you that he could never hurt you. If you say "No" when he asks you to Junior Prom, you will be saved from so much disappointment and hurt. He will ask you for your virginity. Say No. He will pressure you. Keep your pride and dignity. Just remember to look away from him in the hall. Don't let him in to your life. He will cause you more pain than joy.

In addition to damaging relationships with boyfriends, other students captured how bullying at the hands of male adolescent peers can cause lifetimes of pain and low self-esteem. Helen wrote, "When your mother tells you that teasing is a boys way of telling a girl he likes you, after you tell her that he makes big foot noises and shakes his desk every time you get up in class, please ignore her. That is not how boys tell you they like you. It's mean. It will destroy your confidence for a long time." Additionally, Camila wrote, "If that boy in 7th grade snaps your bra again and the guy homeroom teacher just

tells him to "knock it off" for the hundredth time then you have my permission to smack them both upside the head! When the world acts like the crap you are getting is ok, tell him it is not, no matter what you have to do to make your point."

There were a few letters that addressed the abuse of married and formerly married students. Per those students' requests, the details of those letters will not be shared in the data, but the women felt it was important to note that abuse happens across racial and ethnic identities, and they each described feeling that education and economic independence would have been a tool in leaving their situations. Moreover, these students felt that low self-esteem combined with bad peer experiences that included excessive bullying where no peer and no adult stood up for them led them to feel that even in adulthood, no one would really stand up for them when needed.

Letter after letter was embedded with themes of male power, intimidation, and abuse that in many instances were permitted by complacent adults who the women should have been able to trust (e.g, mothers and teachers). The complacency of the adults may signal the desensitization that people in a patriarchal society can experience-a complacency that sent early messages to the students that poor treatment at the hands of men is an accepted norm that women must learn to live with.

Consequences of critical reflexivity. Students discovered that critical reflexivity through course writings situated them as women whose contributions to class could alter classroom spaces of power and privilege. Through the decolonial feminist praxis of writing, an intentional learning space was fostered where students could critically reflect on the course readings and students' lived experiences as connected to systems of power and privilege. This led to an interrogation by students of the significance and meaning of

power dynamics for themselves, their positionality, and standpoints, and was a tool of empowering their voices for democratic participation in the classroom through the dismantling of hierarchy and the promotion of increased claims to epistemic authority for all students.

For dialogue circles, the critical reflexivity positioned students to develop their standpoint. For students in the community college classroom, developing a decolonial feminist standpoint positioned them to enter into the gender conversation and dialogue from a critical and democratic entry point. Through these critical and democratic entry points, students entered into the classroom space and disrupted the traditional community classroom. The classroom experienced transformations as identified by the students' reflections on the decentering of Eurocentric curriculums and disrupting traditional claims to epistemic authority both in the readings and in the classroom. Students explained that intersectional and multicultural readings, in conjunction with critically reflexive writing and dialogue, shaped their goals of identifying the inequalities of gender, tying the inequalities back to systems of patriarchy, racism and capitalism, and working in collaboration with their classmates to grasp gender issues and act for change.

Conclusion

This chapter engaged the understanding of how gender impacts a person's lived experiences in public space. To do so, the chapter illuminated the experiences of students in a feminist sociology classroom where a decolonial feminist pedagogy, utilizing an anti-racist, social justice curriculum, was used to frame students' understanding of the sociology of gender. The findings highlighted the students' experiences in two ways: first, through a discussion on students' gains in gender awareness through an

intersectional lens that spotlights diverse gendered experiences across social identities, and second, through uncovering the impact that curriculum and instructional strategies has on raising gender awareness and developing a decolonial feminist standpoint.

Finally, the findings spotlight decolonial feminist pedagogy's capability to transform classroom spaces, foster the disruption of traditional hierarchies, and promote claims to epistemic authority from students in a community college classroom.

The students' journal writings indicated gains in gender awareness and raised consciousness. A pattern in the data was the use of intersectionality as a tool to make meaning of their own experiences. The impact of intersectionality across the course readings on students' awareness reflected students' application of Collins (2000) "matrix of oppression" to their gender analyses which illuminated the multiple oppressions that people face, and the impact that the interlocking of those oppressions have on people's lives. For example, students worked to understand the links between race, class, and gender, and other social identities such as class, faith, and sexuality, to grasp how those links shaped gender experiences. In the process, students' idea of a uniform gender experience was disrupted. Consequentially, intersectionality proved to be a powerful analytical tool the students used to understand and make meaning of their own gendered lives and further fostered the disruption of the idea that a female is a female is a female. For some students' this analysis was useful when reflecting on their relationship with their body and raised consciousness around the ways that hair and identity are politicized and linked to other identities (e.g., American Indian, Muslim).

For other students, intersectionality was a critical mode of reflecting on adult expectations for their childhood and adolescent body movement in public spaces of

cheerleading and dance. Students drew connections to instances of glamorization, sexualization, and performance and experienced a critical consciousness about the impact of cultural frameworks of power on the women's relationships with their female body as it moved through spaces under the patriarchal "gaze." The dance teachers and cheerleading coaches' demands for glamorization and sexualization privileged the patriarchal "gaze" by expecting the younger women to perform for a male audience. There seemed to be another gaze happening in those public spaces which is an imperialist "gaze." Kaplan (1997, p.78) writes, "The imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject." This was a "gaze" that reinforced hierarchy through positions of dominance and submission that were grounded in patriarchy (male view/female performer), racism (White viewer/performer of color), and capitalism (value determined by if students were "girly enough"). These experiences under the male and imperialist, colonial "gaze" left students feeling minimal control over their bodies and their lives because their bodies in public space have been used to "define the colonial relationship" (Hunt & Lessard, 2002).

The data also revealed how transcultural frameworks of power were barriers to transnational students' desire to move their body through the sport of soccer. The analysis of transnational students' journal writings exposed the challenges and tensions that can arise for transnational families where expectations for female embodiment happen across culture and generation. It appears that while these expectations may vary from culture to culture, a national similarity seems to be the systemic oppression of

females through patriarchal frames that influence the ways parents view their children and determine their children's participation in public spaces.

The analysis of the students' journals revealed that engagement with the anti-racist, social justice curriculum anchored in decolonial feminist pedagogy promoted gender awareness that was symbiotic with the development of a decolonial feminist standpoint. In her interview, Nevaeh discussed the importance of gaining knowledge about the misrepresentation of women in media and recalled an important theme from the film, "You can't be, what you can't see." She shared that the more she saw other women from marginalized identity groups represented in the course curriculum, the more she felt her engagement and experience in the classroom were valuable to herself and the other students. The students' journal writings and interviews also revealed how decolonial feminist curricular choices created space for students to critically analyze gender issues in context of systems of power and privilege which in turn changed how they moved through the public space of the community college classroom. For instance, viewing the film *Miss Representation* (2011) combined with assigned critically reflexive journal writings on gender and media, and in-class dialogue circles on the topic, created a space for students Alison, Sylvia, Nevaeh and others to understand the female body as a form of human capital that the media dangerously objectifies to communicate the diminished value of women in a society where patriarchy and racism exist.

In connection with intersectional, multicultural readings, and using the strategy of intersectionality, Jada, Tasha, Camila, Caitlyn and others were able to further complicate their understanding of the female experience by moving beyond recognizing individual experiences of oppression as females, and gain raised consciousness about individual

experiences as they operate within systems of oppression. For example, while Caitlyn recognized her gender and class oppressions, understanding how women of color experience oppression led to her critical consciousness about the privileges she receives as a White female in society. In addition, Jada recognized that her diminished feelings of self-worth were not just a result of individual experiences of victimization but a result of systemic oppression through such spaces as media, where she wrote that as a Black women her body is often deemed worthless and less valuable than the bodies of White women, while the costs of the negative consequences of media's misrepresentation of Black and Brown bodies is high for the lives of women of color. The students raised consciousness about the complexity of gender experiences made it possible for them to understand female experiences on their terms, and from their truths, a process which fostered the development of their decolonial feminist standpoints.

For the students, the feminist sociology classroom developed into a dialogic space where engaging their critical consciousness, students were able to interrogate gender issues through dialogic pedagogy and represents a disruption of what Freire named (1970) the "banking method" of pedagogy. Decolonial feminist pedagogy created a space for students to know and claim their truths, as well as a space where all truths were heard and engaged across the women representing themselves in the classroom. Entering dialogue from a decolonial feminist standpoint resulted in disrupted classroom hierarchy, and the promotion of claims to epistemic authority from students who found a space in the classroom to reveal hidden narratives, interrogate experiences, name and own their truths about the female experience, and engage in transformation of self and society. The space of the decolonial feminist classroom was important to the way the women

processed critical gender moments related to their lives and others, and in a way that is important to them as a critically engaged students holding epistemic authority in the community college classroom.

In the next chapter, I draw from open-ended questionnaire data to contextualize and foster understanding of the way pedagogy impacts student engagement in the community college classroom. The chapter examines the pedagogical designs of community college classrooms, explores how pedagogy promotes or discourages participation, and illuminates the overall complexity of community college students' experiences.

Chapter 6

Disengagement at "Democracy's College": Community College Students' Experiences across Classroom Contexts

"I was in a psychology class and the teacher was going on and on about post-traumatic stress. She said she knew someone growing up who had it. So we heard all about this person from like twenty years ago for like an hour. She never asked if we had experiences with it. On the way out of class two guys were talking about being in Afghanistan. If she had asked us what we thought then the class could have heard all of these other people's stories and learned so much more"

-Anonymous, community college student

Enrollment in US community colleges marks a student's introduction into an institution known as "democracy's colleges" (Boggs, 2010). Literature on community colleges most often refers to the demographic of the study body as "non-traditional" students who have less access to 4-year college opportunities (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Other shared identity statuses of non-traditional students include being an adult-learner, a veteran, having a family, and being employed. While there is information available on who these students are as non-traditional learners, there is also information available on how these students engage in the college classroom. Data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2014) supports the relationship between student-faculty interaction anchored in rigorous and creative instructional strategies and increased student engagement and academic achievements at community colleges. Still, with national attention on who community colleges students are (e.g., non-traditional learners), and their educational outcomes, far less attention is paid to the *educational processes* of this diverse student population, and minimal information is available on how community college students engage with the *pedagogy* delivered in the classroom. An exploration of processes of student engagement at community college institutions in context of pedagogical frames can inform understanding of how pedagogy

impacts students' experiences. Moreover, this information can reveal hidden narratives about the complexity of community college students' experiences, including the challenges and barriers to student engagement, and the motivational factors stimulating student engagement.

In this chapter, I explore community college students' experiences with classroom engagement through an analysis of data from two sample sets gathered during the same time period. Group 1 consisted of participants who were recruited from a class other than *The Sociology of Gender* (n=30). Group 2 consisted of participants who were from a spring and summer section of *The Sociology of Gender* class (n=25). The participants who were from a class other than *The Sociology of Gender* received an open-ended questionnaire that probed for answers and produced findings on the curriculum and instructional techniques students experienced *across* their community college classrooms, pedagogical challenges and barriers effecting student engagement, and pedagogical practices and strategies that promoted student engagement. (Appendix 3) The participants from *The Sociology of Gender* were asked similar open-ended questions during their one to one in-depth interviews. (Appendix 2)

Throughout this chapter, I aim to reveal the complexity of student engagement experiences in community college classrooms. Additionally, in this chapter I intend to highlight the ways students' classroom experiences tie back to the pedagogical design. Specifically, I seek to connect student experiences, through their narratives, back to a historical context of the community college as a politicized institution of higher education that influences students' processes and outcomes of education through political projects such as pedagogy. The inclusion of the students from outside of *The Sociology of Gender*

is offered to provide context for this research and not to compare classroom sites. At large, this is a study of the low-income women undergraduates from *The Sociology of Gender*, and the other students' shared classroom experiences can help contextualize and further understanding of the embodied perspectives and experiences of *The Sociology of Gender* students engaging a decolonial feminist pedagogy at the community college.

Community College Students' Classroom Experiences

Group 1 (n=30) were part of a required class at the community college. In this group, there were 18 female participants and 12 male participants. The questionnaire data for this group was collected at the end of the academic spring semester. The students had all completed at least a semester of coursework prior to the spring semester when the questionnaire was distributed to them. Therefore, these students had experiences in numerous community college classrooms instructed by a variety of instructors across disciplines.

Pedagogy and student engagement. Responses from students in group 1 illuminated students' firm sense of the dominant hierarchical instructional style across the community college classrooms. Over 90% of the students described the instructional styles as "all lecture" and "someone talking straight at us for an hour without seeing if anyone has questions or has anything to add to the conversation." The most prevalent teaching tool identified by the students was PowerPoint slides drawn from a singular textbook. The students described a typical lecture consisting of an instructor reading PowerPoint slides verbatim, coupled with continuous, one-directional talking from the instructor toward the students with little to no elaboration and no critical discussions related to course content. For some students whose instructors did not use PowerPoint,

they explained the teacher would hand write notes on the board for students to copy down for the purpose of rote memorization. A fraction of students surveyed were art majors who discussed experiencing very "hands on" teaching where instructors modeled the work that students were expected to complete and then interacted with the students often through informal conversation, and whole and individual class critiques, while they worked to completion of their art.

The students' descriptions of instructional techniques dominated by lecture for the intent of rote memorization reflects what Freire (1970) identified as "banking pedagogy." Through Freire's (1970) banking pedagogy, a student's role is one of recipient of the teacher's "deposits" of knowledge. This transaction is one way and students are encouraged to memorize the information for purpose of recall, and not for purpose of critical thinking, inquiry, or action. The participants interpreted their experiences with "banking" instruction as a lack of faculty interest in teaching for the purpose of engaged student learning, as well as a lack of care about the students' learning experiences. One student wrote, "It's sad to say but we never interact with each other in any of my classes here. Sometimes I wonder if it's just easier for the instructors if we don't talk. They can just get their work done, we take notes, and they let us go." Many students expressed a similar instructional format: lecture followed by an online quiz or in-class quiz during the next class session. A student wrote, "It feels really formal. We come in, little interaction, the teacher tries to add something from their life experience that relates to the subject. Then they do their work and start talking fast and we do ours by writing down the notes fast, or copying word for word from the PowerPoint slides." Another student commented, "It's very, very routine. I feel like I'm in high school again. There are some

teachers who are really friendly, and seem to be caring, but they still teach in a way that's so boring." For another student, feeling bored was commonplace due to disengaging instruction. The student wrote, "To be clear about something, I am a really hard worker. If I'm bored it's not the same as being lazy. I'm just really bored! There is nothing going on in most classes to get us excited to learn." Finally, another student expressed that classroom instruction was repetitive each class session. The student's writing continued, "The professor lectures, writes down some notes, and we copy them down. She will ask a question to check if we were paying attention and usually someone in the front row will shoot their hand up and answer and it is right onto the next thing. We don't really go deep into anything so I usually feel like we are checking off the boxes to make the time go by." Overwhelmingly, the illuminated pattern across questionnaire responses was that instructional techniques promoted rote learning and failed to create spaces that fostered classroom engagement and promoted critical student learning.

How did students experience classroom participation in context of classrooms where the voice and engagement experiences was described as dominated by the faculty member? With regard to art classes, students wrote that participation was key to their success and they actively engaged with their instructors through conversations, as well as had open dialogue between the other students to critique and encourage one another's work. However, outside of art classes there was a significant drop in the numbers of students who engaged in classroom participation. The majority of students reported none to very little classroom participation with only three students surveyed remarking that they regularly participated in classes.

Students surveyed reflected on reasons they have or have not participated in class, while also adding insights into how instructional style matters to their participation. One student explained participation was a result of wanting to get the class to move more quickly and finish. A second student wrote about being a talkative person by nature who always participates in class if questions are asked. This student self-identified as an adult learner²³ who feels "there isn't time to waste in my being quiet. I'm not saying the teachers ask me to speak up, but if I have something to add, and I think it's important, then at this point in my life I'm just going to say it." Finally, another student who expressed experience engaging in classroom participation added that classroom participation is something "I like, but I don't feel comfortable doing it. I like to be able to express my feelings or ideas on a topic we are talking about, but I don't know how to join the conversation."

The results of the remaining students' questionnaires strongly indicated that there is little conversation for students to join which makes taking the step of speaking up a difficult task for so many. One student explained that shyness caused her to remain quiet. Another student remarked that class participation makes him feel very nervous. This student discussed the importance of knowing the other students in class in order to feel comfortable speaking and wrote, "I tend to learn more from other students. I don't mind participating in class, but I think it's easier if the other students know who you are because you feel like there is more to offer one another and that you are all in it together." Similarly, many other students expressed the value of knowing classmates and forging a classroom community for promoting dialogue and participation.

²³ According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), as cited in Ross-Gordon (2011), an adult learner is a student who is 25 years of age or older.

In the absence of community and student interaction, most of the students surveyed expressed the scared feelings that accompany their classroom participation. One student explained, "I don't participate much in class because I get *really* nervous and don't want to embarrass myself if I have a wrong answer." Fear of embarrassment or shame was a common feeling across the students surveyed. For example, a student wrote,

Most of my classes, I feel so embarrassed to comment, ask a question, or state my opinion for fear of looking stupid or being judged both by my professor and my peers. Asking or answering a question from a professor is like taking a quiz. You're not quite sure where you stand with them. I've seen it happen where if a student disagrees then the professor debates them right there. That would embarrass me.

Similar fears of embarrassment were expressed by a different student who explained,

I really like to participate. I love when teachers let you ask questions, but I'm scared of the ones who make students look dumb for asking a question. It happened once where I asked something and the teacher kept asking me to try to explain myself differently. I got really flustered and felt crazy for asking.

For the students, building a community of learners on the foundation of trust was critical for their confidence in speaking in class. Students identified the instructor as an important part of that community and as a person they needed to trust would not embarrass or belittle them if they did not know the answer or were processing their answer out loud. Students also identified the instructor as someone they hoped would model skills of processing their answers through questions and responses that furthered their understanding of a topic, and not through responses that dominated the space and as one student wrote, "put me in my place." The place many students felt put in by their instructors when they sought knowledge through asking a question and responding out loud was identified as a place where students felt "embarrassed," "stupid," "wrong," and

“shutdown.” One student explained, “I know I might feel that way because I’ve been out of school awhile. Don’t know. Sensitive I guess. But I need a teacher who gets that this is hard for me and who can talk in a way to encourage me when I ask something. Even if I have no idea what I’m talking about!”

Challenges and barriers to student engagement. Students surveyed explained other challenges in the classroom that impeded upon their engagement. For instance, numerous students described encountering difficulty focusing in class due to the monotonous instructional style. "It feels like no one puts in that extra 10%" wrote a student. Another student explained, "I feel like I want to get involved, but I don't get the sense the instructor cares if we get involved. The few times I've tried to ask questions, the responses are short and there is no real discussion." Other students felt the challenge of instructors not expanding upon their answers in order for the students to fully grasp the content. A student described feeling unsatisfied by his instructor’s responses to his questions. "Sometimes the answers to what I ask are about three words, real brief," he wrote. "I feel embarrassed to say I still don't understand, so I just nod and try to remember to Google it later."

There was a strong pattern of feelings of fear and embarrassment that are connected to spaces where hierarchy prevails and communities are not formed. One student explained that classes feel like she is in a room full of strangers despite the fact that she has spent an entire semester together with the other students. She also shared, "Most professors don't make the environment comfortable enough for me to say if I need help or if I don't understand." Many students also described the discomfort they have with meeting other students. One student wrote, "I went to a rural high school with a lot

of farm kids. This school is very different because I've never been to school with kids of other races before. I'm afraid of saying something stupid so I just keep my thoughts to myself. No one really talks to one another anyway." Likewise, another student from an urban high school wrote, "I'm from the city and you've got everybody down there and everybody talks to each other. It's too quiet here. It creeps me out. Even the teachers are all real quiet types. You never know what anyone's thinking."

For students who spoke English as a second language, fears associated with participation were more complex. One student remarked, "If we got to know the other students through group work, then I wouldn't be so embarrassed to raise my hand to talk or ask a question. But I have a thick accent and worry no one will understand me well. I feel like it's a room of strangers, and I feel really shy around everyone."

Finally, there was a consensus across student questionnaire responses that when teachers did talk and bring in real life examples, they were overwhelmingly the teachers' real life examples. One student explained,

I was in a psychology class and the teacher was going on and on about post-traumatic stress. She said she knew someone growing up who had it. So we heard all about this person from like twenty years ago for like an hour. She never asked if we had experiences with it. On the way out of class two guys were talking about being in Afghanistan. If she had asked us what we thought then the class could have heard all of these other people's stories and learned so much more.

While another student wrote,

It does feel like it is about the professor a lot, and not really about us. I don't think they realize it. Maybe they don't feel comfortable in big classes breaking us up in groups and having us getting loud talking. Whatever the reason, I think a lot of people feel like they are visitors to the professor's class and no one feels like this is really their classroom too.

Students expressed wanting to feel a part of the classroom. The aspiration to participate and engage was strong. Students also demonstrated the critical thinking to understand that their engagement was linked to other factors such as faculty's choices in how they design and instruct their classes.

Motivational factors impacting student engagement. Across all questionnaires, students were able to discuss the motivational factors that impacted their engagement in a college classroom. A student wrote, "I don't feel comfortable asking the Professor for help, so instead I ask the people around me. I think of that as engagement. We become each other's help when we can." Many students explained that their motivation to engage stemmed from the desire to understand the course material while hoping that their participation might also promote content understanding for other students.

The responses to questions addressing motivational factors for student engagement fell into three categories. First, a pattern of engaging for learning's sake emerged from the students' questionnaires. "I like to be inquisitive and enjoy good questions and thinking. I think engagement means I will understand the topic better" wrote a student. Another student's similar sentiments included, "I'm motivated to engage so I can become a better student and learn new things." For another student, engagement meant "getting down with school!" That particular student explained that motivation helped him keep excited about his work, and he expressed that he would be a stronger learner if he were enthusiastic, and thus, would be more apt to complete his degree and graduate.

A second pattern in motivational factors for student engagement was the desire to share perspectives and learn from the perspectives of other students. One student wrote, "I like to express my feelings, but I need to know that those feelings are valued. I just want to be able to speak. I'm motivated by classrooms where you feel that freedom to share something. There aren't many of those classrooms though." Another student described group work settings as the most motivational technique for engagement. "Group participation will get me to engage in full conversation. It feels safer to talk to just a few people. Everyone usually sits in a circle and makes eye contact. We did that in my high school class. It's nice. It gets me to learn new things from new people and get out of my shell." Lastly, another student felt that group work created opportunity to "see what you have in common with other students and learn from those that you never thought you'd have anything in common with at all."

The third and final pattern in motivational factors for student engagement was the belief that "fun" teachers motivate students to be a part of the classroom as well as the course material. "You can tell a fun teacher is one who enjoys their job and subject," wrote one student. Another student explained, "I'm motivated by nice teachers. When you know a teacher cares, then you care too. Nice teachers make good classroom vibes." A different student wrote, "Fun teachers who try to get everyone involved are the ones who do little lecturing and end up engaging me more. I had one class like that in my two years here. And it was so upbeat, and there were all of this hands on group work. The homework to read was interesting. I looked forward to coming. I was always engaged." The students revelations that instructors' teaching practices impacted their engagement, and therefore their experiences in the community college classroom, spotlights the

criticality of furthering understanding on the relationship between pedagogy and student engagement for community college students.

Sociology of Gender Students' Classroom Experiences

Group 2 was made up of participants from the *The Sociology of Gender* classrooms (n=25). During their in-depth interviews, these students responded to a set of questions that inquired about their experiences with student engagement in multiple classrooms across the community college outside of their experiences in *The Sociology of Gender*.

Pedagogy and student engagement. Responses from students in group 2 included descriptions of the typical classroom culture at the community college, reflected the valuing of institutional hierarchy and power, and exposed the resulting consequence of student disengagement. Kassi explained that outside of open science labs where group work regularly took place, every class she had taken in the past two years consisted of the instructor leading the class with a "long lecture," that was nearly "word for word from the text book," and most often, "clicking through PowerPoint slides." As a result, she noticed students never asked questions or exchanged ideas during her classes. Also, Kassi described how this impacted her feelings toward class participation. She said,

I don't like those types of classes. I would much rather be talking. I feel like anything like my lab, or *Sociology of Gender* where we did the group work, kept me interested in learning from other people in different groups every time. And it was interesting to hear people talk, and keep our journals and read so many different types of readings. I remember the 1st class, I thought, *I really like this. I want to do more of this* [emphasis on words expressed by Kassi during interview]. But I couldn't find anything like it at all.

Morgan described the majority of her classes as “boring” and unable to grab her attention. Like Kassi, Morgan struggled with engagement in lecture classes that were run predominately by the instructor’s use of PowerPoint slides. Morgan said,

I know lectures can’t be full of activities, but there could be a little bit of that? Everything is PowerPoint. I have to fight to stay awake in the dark. The professor makes them available to print off but I can't do that or I won't be engaged. Plus, everyone is always on their phones and the professors never say anything. It just doesn't feel like what I imagined college should feel like. It's a big deal for me to be here and I just thought I would feel more special.

Morgan discussed that no one talked in her classes other than her professors whom she noted often went on tangents and discussed their personal lives. Morgan said,

It was in the *Gender* course where I first realized that I had never sat in a circle in any other class here. Every room is always set up in rows, and I just thought that was how it had to be. But now I realize that is how the professor thinks it has to be, or how they want it to be. At the end of the day, it doesn’t *have* to be like that. So why is it?

Sierra, Caitlyn, Jada, and Tasha referenced the amount of personal stories their professors linked to the lesson. Each student responded that the instructors’ stories were not clearly connected to the course content. They each felt that involving students' stories of life connections to course content would have increased student engagement and participation in class. Caitlyn described the hierarchy involved in the classroom as connected to seating arrangements and said,

It makes more sense to me after *Sociology of Gender* where we either sat in a large circle or several small group circles---seating arrangements really matter. In circles, there is this flow. It’s like passing the ball around. Everyone’s voices are welcome. In rows, the message is pretty clear that the instructor’s voice is favored and that person controls who gets to talk next. Like in dialogue circles, we would each kind of look at one another and either someone would feel safe to speak up, or one of us would ask what someone else thought, but it wasn’t just the instructor being the leader in charge. We learned *so* much that way.

The lack of social interaction that stemmed from seating arrangements, and “banking” instructional methods, made learning extremely difficult for Morgan. Moreover, she found that across classes, professors tended to call on the same students. As a result, she began to question if she even wanted to talk at all. Morgan said, "The professors seem to choose the adult students early on in class and it kind of sets the tone that these are the smart people in class. I think that it intimidates the rest of us, it definitely does me. I feel like the instruction doesn't include everyone and that really annoys me." Sylvia shared how quickly professors ask a question without giving time for students to respond. She described how professors are swift to answer their own questions, or quickly return to lecture after students responded with an answer. Sylvia said,

There have been times when I have heard what I think is a wrong answer from another student. Or there have been a few times when I am intrigued by another student who has asked a challenging question. Unfortunately, it seems like the professors just rush through those moments to get back to lecture. It makes me question them, you know, how much they know. Everything is straight from the text and anything that veers from that seems to make many of my professors nervous or rushed.

The majority of the students also shared that class instruction was guided by a singular curriculum tool: a textbook. Caitlyn said,

I know I am supposed to talk about my experiences in other classes right now, but the thing I liked about *Sociology of Gender* was how much we read from different sources. Every class here I've had to use a big textbook, and the information is interesting but just presented in such a tiresome way. It was after *Soc. of Gender* that I started to think about my classes and wonder, why aren't there readings that include diverse races and ethnicities? Things like that. Why do we only learn from this one book, the textbook? I mean, I get it, it's the textbook! But aren't there different texts too?

Jada remarked that she felt the textbooks were what she had been exposed to all along her educational journey: *lacking*. She explained that she has learned from a young age to

look at what is missing. “There is no voice in these textbooks. Most of them have to be full of vocabulary and facts, but aren’t there other ways for us to understand things in courses like Psychology or Sociology or English? It always just seems like more of the same.”

For Monique, Nevaeh, and Molly there was an expressed frustration that assessments were all tied back to the singular textbook. Monique expressed,

It’s just like there is nothing, and I mean *nothing* else driving the classes. The textbook is the bible around here. We are just mannequins sitting in the seat. I don't think they see us as people who can really add anything to the class or on top of what the text says. Actually, they act so annoyed when you do speak up or have a question that I think they are afraid of us challenging the textbook!

Nevaeh described the process of assessment and said, “*Read the textbook for homework, take notes on the textbook in class, take online quizzes on the textbook before the next class.* My god, it's like, ok people, we actually can be critical about this stuff we're reading. We're not just dummies in your class.”

Community and the classroom. Tasha said that she can tell the tone of her classes on the first day. She recalled how in *Sociology of Gender* she immediately felt that she would be held to high standards, but at the same time wouldn't be judged. "Right away, I remember we sat in the big circle and introduced ourselves and shared a goal we had for ourselves. I knew that by saying that goal out loud that everyone would remember it and want me to reach it." She described how important it was for her to feel the building of a community in that classroom in order for her to feel comfortable engaging in the class. "I have to know you before I can trust you. There are a lot of times that I trusted people before I knew them and let's just say that didn't always go too good. In that kind of classroom community, [*Sociology of Gender* classroom] I knew if I

spoke I would be heard," she said. "I didn't have to worry that no one would help me if I needed it." Tasha explained that her other classroom experiences across the community college were in stark contrast to the experience she had in *Sociology of Gender*. She noted, "So many of my teachers just sit there. They don't get up. They don't walk around. They don't talk to you, no notes, no telling you that you can go there for help. They just sit at their desk and talk out loud as if they're talking and teaching themselves. Those are the teachers I hate here."

Kassi also thought the atmosphere of the classroom sends a message that her teachers have no interest in her at all. She said, "In lecture classes they don't really know you. I'm just a number. I don't know anyone's name in any of my classes. Community doesn't seem to be a top priority around here, that is funny, isn't this a *community* college? Ha!" [emphasis on word expressed by Kassi during interview]

Jennifer explained that there are so many things going on in her life outside of school such as a stressful job with a local call center, and raising two school-aged children, that school is often her only time to do something for herself. Jennifer said,

I look around and think, it would be great to meet some of these people in class. I'm sure on a bad day, they could be a source of help to me as I work to get the material. It might be nice to have someone besides the teacher to lift you up and for you to help out too. I sit here struggling with the work, and also feeling really alone on top of that. That makes it harder for me to really get into the classes. You know when you go out to dinner with a new group and feel funny sitting there, well unless I get to know anyone in class that is how I feel for the whole semester. I think it does hurt my overall time here because I can never just let go and focus on the work.

Beth also noted the lack of community in the community college classrooms. However, she felt that her social location as a returning adult learner has instilled a confidence in her to participate independently. "I raise my hand now and give the

answer. The instructor tends to call on me a lot too, which I feel proud of." Jada, also an adult learner, expressed how her confidence rises when she feels valuable to the class.

Jada said,

I feel well-liked and respected. A lot of my younger peers come to me for help or with questions. When people hear my background they make me feel as if I inspire them. Feeling like I am important and liked helps me engage more in class. Previously if I were to be in a class where I didn't really talk to people or feel acknowledged then I would just sit quietly through class. That is one thing that has changed as I've gotten older.

Many of the participants interviewed described community as lacking at the community college, and wondered how lack of *engaged* diversity impacted the lack of community in their diverse classrooms. Nadja noted the large refugee population where students from such countries as Bosnia, Burma, Iraq, and Sudan, among others, are represented. In addition to national representation, many of the refugee students identify as Muslim, which Nadja noted adds to the religious diversity on campus. Ami discussed the strong and growing LGBTQ community on campus. Caitlyn recalled that her classrooms are the most racially diverse spaces she has ever been in. However, most of the students felt that there was no diversity across social class in their classrooms.

Ami said,

Most everyone here is struggling, it's just a matter of how bad that struggle is. But unless you are in the slim minority of high school kids coming to get classes out of the way, or a very few kids who probably goofed off in high school but came from middle-class families, then you are just one of the many just trying to make it and get by.

In these diverse classroom spaces, the students reflected further on the lack of engagement with diversity. Tasha said,

You will see the Black kids sitting together and the White kids sitting together and the Asians, and the Latinos. No one's trying to be racist, I don't think. We

just sit with the people we know. But then again the professors don't get us all interacting.

In addition, Ami shared,

I don't know whose job it is to disrupt all of the separation that happens in our classes, but man, instructors are missing this huge opportunity to get us all engaging with this amount of diversity. And we are missing out on this opportunity to engage with one another. It's a shame.

From curriculum to instruction, most of the participants interviewed noted that classroom spaces are segregated spaces, and argue that the segregation serves to disengage the students from one another and from their learning experiences.

Challenges and barriers to student engagement. In spaces where classroom cultures are described as "disengaging" and "disrespectful," students interviewed provided insight into the biggest challenges and barriers faced in the community college classroom. For Marie, the constant classroom distractions were the greatest interruptions of her engagement. Morgan also felt discouraged by the continuous distractions. Morgan said, "I can't tell you how many times students are talking to each other or texting on cell phones during lecture and professors don't respond." Alison explained that each time a professor ignores a distraction in class, which she said is often, she feels as though her learning experience is devalued by the professor. Moreover, she said, "When professors do address distractions they may say things about how much they personally don't like to be disrespected, but it feels like they forget that those distractions are disrespecting everyone in the classroom. Our learning matters just like their teaching matters."

Morgan found the greatest challenge to her classroom engagement was her teachers' pedagogy and lack of community building in the classroom. She said,

I need a teacher who is willing to discuss things in-depth. I need to feel some sense of challenge. I want to try to wrap my head around ideas, not just be spoon fed textbook definitions. I also need a teacher who wants to get to know me, and have students get to know one another. I like to interact with others and get to know one another so I can do study groups, but also so I can feel comfortable talking in class, and understand lots of different perspectives.

Likewise, the biggest challenge Tasha faced in the community college classroom was the lack of community. She expressed favoring a teacher who asks students to introduce themselves and have group conversations and discussions. Tasha said,

Honestly, *Sociology of Gender* is the only class that had group discussions and I hate saying that. I wish all classes had a rule that you have to sit in a circle so I can see you and you can see me. Seeing each other helps us listen to one another. That makes the class more relaxed and makes us want to come to class versus staring at someone's head all day or the board or PowerPoint. It's just so boring that way, and then it makes you not want to learn.

Tasha felt that $\frac{3}{4}$ of her instructors just want students to sit quietly and take down notes. The other $\frac{1}{4}$ of her instructors have made attempts to know her and engage in class. But the majority, Tasha felt, were unhelpful to the students. Tasha said,

I used to ask professors what important things I should focus on to study for my tests. They all said the same thing, "Just read the chapter in the text." Ok, but can we talk about things in the chapter? They either push you to the book or the PowerPoint slides on Blackboard. Why not have a conversation with me? Am I that awful for you to deal with?

Morgan concluded her interview with a memory from a class that she took during her first semester and said, "One of my professors put us into groups to work as punishment! The last week of class! It was hilarious because that was the class we all told him we felt like we'd learned the most!"

From the students' interviews, a common discovery across half of the interviews was the identification of patterns in student participation that were seen as a barrier to their own engagement. For example, the majority of students described the "knowers of

the classroom" who actively participated as the adult women and men. Regarding the adult learners in class, Kassi said,

They just don't give anyone else a chance to speak, they talk right away. Mostly the women. They act more knowing and more confident. But I want to be given a chance to talk sometimes. I am pretty quiet so if I know the answer I just say it out loud, but softly. I like when we answer as a group more. Then others would have to say how they feel and be given the time to do that.

Caitlyn also noticed that adult learners were more quick to participate and more quick to be called on by the professors. "There really feels like a wall is set up in the classroom and I'm on the younger side of the wall. Because of that I feel like a lot of times I'm not taken seriously and can't speak up, be called on, or even be heard."

Beth, an adult learner, said she is aware that the adult learners participate more and she has noticed how less apt the younger students are to participate, but after having a second chance at school she feels more ready to take chances and ask questions. "We have lots of life experiences to bring in," Beth said. Also, she noted that she is as old, if not older, than her instructors. The lack of age difference makes Beth feel confident to disagree with her instructors, which is something that she explains she never would have done when she was younger. "Being in my 40s, if I think my experiences are important and would add something to the class discussion, then I'm going to make sure I share them for the benefit of everyone."

Morgan described the older students as "the know-it-alls." While Tasha noticed that the adult women tend to be most vocal and sympathetic in her courses. The adult men, however, she found to be judgmental and rude and a barrier to her classroom engagement. She noticed that instructors seem to find the adult learners participation "very important." Tasha said,

I understand. Who knows what they went through to come back to school at their age? But I feel really uncomfortable with how vocal they are, and how the rest of us are not encouraged to be vocal and not asked how we feel about things. If I don't feel comfortable then I won't participate.

In addition to differences in participation across age and gender, the participants discussed patterns of difference in student participation across racial and ethnic identity groups. Additionally, participants found these patterns of difference to be disconcerting and problematic for the process of student engagement for all students. Tasha explained,

In one class I notice, you will have a Black person raise their hand, a Puerto Rican person raise their hand, and a White person raise their hand. The Black and the Puerto Rican could raise their hand first, but you could see the teacher call on the White person. My other friends have noticed the same things. Maybe they are thinking they probably know the right answer, look at who the other students are. And then I think some teachers judge you by your appearance. The news says that racism is still here. It is still here. It never left. There may have become rules and regulations but in the end racism is still there. Some of the teachers practice that and I think that is real sad. Even though they try to do it nonchalant it's still there. And me for instance, I don't know what it is, but I might go into a classroom and sometimes I'm the only Black person in my classroom, and I feel sometimes intimidated because I'm around all of these White people, and I'm the only Black person and it's like I have to prove myself. And just because of my race, that doesn't mean anything. I could be just as smart as everyone in this classroom. But I have to be really comfortable around everyone, than I will talk. I'm going to say my opinion. You got to open up. It may be a topic you don't want to talk about it, and then you have to talk about it. So teachers need to stop treating us differently. And they have to get us talking!

Instructional routines such as patterns of which students instructors call on revealed the privileging of certain social identity groups over others in the community college classroom. The participants' interview responses illuminated the pedagogical privileging of older female students, as well as White students. In all cases, students felt that the instructors should be working to create spaces that engage all students' voices.

Numerous students felt that promoting student voice and dialogue in the class is critical for student engagement. However, some students expressed the challenges

linked to speaking in classrooms due to pedagogical barriers. For Subin, English is her second language, yet she recognizes it is the first language in her college classrooms. "Of course English is the first language here. I understand. But without room to get to know other students, maybe the group work, then I can never feel brave to speak in front of the whole class. It feels too hard." Ami, a woman of Thai descent, shared similar feelings. She described that while she does not have a Thai accent, many of her friends have accents and have shared how uncomfortable it is to raise their hands and participate in the community college classroom. Ami said,

As soon as they participate and their accent is out, it is like all heads turn and stare at them. It's uncomfortable. But I don't see the instructors doing anything to change that. You know, we could work together in groups, there could be chances for all students to speak early on in the semester so it breaks the ice. Because otherwise it makes it clear that there is a line between who the class works for and who it works against. And unless you speak perfect English and have no third world accent, then...it doesn't work for you. Not that we ever expected it to truly work for us anyway, you know?

Motivational factors impacting student engagement. How did the student participants become motivated to engage in a disengaging classroom culture? Morgan explained that if she was in a class where an instructor interacted and transformed the classroom into a space where student interaction was welcomed and could regularly take place, than she would be motivated to learn. Morgan said, "I keep putting it back to *Sociology of Gender*. We were not afraid to talk in that classroom. Unfortunately, in other classrooms when the teacher is not engaging *everyone*, and it's not a group discussion, than I don't feel like I can talk to everyone." Caitlyn said, "I'm motivated by excitement, by interaction, and by high standards." Alison explained, "It's all about feeling involved. If you involve me in some way then I am in. Group work in class can help everyone feel involved and motivated." For Jada, motivation came from seeing an

academic reward. She said, "I'm older now, have kids, and this really means something. I want to do a good job and make my kids proud. Even if they don't see me in the classroom, it motivates me to know they would want me to do well." Alison, Ling, and Sierra expressed the ability of dialogue to motivate them. Sierra said, "When everyone gets a chance to talk, not just a few people, but everyone, then I feel like I want to participate too."

Molly expressed,

It's like a coach who believes in what is happening on the court and believes in every player, every play, and the entire team. I have to know that my teacher believes that too. We all matter and it helps motivate us when they stir up that energy and pull us all together. Then we can really achieve our goals.

Lastly, Tasha explained how *The Sociology of Gender* changed her ideas on what motivates her and disclosed academic desires aligned with educational processes of feminist pedagogy (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1994; Shrewsbury, 1993). "I know I am *not* motivated by the same ol', same ol'. I want to understand things in a way that's more interesting. Like the readings, I want readings to be diverse. And if there are diverse students in the class, well then I'd like to be able to talk with them and learn from each other, and do the class *together*."

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how the community college students surveyed and interviewed describe experiences with student engagement in the community college classroom. The chapter also illustrates the community college students' understanding of pedagogy in the community college classroom. The students surveyed all demonstrated the ability to grasp the relationship between classroom pedagogy and engagement experiences within the classroom. This diverse group of community college students

shared mutual educational desires for a more deliberate and purposeful learning experience anchored in a critical pedagogy that promotes student engagement across social identity groups, centers voices that are often marginalized, and demonstrates the valuing of all students. There was also an awareness that the relationship between pedagogy and engagement also impacted students' motivation to graduate. Therefore, graduation, and ultimately social mobility, are impacted by pedagogical frames in the community college classroom.

The community college students surveyed and interviewed described pedagogy that was colonial in design. For example, the common mode of instruction was rote memorization through lecture. Lecture was most often delivered through PowerPoint slides where the flow of information went from instructor to student with no room for, or encouragement of, critical thinking and dialogue. Moreover, students highlighted the classroom hierarchy established through seating arrangements such as rows where students only looked at the instructor and had little student to student interaction through small group or whole group circle discussions. The students expressed that lack of instructional creativity, inclusive instructional strategies, diverse readings, and academic rigor, combined with minimal opportunity for critical thinking and dialogue, fostered an understanding across participants that engagement was not welcomed, and their critical learning and development were not seen as important in the classroom.

While annual national studies on student engagement such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2014) find a positive relationship between faculty and student interaction, rigorous and creative instruction, and student learning outcomes, the reality for the study participants was lack of access to such interaction,

curriculum, and instruction in the community college classroom. The participants' descriptions and understandings of classroom pedagogy are reflective of Freire's (1970) concept of "banking" pedagogy where information is "deposited" into the students' minds. This one way transaction where students are merely recipients of information fails to promote faculty to student, and student to student, communication and results in the silencing of student voices and the hampering of student engagement in the classroom. Pedagogically, the "banking" method establishes social hierarchy in the classroom and constructs what Freire (1970) names a "culture of silence." Characterized by Freire (1970) as a colonial concept for the oppressive relationship it establishes between the dominator and the dominated, the "culture of silence" privileges the values and norms of the dominant identity. These values and norms are forced on the oppressed groups in ways that deny their lived experiences and social realities, and stifle the opportunity for critical thinking and questioning which thus results in further marginalization. Thus "banking" pedagogy praxis in higher education manifests ideologies about how different people learn and is interlocked with systems of institutionalized oppression. Feminist theorists' work on the concept of voice further complicates this notion of the "culture of silence" and illustrates how the silencing of voices manifests at the institutional level. This is illuminated by narratives of faculty of color (Berry & Mizzelle, 2006; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014; Gutierrez, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Rodriguez, 2006) who address their marginalized experiences in higher education, and the silencing of their voices by a colonial system that works to make them invisible because of social identities. Therefore, students' critiques of instructor's "banking" pedagogy models are thus inherently a critique of a colonial

educational structure that supports oppressive ideologies and practices such as institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and xenophobia that isolate, disengage, and silence marginalized voices in the college classroom.

Collins (2000) writes that for a person to come to voice, the person must speak to the institutional politics of knowledge and power. The students who engaged in a praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom experienced a culture of voice. This led to students' developed critical consciousness and critical questioning of the community college classrooms design, including the lack of innovative pedagogies that extend beyond the status quo "banking" pedagogy in effort to promote dialogue, interaction, and inclusion by drawing in different texts with other narratives, and engaging diversity and multiple perspectives in the classroom. The outcome of critical consciousness and questioning resulted from the strategies of decolonial feminist pedagogy, but also from a shift in classroom culture that a decolonial feminist pedagogy was able to create---a classroom culture that confronted patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism and created space for students' dissent to institutional ideologies and practices anchored in colonialism.

The community college students surveyed and interviewed described challenges to student engagement in the classroom. The ways students negotiated engagement were largely informed by the culture of the classroom. The students' descriptions and understanding of student engagement revealed the classroom as a site of struggle for those seeking to engage the course content through critical thinking and dialogue. Challenges to student engagement included feeling that student engagement was unwelcome in the faculty dominated hierarchical space. Students often faced the

challenge of wanting to participate through dialogue but feeling unsure of *how* to participate, as well as feeling *fearful* about participating in a classroom where students reported feeling at risk of embarrassment, appearing unintelligent, being shamed or ignored by the instructor, and feeling less respected than their adult student and White student peers.

Students highlighted the pedagogical barriers to student engagement in the community college classroom. Students identified the lack of classroom community as an ever-present barrier to dialogic participation. Students felt that community would be a motivational factor in dialogic participation because it would allow for student interaction across identity groups, promote deeper understanding of students' own social locations, and increase understanding of one another's social worlds in ways to more deeply inform the course content and the development of students' social location. Small group discussion was identified by the students as an instructional strategy for fostering community, and the absence of small group work was a perceived barrier to student engagement.

The barrier of lack of classroom community development through strategies such as small and whole group dialogue further reflects Freire's (1970) concept of the colonial "culture of silence." The students' fearful feelings about critical thinking and dialogic participation in the classroom reveal a culture where marginalized students are oppressed by the values and norms of a hierarchical classroom design. This barrier is made more complex by students' understanding how marginal identities are silenced and the implications of this silence for targeted identity groups (e.g., students of color, students from the Global South who have accents). For instance, the students depicted classroom

settings where student engagement was tied to social relations where hierarchy was reinforced in specific ways. An example of this is that the students most likely to engage were adult learners who were closer in age, or older than the instructors and spoke of the value they had found in their voice through life experiences. It was this value that students under 25 years old were perplexed by as they struggled to speak and be heard in the classroom. The students also identified the adult learners as the students most likely to be called on by the instructor which transferred the feeling to the students that adult learners' knowledge was more valuable than non-adult learners' knowledge in the classroom. This feeling contributed to the colonial "culture of silence" in the classroom, especially for students under 25 years of age.

In addition, students of color were negatively impacted by the lack of community in community college classrooms. Students who self-identified as African-American and/or Black were women more likely to feel the need to "prove" themselves in the classroom. Students from the Global South, especially those with strong accents, felt the most fearful about speaking up and out in a diverse group of strangers. Students sensed that students who spoke English as a second language were less encouraged to participate, or were given less opportunities to do so in spaces designed to support their experiences (e.g., through small group dialogue that students identified as a design that promotes greater dialogue across all students). The design of the classrooms thereby reflect a racial and ethnic hierarchy where students of color find the silencing of their voices is a complex experience embedded in colonial cultural processes of educational *disengagement*. Classroom community building and small group work were two strategies that many students identified as instrumental to promoting student engagement.

Pedagogy is political. Giroux (2013) states,

Pedagogy is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency. As a political project, critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power. It draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and skills, and it illuminates how knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed within particular sets of social relations. Similarly, it draws attention to the fact that pedagogy is a deliberate attempt on the part of educators to influence how and what knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations.

The politics of knowledge in the community college classroom reveal how processes of education are never neutral. Pedagogy is a political project that is governed by the historical and cultural contexts of the community college as a capitalist institution grounded in political agendas to boost the US economy. The community college students surveyed and interviewed revealed information that points to the political project of pedagogy, and the implications for their lives as students operating within the structure of community college. The findings demonstrate the tension that exists with the students' quest to gain knowledge and epistemic authority through dialogic and communal learning in a classroom not designed with a pedagogy to meet their needs. Moreover, the findings spotlight the lack of control students have over their lives when operating in schools and within classroom spaces designed for working-class students who are expected to be passive learners, non-critical thinkers, and conformists in preparation for labor positions that are integral for the success of capitalism and securing the US empire.

Carnoy (1974, p.19) writes,

Schools demand the most passive response from those groups in society who are the most oppressed by the economic and political system... While this is logical in preserving the status quo, it is also a means of colonializing children to accept unsatisfactory roles.

Sustained colonial legacies in education create and maintain challenges and barriers to the engagement of marginalized students in the community college classroom.

Instructionally, these legacies consist of the described classroom hierarchy, banking instruction, segregation and isolation of learners, a culture of silence, and structures of dominant social relations that reinforce submissive learning void of criticality and transformation (Freire, 1970). Ultimately, community college students' passivity as learners is expected, depended upon, and encouraged by pedagogical praxis and thus challenges the notion of the community college as "democracy's college." For students who engaged a decolonial pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender*, there was an awareness of the lack of criticality across many classes and the implications for their success during and after community college. Conscious of the disengagement in the classroom, students from *The Sociology of Gender* were positioned to interrogate the oppressive patterns of classroom pedagogy and in doing so, held democracy to task.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

“I just want to be able to speak”

-Anonymous, community college student

Low-income women undergraduates in community college engage their education within an institution that is part of “democracy’s colleges.” Community colleges are lauded as democratic because of open enrollment policies that promote equal access to higher education across communities in the United States (US). As sites of academic preparation, community college students are actively relied on as labor sources to boost the economy of the 21st century (Boggs, 2010). Are low-income women undergraduates in community college who work toward receiving an educational degree for social mobility also experiencing social equality in their academic experiences, or are these students being educationally engaged in ways that reproduce and sustain social inequality? Democratic colleges require more than democratic enrollment policies, and attention must focus on pedagogy to examine and inform classroom spaces for democratizing knowledge and engaging experiences that foster students’ claims to education. Rich (1977) argued that claiming an education is different than receiving an education. To claim an education is to engage in processes of action: “.....to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction,” whereas to receive an education means to “.....come into possession of: to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true.....The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon” (Rich, 1977). If low-income women undergraduates in community college are to claim an education, then they must have access to classroom spaces framed in a pedagogy that disrupts colonial legacies grounded in oppressive curricula, instruction,

and assessment, and instead promotes community, critical consciousness, empowerment, action, and solidarity. Following from these issues, this research centered on the following questions:

- What is the impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy praxis on students' experiences and learning outcomes?
- How does the praxis of decolonial feminist pedagogy disrupt traditional hierarchies and claims to epistemic authority in the community college classroom?

In this conclusion, the research findings are synthesized as they respond to these research questions. Additionally, the pre-study researcher assumptions that were recorded prior to the data collection will be shared. Next, research implications will be offered, followed by the sharing of future research directions and recommendations.

Synthesis of Empirical Findings

The first findings chapter (chapter 4) focuses on exploring the experiences of low-income women undergraduates in the community college classroom of the course *The Sociology of Gender* which was framed in a decolonial feminist pedagogy. Through in-depth interview data and content-analysis of student work, this chapter studies the relationship between decolonial feminist pedagogy and students' classroom experiences. Through an examination of this relationship, the findings reveal disruptions of colonial legacies in the community college classroom, as well as transformation of the possibilities of the community college classroom as a site of social justice where students could develop their critical consciousness and make decisions about how to enter and engage their experiences in the classroom space.

The students in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom engaged in classroom border crossings. Data reflects student awareness that traditional community college classroom experiences occur in spaces where borders are present and sustained by colonial

traditions in the classroom such as centering dominant identity voices and experiences and marginalizing target identity voices and experiences. An important point of this chapter is that while the pedagogy in *The Sociology of Gender* was implemented by the course instructor, it was the students who disrupted the traditional claims to epistemic authority in the classroom. Students' disruption of epistemic authority in the classroom happened through border crossings that fostered feminist standpoints and resisted educational oppression, and promoted understanding of gender through democratic learning processes that centered all voices and thus represented multiple, diverse experiences of the traditionally silenced and ignored. The impact of decolonial feminist pedagogy on the students was that it resulted in positive outcomes of critical consciousness, empowerment, action, and solidarity. Students developed critical consciousness through awareness about gender inequality, but moreover, as a result of grasping the politics of gender and the politics of knowledge. As students gained empowerment leading into their action projects, there was a transformation for the students where they felt a sense of value with respect to their lives and the lives in the classroom community. This transformation led to a shift in the students' classroom practices and they began to act alongside one another towards solidarity.

In the second findings chapter (chapter 5), in-depth interview data and content-analysis of student work reveal how decolonial feminist pedagogy positively impacts the development of feminist standpoint. In addition, it demonstrates how decolonial feminist pedagogy promotes understanding of how gender impacts identity and female experiences in public spaces through analysis of such activities as dance and cheerleading, to the consequences that female misrepresentation in the media has on the

female experience. Through engagement with an intersectional, multicultural, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-sexist curriculum, attached to dialogic pedagogy and collaborative action projects, students described processes of raised awareness on the role gender plays in shaping lived experiences. The data reveal how decolonial feminist pedagogy develops a place for engaging learning and voice through both dialogue and writing. A critical point in this chapter was that dialogue and writing provided a space for understanding critical gender moments from the ground up in the classroom. Dialogue and writing were transformative experiences in the educational processes of the female students because they provided the students with space to process their understanding of gender inequality, which strengthened their agency in thinking about how to enter and engage in public spaces as women and students with epistemic authority, who have lives worth knowing, and lives worth claiming, in the community college classroom and in greater society.

Lastly, the third findings chapter (chapter 6) examines the ways community college students experienced educational engagement across community college classrooms. This chapter focuses on two samples: students from *The Sociology of Gender* and students from outside of *The Sociology of Gender* and intends to further contextualize the topic of pedagogical frames in community college classrooms. Through mixed-methods of and in-depth interview and open-ended questionnaire, students describe how pedagogy impacts their student engagement experiences in the community college classroom. The results from both student samples illuminate the propensity for community college classrooms to be framed in “banking” pedagogy (Freire, 1970) as indicated by student descriptions of classrooms that were designed in

ways that discouraged criticality and voice, and stifled student engagement and action. Furthermore, findings spotlight the presence of colonial legacies in the classroom and point to the existence, not assumption, of colonial legacies in the community college educational setting where Eurocentric curriculums, hierarchical classroom instruction and engagement designs, and segregated and isolated experiences were a norm. Students in these classrooms were recipients of knowledge but were not actively claiming knowledge because the pedagogy denied them space in the classroom to do so. The students' experiences add to research examples of how people, specifically marginalized people, are trained to be silent and expected to be passive in response (Carnoy, 1973) which are colonial strategies employed through pedagogy in college classrooms.

A key finding in chapter 6 was that the students had an awareness that they were in classrooms that suppressed their learning experiences. In classrooms framed in “banking” pedagogy, students felt embarrassed or fearful to participate. They lacked empowerment and agency. They viewed themselves as visitors to the classroom where the knowledge was held by the instructor, and where, as students, they viewed their role as recipients of information to memorize and regurgitate, but not to grapple with and challenge. The students craved engagement in the classroom, but felt confined by the pedagogy of their instructors. The students who had a point of pedagogical comparison resulting from participation in *The Sociology of Gender*, expressed strong expectations for what pedagogy in the community college should look like because they had experienced what it could look like through decolonial feminist pedagogy practices. For these students, the comparison made the revelation of “banking” pedagogy experiences more apparent and more apprehensible. Open enrollment in the college may have been a

democratic entry point for these students as they worked toward a degree and social mobility, but it did not ensure democratic learning practices in the classroom and as a result denied the students access to democracy, and thus, social equality in their experiences within the institution.

Researcher Assumptions

Prior to the collection of data, researcher assumptions were written down and not revisited until post-data analysis. The reason why researcher assumptions were recorded was because as the researcher, I was also an instructor and employee of the community college that was the research site of this study. As shared in the methods chapter (chapter 3), I was motivated by the research methodology of Tsui (2002) to record my assumptions about the participants' experiences in context of the institution. Prior to administering in-depth interviews and analyzing student coursework, I repeatedly heard from *The Sociology of Gender* students that the class was a transformative experience for them. My first recorded assumption was that students' transformative experiences were a result of participation in a class framed in decolonial feminist pedagogy. The data from the in-depth interviews and student coursework positively illuminated the impact that participation in a decolonial feminist classroom had on the community college student participants of this study. With knowledge of the curriculum used in *The Sociology of Gender*, I reflected on which aspects of the pedagogy I thought the participants would identify as significant to their experiences in the classroom. I assumed that the small group and whole class dialogue would be identified as the most influential aspects of the pedagogy because this was something that my prior knowledge of the institution left me assuming there was little inclusion of in most classes despite student interest in this type

of learning. After the data analysis, I discovered that while dialogue was evidenced as being integral to the students' experiences in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom, the critically reflexive writing assignments were spaces where students demonstrated critical consciousness, voice, and empowerment. Moreover, this writing was identified by the students as an important space for them to process earlier readings and dialogue and develop their own female standpoints on gender issues.

A second researcher assumption was with respect to the students not in *The Sociology of Gender* classroom. I expected students to identify “banking” pedagogy (Freire, 1970) methods. I assumed, accurately so, that students would describe instructional methods that were hierarchical where the instructor dominated through PowerPoint lectures and expected students to use rote memorization for learning. I anticipated students would not have space for dialogic communication across social identity groups, and the data revealed this to be true. I did not make assumptions about how the students would communicate the way that pedagogy impacted their engagement and experiences in the community college classroom. The data revealed that students were very in tune with how pedagogy impacted their lack of motivation and disengagement in the classroom. The data further revealed that students craved more from their learning experiences at the community college.

Research Implications

This study is a launching point for future research in multiple areas. First, this research attends to the lived experiences of low-income women undergraduates in community college. The data speaks to the complexity of experiences for low-income women undergraduates and illuminates how their class and gender identities position

them at the college, while also highlighting the ways their intersectional identities influence their multiple perspectives on their positionality and embodied experiences in the classroom and outside of the classroom. There is great potential for future research that explores other facets of low-income women undergraduates' experiences in community college in relation to their other diverse identities (e.g., faith, nation, parenting status, age, disability, etc.).

The research offers insights on pedagogy anchored in decolonial feminism and this is a place where more empirical research is needed. A decolonial feminist lens provides an analysis that is different from most pedagogy research because it centers the dialogue on foundational issues in education such as racism, patriarchy, and classism. In this way, applied to pedagogical studies that respond to curricular concerns, decolonial feminism can approach curricular concerns through an action, not reaction, framework and contribute to illuminating root causes of the problems in classrooms, such as the manifestation of colonial legacies. Future work in this area might identify the presence of colonial legacies in the classroom and examine practices of dissent, disruption, and transformation. While the participants of this study were students, a future study might use multi-methods of qualitative in-depth interviews with instructors, and participant observation of classrooms, to further understanding on the pedagogical methods instructors use in their classrooms, and also explore the relationship between pedagogy and institutional culture. Furthermore, future research might examine how graduate students are being pedagogically prepared for the professoriate and build on current research that examines this preparation in relation to decolonial feminist pedagogy commitments (Madden, 2014).

The research also draws into question the pedagogical frames used across community college classrooms. An inquiry of this type could be applied to four year colleges and universities, and/or by undergraduate or graduate programs. In this study, the research outcomes were tied back to the ways instructors prepare community college students, but it is also relevant for understanding how four year college students are prepared, and in fact, a comparison of the two could further inform arguments on social inequality reproduction.

Recommendations

Important recommendations can be made based on the study results. First, recommendations are offered to educators across higher education contexts, but especially in community colleges, that begins with reflection and moves to action. Educators are encouraged to critically reflect on their pedagogical praxis. To begin, educators should review their syllabi and curriculums and identify the presence of colonial legacies such as dominant Western, Eurocentric ideologies. Educators are encouraged to diversify their curriculums and include anti-racist, anti-sexist, multicultural readings. It is recommended that educators also reflect on instructional techniques and adapt those as necessary so as to create spaces where multiple voices can be heard and privileged voices are decentered. Hierarchies should be acknowledged and disrupted and multiples opportunities for engaging voice should be incorporated into the course through such strategies as dialogue circles and critically reflexive journal writings. Given what the women of this study have discussed through their narratives in the research, the overarching recommendation is that pedagogy is actively decolonized for the purpose of creating classrooms where claims to knowledge can be made.

In addition, it is recommended that researchers actively engage marginalized sites such as the community college, and people with marginalized identities such as low-income women undergraduates in community college. The narratives of the women in this study have captured voice, captured knowledge, and captured lived experiences and by doing so, an empirical space has been carved out that implicates knowledge production and how classrooms can be transformed for purpose of shifting claims to epistemic authority and honoring the lives of all students, especially the marginalized.

Parting Consideration: On Knowledge

Knowledge can be a mechanism of power, but for whom? Which students claim epistemic authority in the classroom and which do not? With attention to the historical narrative of Western higher education, should it come as a surprise when attempts to disrupt the traditional “knower” in education are challenged or underrepresented? What would it mean if the powerful “knower” were a person of color? female? queer? first-generation college student? working class or poor? disabled? a refugee? and/or of the Global South? To experience classrooms where those identities reflect the “knower” is to experience decolonial feminist pedagogy in action. In *The Sociology of Gender* there were multiple “knowers” who reflected those identities. Through personal narrative and in her words, the knower is she---the low-income woman who entered a community college classroom and engaged a pedagogy that transformed space and transformed lives. She claimed her knowledge so fiercely that it could not be contained in the concrete walls of the classroom, but staked claim in this research so that a new legacy, a decolonial feminist legacy, can be created and sustained in education.

This study explored the relationship between colonial legacies in the community college classroom and low-income women undergraduates' classroom experiences in community college. In exploring those experiences, this study illuminated the positive impact that decolonial feminist pedagogy can have on disrupting traditional claims to knowledge, shifting claims of epistemic authority to marginalized students, and changing students' academic and personal lives. In community college classrooms pedagogically anchored in decolonial feminism, space is created for knowledge to be claimed and lives to be transformed. Furthermore, decolonial feminist pedagogy preserves the role of democracy at "democracy's colleges" by giving students open access to not only enrollment but to just learning experiences, and thereby prepares them to participate more fully in transmuting their worlds.

This political project is in solidarity with the low-income women undergraduates of *The Sociology of Gender* classrooms. Through their collaboration as participants of this study, they have shared their experiences and challenged ideologies about community college students: who they are, how they learn, what they need, and why they should have access to transformative pedagogies. Pedagogy is political, and this dissertation is a moment of my feminist politics that is transformative for me as a researcher, educator, student, and woman. It is my hope that this research can transform pedagogy across community college contexts by illuminating the community college space as one where innovative pedagogies such as decolonial feminist pedagogy can exist. Decolonial feminist pedagogy is not just something to be practiced at elite institutions with more resources, but as this dissertation shows, it can be practiced at

community college institutions and it can impact low-income women undergraduates no matter which type of college they attend.

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Appendix 1: Student Description Chart
(Based on students' self-identification of social identity)

Student	Student of Color (SOC) or White	Ethnicity	Class	Sexuality	Ability	Faith	Other Status
Alison	White	Polish-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Jewish	
Ami	SOC	Thai-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Agnostic	
Beth	White	Polish-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Protestant	
Brenda	SOC	African-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Socio-emotional disability	Christian	
Caitlyn	White	Irish-American	Middle-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Catholic	
Camila	SOC	Puerto Rican-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Catholic	
Ciara	SOC	African-American	Working-class/ Poor	Homosexual	Able-bodied	Christian	
Helen	White	American Indian	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Christian	
Jada	SOC	African-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Christian	
Jamie	White	Italian-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Agnostic	
Jennifer	White	Italian-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Catholic	
Johanna	SOC	Tunisian	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Muslim	Recent immigrant
Kassi	White	Irish-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Catholic	
Ling	SOC	Asian-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Christian	
Malia	SOC	African-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Christian	
Molly	White	Irish-American	Working-class	Heterosexual	Able-bodied	Protestant	

Monique	SOC	Dominican	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Catholic	
Morgan	White	Italian- American	Working -class	Homosex ual*	Able- Bodied	Catholic	
Nadja	White	Bosnian	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Able- Bodied	Muslim	
Nancy	White	Polish- American	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Socio- emotion al disabilit y	Catholic	
Nevaeh	SOC	African- American	Working -class / Poor	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Christian	
Sierra	White	Italian- American	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Catholic	
Subin	SOC	African/ Sudanese	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Muslim	Refugee of War
Sylvia	White	Italian- American	Middle- class	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Christian	
Tasha	SOC	African- American	Working -class	Hetero sexual	Able- bodied	Christian	

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Question Guide

Questions about classroom experiences at community college

- 1) Describe for me a typical experience for you a student in an average classroom here (at the community college). Try, if you will, to paint a picture for me of how you experience being a student and engaging in the classroom.
- 2) Tell me about your experiences participating in most classes here. For instance, imagine an instructor is asking a question of the class---how do you participate?
- 3) Describe for me what working in small groups is like for you in most classrooms here?
- 4) Explain to me what the challenges you face in most classrooms that impact your classroom experiences.
- 5) Explain to me what motivates your engagement in most classrooms.
- 6a.) Describe for me how you feel in relation to other people in most college classroom, (e.g. in relation to your peers, professors, advisors, and so forth.)
- 6b.) Describe for me how those feelings impact your experiences in most classrooms.
- 7a.) Who do you see as the “knowers” in most classrooms? Explain.
- 7b.) How do you see yourself in the ways of being a “knower?” Explain.

Questions about experience in feminist/sociology of gender classroom that used a decolonial feminist pedagogy

On Classroom Instruction

- 8) Describe your feelings and experiences with the choice of readings assigned and how they impacted your understanding of gender.

9.) Describe your feelings and experiences surrounding the films shown in the course.

10.) This class was organized largely around dialogue (large group and small). Please reflect on how the process of your participation in dialogue in the class over the semester contributed to you finding and using your own voice in the classroom (if it did at all).

11.) Describe your experiences with the dialogue circles.

12.) How did dialogue impact your understanding of gender and your transformation of self?

13.) Describe your experiences with in-class writing prompts.

14.) How did the in-class writing prompts impact your understanding of gender and your transformation of self?

On Classroom Assessments

15.) Please describe how participating in weekly journal writings impacted your experiences this semester (in terms of your critical thinking, writing, and understanding of gender).

16.) Please describe how participating in the Gender Collaboration Project impacted your experiences this semester (personally and academically)

17.) Please describe your experience with the Final Paper (with scheduled requirements of outline, sources, rough draft, and final)

On Connections to Self

18.) What was the greatest challenge (personally and academically) that you experienced in the classroom?

19.) What was the greatest outcome/reward (personally and academically) that you experienced in the classroom?

20.) How have the following outcomes been impacted as a result of your participation in this course:

- your gender consciousness?
- your coming to voice?
- your sense of empowerment?
- your sense of collective action and leadership?
- your sense of solidarity?

21.) Is there anything else you feel was critical to this course and your experience that hasn't been addressed yet? If so, please discuss further

Appendix 3: Sample Open-Ended Questionnaire

- 1.) Describe in detail the ways that most of your classes are instructed here at the college.

- 2.) Describe your experiences with classroom participation. Please reflect on why you think you do or do not participate in class and consider how the course content and methods of instruction play a role in your participation.

- 3.) Explain to me the challenges you face in most classrooms with respect to your classroom experiences.

- 4.) Explain to me what motivates your engagement in most classrooms.

VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Meredith Madden
PLACE OF BIRTH: New Hartford, NY
DATE OF BIRTH: December 19, 1976

EDUCATION

2016 Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York
Ph.D. in Cultural Foundations of Education
Dissertation: "Claiming Knowledge: Claiming Lives. Decolonial Feminist Pedagogy and the Experiences of Low-Income Women Undergraduates in Community College." Committee: Dr. Gretchen E. Lopez, Dr. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Dr. Dalia Rodriguez

2015 University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Penn Equity Institute Certificate in Race and Equity in Education

2013 Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York
Certificate of Advanced Studies in Women's and Gender Studies

2005-2007 Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York
M.S. with distinction in Urban Education

2000-2002 The George Washington University, Washington, DC
M.P.P. in Public Policy Analysis and Research,
Concentration: Gender and Social Policy

1995-1999 Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York
B.A. in Sociology, Minors: Women's Studies and Russian Area Studies; Certificate of Study from University College Galway

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Experience at Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Part-time Instructor

2015 **Socioeconomic Inequality and Education** (undergraduate course), Cultural Foundations of Education, Sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies Departments

2012-2014 **Social Class Matters: Dialogue in Action** (undergraduate course), Cultural Foundations of Education, Sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies Departments

Graduate Teaching Assistant

- 2014 **Institutions and Processes in Education** (graduate course), Cultural Foundations of Education Department
2011-2012 **College Learning Strategies** (undergraduate course), School of Education

Teaching Experience at Excelsior College, Albany, NY

Part-time Online Instructor

- 2015 **Introduction to Sociology**, Sociology Department

Teaching Experience at Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, NY

Part-time Instructor

- 2010-2015 **Introduction to Sociology**, Sociology Department

Visiting Instructor

- 2013 **Social Significance of Gender**, Sociology Department
2013 **Methods of Research**, Sociology Department
2012-2013 **Introduction to Sociology**, Sociology Department
2012 **Racial and Ethnic Inequalities**, Sociology Department

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

Peer-reviewed journal articles

Madden, M. (2015). Social class dialogues and the fostering of class consciousness. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 48(4).

Madden, M. (2014). Pedagogical encounters, graduate teaching assistants, and decolonial feminist commitments. *Feminist Teacher*, 25(1).

Madden, M. (revise and resubmit). Invisibility cloak credential: Exploring the hidden experiences of pregnant and parenting students in community college contexts. *Gender & Education*.

Peer-reviewed book chapter

Nguyen, N., Nastasi, A.W., Mejia, A., Stanger, A., & **Madden, M.** (2016). Epistemic friendships: Collective knowledge making through transnational feminist praxis. In E.H. Chowdhury & L. Philipose (Eds.), *Dissident Friendships: Imperialism, Feminism, and the Possibility of Transnational Solidarities*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, IL

Peer-reviewed book review

Madden, M. (2014). Review of *Contemporary issues in the sociology of race and ethnicity* by George J. Sefa Dei and Meredith Lordan (Eds.). *Education Review*, 21.

Manuscripts in preparation

Madden, M. A movement for social justice or social reproduction? Examining New York City Teaching Fellows' teacher preparation and experiences in urban schools.

Media publications

Madden, M. (2015, Jan. 20). Give Single Mothers College Chance [Letter to the editor]. The Washington Times, online:
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/20/letter-to-the-editor-give-single-mothers-college-c/>

AWARDS/HONORS/INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

- 2016 Women's and Gender Studies Certificate of Recognition, Syracuse University
This award recognized my dissertation as a work in feminist studies.
- 2014 Joan Rothenberg Graduate Student Service Award, Syracuse University
This award recognized my work organizing and facilitating the Feminist Pedagogy Working Group for graduate students across disciplines at Syracuse University.
- 2013 Chancellor's Award for Public Engagement and Scholarship, Honorable Mention in Innovation in Academic Achievement, Syracuse University
This award recognized the accomplishments of the Intergroup Dialogue course on Social Class Matters: Dialogue in Action. Along with the students of the original course, I was recognized for innovation in academic achievement and public engagement. Specifically, the course demonstrated innovation in academic achievement through inclusion of a social action project that joined the university students with the city of Syracuse's Nottingham high school's Spotighting Justice Club for community collaboration on events related to issues of educational inequality.
- 2012 Honorable Recognition, Faculty Institute Workshop Session Organizer and Facilitator, Mohawk Valley Community College
This recognition honored my work as a session organizer and facilitator for Mohawk Valley Community College's Faculty Institute Workshop. For my role, I organized a workshop, "Writing Matters," which engaged faculty across disciplines in creative and non-fiction writing exercises that were transferable to the classroom.
- 2005 & 2006 AmeriCorps National Service Award
This award recognized my successful teaching service through AmeriCorps New York City Teaching Fellows at Isobel Rooney, Middle School 80, Bronx, NY.

CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

Madden, M. (2015, February). (Chair and Presenter) *Gender, Class, and the Community*
Meredith Madden

College Classroom: Understanding the Experiences of Pregnant and Parenting Students. Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society Conference, New York, NY.

Madden, M. (2015, February). (Chair and Presenter) *Dialogue Across Social Identity Borders in the University Classroom*. Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society Conference, New York, NY.

Madden, M. (2014, October). *Engaged Together: Public Scholarship and Graduate Student Learning Through An Intergroup Dialogue Facilitator Collective*. Paper presented at The 14th Annual Imagining America National Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Madden, M. (2014, March). *Social Class Dialogues and the Fostering of Social Class Consciousness*. Paper presented at The 7th Annual Conference on Equity & Social Justice, Syracuse, NY.

Madden, M. (2013, April). *Critical Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Epistemic Dignity*. Paper presented at the 2013 New York State Foundations of Education Association Conference, Hamilton, NY.

Madden, M. (2013, March). *Consciousness Raised! The Case for Intergroup Dialogue Pedagogy and the Development of Undergraduate Social Class Consciousness*. Paper presented at The 6th Annual Conference on Equity & Social Justice, Testing Our Limits: Teaching and Learning with Courage and Conviction, New Paltz, NY.

Madden, M. (2012, May). *Dialogue Facilitation as Social Activism* paper presented at the Syracuse University Conference on Activism, Rhetoric, and Research, Syracuse, NY.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2015-Present Research Assistant, Democratizing Knowledge Project, Syracuse University

2015 Research Assistant, American Association of Universities and Colleges funded *Bringing Theory to Practice* project, Syracuse University

2014-2015 Graduate Research Assistant, Intergroup Dialogue Program, Syracuse University

2013-2014 Research Apprenticeship directed by Dr. Gretchen E. Lopez, Syracuse University

2001-2002 Senior Research/Project Assistant, National Research Council *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003.

2001-2002 Senior Research/Project Assistant, National Research Council
Meredith Madden

Working Families and Growing Kids: Caring for Children and Adolescents.
Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2015-Present Program Administrator/Research Assistant, The Democratizing Knowledge Project, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
- 2014-2015 Graduate Research/Project Assistant, Intergroup Dialogue Program, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
- 2007-2010 Students with Disabilities Teacher in English, Social Studies, Math, and Science, Trumansburg M.S., Trumansburg, NY
- 2005-2007 Students with Disabilities Teacher in English and Social Studies, and Grant Writer, M.S. 80, Bronx, NY
- 2004-2005 Development Associate, Young Adult Institute/National Institute for People with Disabilities, Manhattan, NY
- 2003-2004 Public Affairs Coordinator, Inwood House (adolescent maternity residence), Manhattan, NY
- 2001-2002 Senior Research/Project Assistant, National Research Council, Washington, DC

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Service at Syracuse University

- 2013-Present *Founder, Organizer, and Facilitator, Feminist Pedagogy Working Group, Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University*
Stemming from graduate students' recommendations for a collective space to discuss challenges and supports to the development and praxis of feminist pedagogy, the working group was created to engage graduate students across academic disciplines in dialogue and praxis on feminist pedagogy, decolonial pedagogy, and pedagogical philosophies, as well as serve as a space of pedagogical support and solidarity.
- 2013-2014 *Advisory Board Member, The 7th annual Conference on Equity and Social Justice, Syracuse University, spring 2014*
- 2011-Present *Member, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, Syracuse University*
- 2011-2012 *Committee Member, School of Education Brown Bag Lecture Series, Syracuse University*

Service at Mohawk Valley Community College

- 2014 *Diversity and Global View Presenter, "Striving for Success: Parents in School," Mohawk Valley Community College*
Collaborated with former student to create a community awareness

event that included a research presentation on pregnant and parenting undergraduate students' experiences and a panel discussion by current undergraduate parenting students with intersectional identities. This event illustrated diverse family-school experiences, and the need for increased visibility, engagement, and institutional resources for this student demographic on college campuses.

- 2012-2014 *Public Policy Club Advisor, Center for Social Sciences, Mohawk Valley Community College*
- 2013 *Invited Session Organizer and Facilitator, Faculty Institute Workshop, "Writing Matters," Mohawk Valley Community College*
- 2012 -2013 *Organizer, Voter Registration, Mohawk Valley Community College*
Organized two-day voter registration event with the League of Women Voters. Mohawk Valley Community College Public Policy club students volunteered in hour-long sessions.
- 2012 *Session Organizer and Facilitator, Meet the Candidates Event, Mohawk Valley Community College*
The Meet the Candidates event offered a platform for local and state candidates to share their political views with members of the campus and local Central New York community, as well as address specific questions and concerns from the audience.

Service for Academic Community

- 2015 Peer-reviewer for *Gender & Society*
- 2015 Peer-reviewer for *Equity & Excellence in Education*

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH

- 2015-Present Secretary, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Clinton Central School District, Clinton, NY
- 2014-2015 President, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Clinton Central School District, Clinton, NY
- 2013-2014 Treasurer, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Clinton Central School District, Clinton, NY
- 2013 Collaborator, Sudanese Refugee Collective, Utica, NY
- 2013 Session Organizer and Facilitator, "For Writing's Sake," Creative writing community workshop, Dunham Public Library, Whitesboro, NY

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

- American Educational Research Association
Meredith Madden

Eastern Sociological Society
National Women's Studies Association
Sociologists for Women in Society