Storying Our Claims, Claiming Our Stories: Becoming Through Narrative in the Social-Justice Focused Classroom

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Storying Our Claims, Claiming Our Stories: Becoming Through Narrative in the Social-Justice Focused Classroom

by

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B.A., Vanderbilt University, 2004
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Storying Our Claims, Claiming Our Stories: Becoming Through Narrative in the Social Justice Focused Classroom
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

Kantor, Julia Churchill (Ph.D Education, Literacy Curriculum and Instruction)
Storying our Claims, Claiming Our Stories: Becoming Through Narrative in the Social Justice Focused Classroom
Dissertation directed by Associate Professor Elizabeth Dutro

The following project uses both narrative and feminist poststructural lenses to consider how narratives operated in one undergraduate social foundations of education class purposefully designed around issues of social justice. These theoretical frameworks were useful in exploring the ways students and myself, the course instructor, were variously positioned amongst both dominant and counter storylines that took up issues such as educational opportunity, diversity in schools, racial oppression, gender performance, and sexuality. In exploring the way stories worked to provide students with new ways of being, thinking, seeing and doing around such issues, this project goes beyond work that understands narratives as pointing to some “out there” reality. Rather, students’ personal stories and ones they told about their families, community members, and peers were understood as always in process, being discursively negotiated amongst other circulating narratives, told and untold. Rather than focus on big, canonical narratives that tend to privilege the traditional “story arc” and are explicitly elicited, this project primarily takes “small stories”, those that occur in interaction and often in fragmented ways, as entry points to discursive analysis of student conversation and case study interviews. The conversational data, drawn from three “narrative events” over the course of the semester with students, enabled a broader view into the use of “small stories” to construct versions of selves and their connection to larger claims about the world. The case studies follow four students as they negotiate who they are in the course in light of their own stories, those of others, and larger storylines invoked throughout the semester.
The results of this project suggest that stories of a variety of forms and genres are both regulated and serve regulatory functions given larger storylines around inequity, diversity and difference throughout our society. Nevertheless, the rules surrounding the telling and listening of stories were constantly being negotiated, challenged, and reworked by students, enabling a look into the movement and interplay of stories and the storylines they helped to construct. Ultimately, this work indicates the need to continue to see stories as part and parcel of classroom experience and consider the promises and perils of placing stories from variously positioned individuals into contact with one another.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I’d like to thank the thirty-one students that I worked with for this project, particularly my seven case study students- Lisa, Austin, Mark, Catherine, Sophie, Adam and Emily. Their vulnerability throughout this process was inspiring as they shared intimate details about their lives with me, details that allowed this project to happen. They were the ones that drove and ultimately made this project what it became. I’d also like to thank my advisor, Elizabeth Dutro, whose support was instrumental in providing theoretical and methodological direction for this work. I could not have asked for a better advisor to guide me as I made my way through the sometimes sticky process of doing qualitative research. Lastly, I’d like to thank my family and friends (particularly those who have taken this doctoral journey with me) who have provided unending support as I’ve woken up early and stayed up late writing. You all have provided me balance and perspective throughout the last six years as well as shoulders to lean on. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Stories in the Social Justice Focused Classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments to Interrogating Privilege and Power</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Goals</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Framing the Story: Narrative and Feminist Poststructural Theories</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Theory: Laying the Groundwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storied ways of knowing and being</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A contextual turn</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Poststructural Theory: Critiquing the Groundwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Situating the Story: Review of Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry into Preservice Teacher Beliefs Through Stories</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pedagogy of storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories to live by</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Canonical to Small Stories</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small stories in classroom conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Constructing the Story: Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and Society: Purpose and Background</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class structure: curriculum and pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews and case studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher notes and reflections</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Frameworks</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kantor

Self-study of teaching practice.............................................48
Feminist poststructural methods...........................................50
Data Analysis........................................................................51
Identifying “stories” in the data.............................................51
Positioning analysis..............................................................52
Critical deconstructive analysis.............................................56

Chapter 5: Storied Constructions of Educational Opportunity, Difference and Understanding.............................................................................................................61

First Narrative Event: Small Stories as Socially Meaningful, Regulated, and Regulatory Acts.................................................................62
Constructing the “ideal modern school”.................................63
The ideal modern school as merely theoretical?.........................68
Constructing educational opportunity.....................................71
But who’s we?...........................................................................75
“Privilege” speaking back......................................................78

Second Narrative Event: Attempts to Understand..................85
“You can’t ever understand, but you kinda have to”..................86
Narrative validity.................................................................95
“Constructive narratives”.......................................................100

Third Narrative Event: Slipping In and Out of Striated Orders......103
“You can accept it, but it’s hard to like wrap your head around it”...105
The need to know?.................................................................110
Negotiating the gendered order.............................................116
“I was kind of uncomfortable, even when I was accepting”........120

Chapter 6: Negotiating Storytelling as a Seeing and Caring Process: Lisa......................................................128
Shifting..................................................................................129
Power, Privilege and Narrative Validity..................................133
Shifting Through Feeling Rules.............................................139
Breaking Down and Reconstructing the “Emotion/Reason” Dichotomy......................................................142
Chapter 7: Cultivating and Straying from Her Plot of Land: Catherine

Playing with the Public Transcript

“Sometimes Your Emotions Can Get Mixed Up”

“The Whole Fairness Thing”

Digging Out of a Deep Hole

Chapter 8: “Caught out in my unknowing”: Coming to Know through Narrative Encounter: Austin

Shifting the Boundaries of the Familiar

Negotiating “Acting White”

Compassion for the Passionate

Chapter 9: Negotiating the Head and the Heart Through Stories: Mark

Opening Stories

“This whole thing of seeing”

The Judicious Spectator or Voyeuristic Spectator?

Chapter 10: Stories in the Classroom: From Stasis to Assemblage: Theoretical, Methodological, and Pedagogical Implications

The Classroom as Assemblage

Narrative technologies: Negotiating the rules of storytelling

A Pedagogy of Reflexive Storytelling

Future Research

References

Appendix A
Chapter 1

Stories in the Social-Justice Focused Classroom

It was in the Spring of 2009, during my second year of teaching School and Society, an undergraduate course focused on the history of and current inequities in education, that I began to notice the prevalence of personal storytelling in the classroom. These stories varied from those about past educational experience, stories of future teaching, and ones presenting hypothetical scenarios. As a class heavily focused on dialoguing around social justice issues, this personal storytelling seemed particularly important, as I saw it as providing complexity and nuance to our class discussions that often became “difficult” as race, class, gender, and sexuality, amongst other markers of social difference, were squarely put on the table. I heard students’ stories often support or alter the concepts we dealt with in class as they operated as the primary linguistic device for students to relate to and come to new understandings. Yet, it was not until Nate, a student from Colombia, came into my office to discuss his participation in class that I began to question the deeper ways that these storytelling practices were operating. He described how he could not speak his story into the room much of time because he knew, from past experience, how his accent was perceived. He could see when others stopped listening as their eyes shifted away from his, and he could tell that he was not taken as seriously as those with what are typically considered “American” accents. It was in this moment that I realized the stories that flooded my classroom each week became contingent upon and had the potential to reinforce structures of power and privilege. Nate’s conscious choice to stay silent much of the time operated as a rejoinder to this set of conditions beyond his control, conditions rooted in the legacies of racism and xenophobia in this country. Storytelling in my classroom was no longer a
neutral enterprise but one that reflected the difficulties with talking across difference in a classroom full of students situated at various intersections of power and privilege.

It was from this incident with Nate that I began to consider what it meant to privilege storytelling in this social justice focused classroom with differently situated students. Indeed, scholars have noted the tendency to glorify the process of “talking across difference” as if we can once and for all know others and, more critically, the Other, through the “talking cure” whereby “hearing silenced voices…fixes everything” (deCastell, 2004, p. 54). This sort of democratic dialogue is taken up by scholars such as Iris Marion Young (1997) who writes of the ideal of narrative in democratic dialogue where all stories have “equal value in any communicative event” (p. 73) and Martha Nussbaum (1997) who argues for the notion of the “judicious spectator” whereby the reader or listener is able to, through stories, “comprehend the inner plight of a person and inner feelings he never experienced himself” (Bruhwiler, 2012, p. 171). Yet, as Jones (2004) notes, such a “narrative cure” may only serve to reinforce the position of those in dominant groups through their demands for access to the Other, those that often remain on their terms. As part of a colonizing process, the “benign, maybe even apologetic request, [from those in dominant group]: ‘Tell us exactly what happened’; ‘What is it like for you?’” becomes a symptom and perpetuation of unequal relations of power, rather than the cure (p. 65). In Nate’s case, he knew that to tell his mostly White classmates “what it was like for him” emigrating from Colombia and going to public schools in Miami risked falling on ultimately uninterested or deaf ears. And still, to do away with telling stories across difference altogether would be to eliminate the very discursive grounds where there is potential for students to come together and play with new ways of seeing, being, hearing, talking and listening to one another. It is in this paradoxical
space of relying upon, but ultimately questioning, storytelling in the social-justice focused education classroom where I situate this project.

**Commitments to Interrogating Privilege and Power**

Teacher education programs, in particular, have taken up this call to create circumstances to encourage students of education to begin to encounter new ways of thinking and talking about issues of educational inequity. These programs have, over the past two decades, reacted to what Cochran-Smith (2004) calls “the demographic imperative”, or the growing disparity between the pipeline of primarily White, female pre-service teachers and the non-dominant students they may teach, by implementing various approaches to both prepare preservice teachers to teach in culturally responsive ways and work towards equity for their students (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). *School and Society* is a social foundations class that intends upon beginning this process with future teachers, as well as any students interested in the U.S. education system. While I will elaborate on the class in more detail in Chapter 3, such approaches are designed to not only provide alternative teaching methods and curricular options for preservice teachers, but also to provide an environment to interrogate their own beliefs, opinions, and attitudes towards groups and individuals different from themselves (Gay, 2010). Indeed, while addressing the more practical concerns of teaching is certainly a necessary part of teacher education, deeply entrenched beliefs about teaching and learning, especially those that relate to non-dominant students\(^1\), are directly related to the instructional decisions future teachers will make and, therefore, influence the opportunities that students will have for an equitable education. Gay’s

---

\(^1\) I use the term non-dominant students as Gutierrez and Arzubiaga (2008) do, referring to “communities or individuals who have less power, historically as well as in the present, vis-à-vis the dominant community, e.g., economically, socio-politically, educationally” (p. 3). This definition places a focus on power differentials rather than merely using descriptors such as “minority” or “communities/persons of color”, for example.
most recent call to interrogate preservice teacher beliefs and attitudes towards diversity as not only a goal but as a starting point is persuasive. Recent research has shown that many preservice teachers hold negative, inaccurate beliefs towards students of color, those living in poverty, and English language learners (Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse, 2006; Trent et al., 2008) and that these beliefs are not easily changed (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000). Moreover, Garmon (2004) notes that, “Students who bring strong biases and negative stereotypes about diverse groups will be less likely to develop the types of professional beliefs and behaviors most consistent with multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness” (p. 20). Importantly, educational equity, access, and opportunity is at stake for not only students of color but for all groups who have historically and currently face discrimination. This includes GLBTQ youth and their families, an aspect of diversity that has traditionally been left out of teacher education programs (Jennings, 2007).

Thus, with the call to interrogate preservice teacher beliefs about teaching, learning, and their future students, various methods have been taken up in teacher education classrooms across the country. One such approach makes use of life history and autobiographical narratives as a way to gain insight into “the material, political, social and economic contexts in which preservice teachers matured…and encountered individuals from diverse backgrounds” (Johnson, 2007, p. 300). Studies of the use of these methods have been important in disclosing the narrative processes that teacher education candidates go through as they explore and make sense of their developing identities as teachers (e.g. Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2002; Gomez et al, 2000). Typically, these studies also rely upon narrative theory (Bruner, 1986, 2004) where eliciting stories works as a sort of lever in which to pry open new possibilities for education, while creating space to tell and re-tell stories in light of others. Theoretically, preservice teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about education are challenged by the presence of alternative possibilities.
These studies also serve as examples of post-positivistic research in teacher education, representing an epistemological standpoint that leaves room for complexity and ambiguity as they recognize the variety of local and contingent truths about education.

The use of elicited autobiographies in preservice classrooms for curricular (Conle, 2003), pedagogical (Coulter et al., 2007) and methodological purposes (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) is well documented. Nevertheless the act of “getting personal” through storytelling is not a neutral enterprise and attention must be paid to the act of narrating in which the situation and context is fully taken into account (Rymes and Wortham, 2011; Conle, 2003). The ways stories are told, if at all, as well as story content, are necessarily dependent on a variety of factors, including the audience, the topic at hand, and the particular norms in place for telling stories in the classroom. The opening story with Nate illustrates this well. Moreover, the meanings we attach to such stories are contingent and partial, as well as reliant on the classroom and research contexts that can render some stories more valuable than others and, thus, more likely to get taken up as alternative truths about education. While a number of scholars have acknowledged that the stories we tell are not merely individual accomplishments but, rather, relational in nature (e.g. Conle, 2003; Rymes and Wortham, 2011), there has been a lack of narrative research within preservice teacher education taking this as a primary concern. In addition, narratives are typically understood as pointing to some reality “out there” rather than doing the work of constructing a contingent and, therefore, shifting reality. Feminist poststructural scholars have, however, recognized such contingency (e.g. St. Pierre, 2000; Lather, 2001), understanding how discursive practices, such as storytelling, “gather themselves according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485).
A second, but certainly related gap in the literature, concerns narrative form and, to what extent, particular forms are understood to be valuable and, therefore, worthy of research. Stories with a temporal sequence of past events that move to resolve a highly significant event have been privileged over those that are characterized by improvisation, contradictions, fragmentation, and a recognition that events told (past, present or future) may be unfinished and still unfolding (Georgakopoulou, 2007). These “small stories” which focus more heavily on naturally occurring talk-in-interaction rather than elicited stories, highlight the importance of co-authorship, retellings, and even refusals to tell, making them centrally concerned with “stories as social practice rather than as detachable and autonomous events (Ochs and Capps, 2001) With this, the “about” of narrative is seen as inextricable from the “how” of narrative. Historically, preservice teacher education research concerned with issues of diversity and equity has lacked this understanding of narrative, instead focusing on the more canonical “fully formed” narrative. The naturally occurring, perhaps fragmented, stories that both students and teachers tell one another have much to add to the conversation about coming to understand beliefs and attitudes around issues of social justice, as well as how subjectivities are discursively constructed through these small stories.

Project goals

Christine Sleeter (2008) uses “critical family history” to allow her preservice teachers to develop a deeply contextualized look into their storied constructions of themselves and notes that, “it is important not to attempt to draw sweeping generalizations from any story, but rather to allow the stories to converse, and the disjunctures to sit alongside one another, generating questions for further consideration (p. 9). It is, thus, the goal of this project to explore these storied conversations, the disjunctures and attend to the questions that arose in my own
classroom, a class that included students previously admitted into the teacher education program, those exploring teaching as a possible profession, and students simply interested in thinking more deeply about education. Specifically, I documented and analyzed not only story content, but which stories were told, who told them, how they were told and what was potentially silenced in the process. While I was certainly concerned about the content of stories, I also understood them as part of a larger discursive space where storytelling was relational rather than an individual act separate from the context in which it happens.

Using a post-structural feminist framework (St. Pierre, 2000; Lather, 1991; Davies, 2000; Behar, 1996), this study intervenes in the existing literature in at least two important ways. First, it shifts attention from simply exploring elicited educational life-history stories to also attending to the more spontaneous, partial, and situated “small stories” that arise throughout conversation (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Second, it examines this range of storytelling as more than a way to simply add nuance to the conversation about teaching for social justice. Rather, I seek to understand these stories as part of the larger ideological structure that regulates discourse and language in ways that continue to privilege some ideas about teaching and learning over others. In doing so, I question whether we have been complacent about using narrative theory, failing to acknowledge how stories are both regulated and regulatory forces within classrooms. Consistent with a feminist poststructural approach, this project is a self-study as self-critique (Lather, 1991), in which I understand myself not only as an active, historically and socially positioned storyteller in the classroom, but also one who acknowledges “my own inescapable complicity in practices of cultural production” (p. 85). It is here where a deconstructive approach to narratives is necessary as it seeks to, “locate the exclusions, limitations and restraints placed on practice” (Sholle, 1998, in Lather, 1991, p. 96). This process works to not only reveal the structure and
function of storytelling in the classroom but to reconfigure new ways of being in the midst of these stories for both myself and my students. In addition, and in line with deconstruction, is the recognition that just as the stories we tell about ourselves are subject to change, so are the ways that we see narratives, the categories we place them within, and how they function in social spaces, establishing this project as one that works to de-limit the possibilities of the use of narrative in pre-service teacher education. Given this purpose, I ask the following questions:

Within a foundation course on diversity and equity in a teacher education program, how do stories of educational histories and experiences function in the classroom?

- What stories get told about educational histories and in what ways?
- How are students telling their educational stories?
- Who gets to tell these stories?
- How are students’ stories situated in the larger discourses of inequity, diversity, and difference taken up in the course?

How are stories taken up by both students and instructor, and how does this impact what ideas about education are positioned as dominant or subordinate in any given discursive event?

- What is my role in maintaining the “rules of discourse and storytelling” surrounding stories in the classroom?
- How do students respond to storytelling practices and pay explicit attention to storytelling as a practice?
Chapter 2
Framing the Story: Narrative and Feminist Poststructural Theories

The overall framework for this study combines two strands, narrative theory and feminist poststructural theory which, when put into conversation with each other, collectively serve to challenge the pedagogical and curricular use of narratives and potentially make them an even more valuable, albeit unpredictable tool, within teacher education classrooms. In considering the purpose and design of this project, narrative theory was useful as a basis to help me understand the work I was already doing with my students. Our past, present, and future educational stories permeated the space, a space that I purposefully created for stories to flourish and come into contact with one another. Robert Coles’ (1989) seminal text, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, initially provided external affirmation that these stories were part of the process of learning and self-discovery that I was hoping to experience along with my students. As Coles writes, “The beauty of a good story is its openness - the way you or I or anyone reading it can take it in, and use it for ourselves” (p. 23). This assertion is significant for classrooms that provide space for stories to emerge from students, teachers, and external sources and do so hoping that alternative ways of being and thinking can be taken up. Indeed, this was, and still is my hope for my classroom. Yet, I could not help but notice the consistently messy space that my classroom became, or perhaps remained, when stories, in their various forms, began to circulate. It became apparent, as feminist poststructural theories suggest, that these stories did not emerge as objective representations of experience but as situated and context-bound, making certain ways of being, thinking, and acting available over others. These various positionings are made possible within the rules of discourse where “it makes sense to say only certain things and others are “outside the realm of possibility” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). With this, the classroom context,
complete with differentially situated individuals helped to shape not only what got told, but how and by whom. The humanist conception of the autonomous individual is put into question here along with the prospect of “coming to voice”, and an exploration into the ways in which power constitutes various subjectivities is in order. Thus, Coles’ suggestion that we “take in” others’ stories, seemingly with ease, must be questioned as certain stories become the norm, while others remain on the margins.

Much of the underlying assumptions of narrative theory and feminist poststructural theory are compatible. For instance, narrative theorists Mishler (2004) and Bruner (2004) wonder about the various ways stories can be told due to the cultural resources we have available. Such work is consistent with poststructural concerns over the constitutive nature of language for not only does the “truth” of a story become a fiction for “every telling is constrained, partial, and determined by the discourses and histories that preconfigure, even as they might promise, representation” (Britzman in St.Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p. 32), but the structures surrounding the story constitute its very existence. Yet, feminist poststructural work has explicit concerns about the way this language operates to limit the conditions of possibility, particularly for historically marginalized groups. Furthermore, the knowledge about teaching and learning that emerges from stories, however it may come about, is “performative of relations of power” (p. 32) and may, therefore, further privilege some stories over others. Asking how and why, in addition to the what, gets at the potential ways that stories serve to reproduce power relations within a classroom space. While narrative theory remains a valuable resource and is often grounded in feminist theories of experience (Noddings, 2007), it is also a place to interrogate the structure that holds it in place and, thus, limits new ways of being within and amongst stories.

**Narrative Theory: Laying the Groundwork**
As the larger framework for this project, narrative theory serves to challenge the grand narratives that provide narrow definitions of what education can and should look like, establishing innovative spaces for teachers, students, and researchers’ experiences to come alive and inform this challenge. This purpose is grounded in Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, Bruner’s (1986; 2004) work on storied ways of knowing, and other notable scholars who understand educational narratives as a medium through which we can take stock of current educational conditions. In this section, I will highlight both Dewey and Bruner’s work as it relates to my particular study, examine what it means for various stories to come into contact with each other, and focus in on how context is understood within the narrative tradition.

**Continuity of experience.** As a starting point, Dewey’s (1938/1998) notion of the continuity of experience suggests that, “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those that come after” (p. 27). In this sense, Dewey eludes to the idea that past, present and future experiences become intertwined in such a way as to produce a plotline that we are living through and through which we come to understand both ourselves and others. Lives are understood, not as punctuated with stories, but as *always* storied. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that, “This general notion translates in the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others’ stories” (p. 2). Given this premise, conditions are created where both teacher and students’ storied experiences serve to disrupt those “theories of the world that can be applied universally, regardless of particular circumstances” (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p. 22).

**Storied ways of knowing and being.** To more deeply examine the process through which stories work to disrupt taken for granted universals, I turn to the work of Jerome Bruner
Kantor

(1986, 2004). In highlighting two distinct ways that we construct reality, Bruner (1986) distinguishes between the paradigmatic way of knowing that strives to produce “good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery, guided by reasoned hypothesis” (p. 13) and the narrative mode which deals with more subjective ways of knowing. In the former, consistency and non-contradiction serve to “regulate” language in order to best describe and explain the phenomenon at hand. Such a positivistic way of knowing dominates many current educational policies, such as No Child Left Behind (2002). As Kim and Latta (2010) note, “such prescriptions focus on causes and effects of teaching and learning with little attention to teaching and learning contexts and ensuring relations, adapting, building and changing meanings” (p. 69). The narrative mode, on the other hand, is primarily “concerned with the human condition” and the ways in which we can be with “human possibilities rather than in settled certainties” (p. 26). As we story our own worlds and those of others within the narrative mode, these constructions of experience necessarily resist a single interpretation and meaning remains open and subject to change. Bruner notes that through various discursive moves (i.e. metaphor, presuppositional triggers) such subjunctivity renders the reader or listener, who participates in the “uptake” of the narrative speech act, a critical part of the story construction. A story is not endowed with a priori meaning but, rather, gains its significance when it is put forth for interpretation. Even here, it remains unstable, fully reliant on the cultural conditions of which it is a part (Bruner, 2004). Thus, in pressing squarely on positivistic theories and modes of knowledge production, narrative theory is a helpful lens to look through when examining classroom discourse. Teachers’ and students’ stories are understood as context-dependent, rule-driven, and enmeshed within a community of other stories, past and present, all limited in certain ways. Given this assumption, “stories contain within them the possibility for
undoing, for their own subversion” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 88) as their constructed nature becomes apparent and alternative ways of storying experience become available.

Narrative theorists recognize the space where stories come into contact with each other as “moments of encounter” in which certain accounts resonate strongly creating a “metaphorical connection of parts of one’s own life to the parts of the narrative statement one is hearing or reading” (Conle, 2003, p. 11). Importantly, stories will not always resonate positively or be consistent with one’s own. Rather, Clandinin et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of the tensions that emerge when opposing stories of experience meet a crucial part of what it means to understand classroom life in storied terms. They note that when “participants’ or our lives’ crash into one another or into the social narratives surrounding us as moments of tension… we see how important it is to stop and attend, to inquire into what these tensions can teach us about the meeting of diverse lives” (p. 88). Ideally, such conditions will “invite counter-stance and in the process leave place for reflection, for metacognition” (Bruner, 1986, p. 139). When we reframe teaching and learning in this very way- as lives meeting, as stories told and retold in light of others- we can begin to see the potential in understanding the nuances and complexities of classroom life.

**A contextual turn.** Context is central to storytelling as it is the backdrop, the place where stories play out, and certainly what helps to construct our narratives in very particular ways. Narrative theory takes the “relational inseparability between situation and interaction” (Kim and Latta, 2010, p.69) as centrally important. Notably, this uniting of context and social participation is the stuff of narrative theory and inquiry. As such, stories can only emerge from this interaction, for, “In narrative thinking, context is ever present [and is] necessary for making sense of any person, event or thing” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 32). This is, in fact, what
challenges the grand narratives that circulate about education. That is, stories that function as normative, “the way things are”, constructed to prescribe pedagogy and curriculum for all contexts. Ironically, relying on grand narratives, rather than localized ones, manages to become a context-free way of seeing things and, ultimately, making decisions about education. Bruner (2004) takes this a step further and recognizes narratives as social constructs, formed within and through both local and more global cultural “tool-kits”. Canonical life narratives (i.e. heroes), as well as language conventions, are distinct aspects of this tool-kit and, importantly, represent the stock of “‘possible lives’ that are a part of one’s culture” (p. 694). As Casey (1995/1996) states, “Every narrative is a highly constructed text structured around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission and disparity” (p. 234). Mishler (2004) illustrates this through his focus on stories and their retellings, noting that “variations in contexts, audiences, and intentions” (p. 118) inevitably contribute to the differences in stories told the second time around. It is here where we can attribute the chance to tell a story as an opportunity for a performance, a chance to perform different ways of being within unique and always changing situations. This notion of performance of the self is certainly linked with identity and its shifting, multi-voiced, often contradictory nature (Bakhtin, 1981; Butler, 1993). Importantly, and as I discuss below, this is a move away from viewing identity as static and as having an essence that is just waiting to be storied into existence. Rather, identity is in process and “a story that can never fully be told” (Davies, 1993, p. 22).

Yet, despite recognizing the importance of context in exploring narratives, including Bruner (2004), Mishler (2004) and Casey’s (1995/1996) emphasis on the constitutive space in which narratives are told, another lens is needed to more directly address aspects of power and privilege that circulate through classroom spaces, especially those that focus on issues of
educational inequity with preservice teachers. While the promise of stories to “direct and change our lives” (Noddings in Carter, 1993, p. 5) is notable, one must question whether pedagogical and curricular uses of stories is, itself, a “technology of regulation” (Lather, 1991, p. ix) that determines the degree and direction of this change. Thus, following Carter’s assertion that “we will not serve the community well if we sanctify story-telling work and build an epistemology on it to the point that we simply substitute one paradigmatic domination for another without challenging domination itself” (p. 11), I turn to feminist poststructural theory to question and name the very ways that stories can potentially reinforce dominant discourses of power and privilege.

**Feminist Poststructural Theory: Critiquing the Groundwork**

Itself a move away from humanism and the search for hard and fast “truths”, feminist poststructuralism focuses attention on the discursive and material structures that limit the possible ways of thinking, knowing, being, and listening. In education, feminist scholars working from a poststructural framework focus on the discursive and material structures surrounding teaching and learning (e.g. St. Pierre, 2000; St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000; Davies, 1993, 2000; Lather, 1991). In particular, and specific to the focus of my study, this lens emphasizes the role of language and discourse in helping to construct normative ways that stories get told, taken up, and rejected within classrooms. St.Pierre (2000) notes that, “Foucault’s theory of discourse illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others” (p. 485). Here, language moves from being a representative force, capable of proving the “real”, to a constitutive one that establishes categories and boundaries within which certain ways of being, thinking and acting are made available and, thus, normalized. This is certainly compatible with
narrative theories yet we must continue to ask: What are the conventions we are using to perform this task? How do these conventions work to reify certain ways of being over others? What are the positions made available through these storied conventions and how can they be disrupted to expand to new and perhaps unimagined ones?

Considering such questions enables us to peer into the structures that language creates-structures that serve to legitimate some practices and social positions over others. Left unexamined, discursively constructed categories are seen as natural, “things in themselves”, and capable of producing “an authorized pressure that spawns hierarchized oppositions” in which “the superior terms belongs to presence…and the inferior serves to define its status, to mark it’s fall” (Spivak in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482). It is here where feminism and poststructuralism work in tandem, using their respective tenants to push against and support one another, allowing us to move towards “the development of new ways of writing and speaking that reconstitute the world in significant ways” (Davies, 1993, p. 13). Indeed, while feminism is rooted in critical theories of conscientization, empowerment and emancipation (Freire, 1973), these terms are not exempt from critique themselves and must be implicated for the way that they operate under the “master discourses which promote and legitimate the very social relations and subject positions” that they claim to undermine (Luke, 1992, p. 35). For instance, the assumption of the independent, autonomous individual, defined by its “separation and distance from the outside” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500), whose free-will operates to resist oppressive forces, is a call for agency that is ultimately detrimental to those actually seeking emancipation. Poststructuralism effectively reframes the analysis necessary for social change as one that looks at the constitutive nature of language and the way it can “draw tight boundaries around the self and it’s possibilities” (Davies, 1993, p. 10). “Emancipation” comes with the recognition of these boundaries and how
they function to regulate certain ways of being for differentially situated individuals. As such, the notion of power moves from being some “out there” and a commodity to have, to being a process that “is dispersed, manifest in discourse, and apparent only when it is exercised” (Zembylas, 2005, p. 55). Similarly, Davies notes that attention must be paid to “the very mainsprings of power that hold…marginalized groups in place” (p. 8) and that this is precisely where attention to language and its connection to dominant discourses comes into play.

It is here where a move away from identity, even when it is conceived as multiple and context-dependent, to subjectivity becomes valuable. Rather that subscribing to the humanist conception of the individual whose identity can be located, stated and contained, subjectivities are being constantly achieved through available discursive categories and storylines. This process “involves knowing how to be positioned and position oneself as a member of the group who knows and takes for granted what other people know and take for granted in a number of different settings” (Davies, 2000, p. 22). Here, our stories are not ahistorical representations of “who we are” once and for all but, rather, representations of the storylines that have been made available to us given our social positioning. Thus, an individual is, at once, seen as a speaking subject “that exhibits agency as it constructs itself by taking up available discourses”, but also one subjected to those same discourses and practices (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502). When we acknowledge that our subjectivity “is constantly achieved through relations with others (both real and imagined) which are themselves made possible through discourse” (p. 10), the possibility to begin resisting dominant storylines becomes available.

Such theoretical grounding is important when we begin to see stories, not as purely representative of “what is”, but as constituted of and in larger discursive rules that render them partial and regulatory forces working to the advantages of some groups and individuals over
others. Indeed, Carter’s (1993) warning that the use of narratives in curriculum, pedagogy and as method may actually reinscribe dominant discourses is particularly applicable here. Central to this assertion, however, is the parallel notion that, just as we “learn the ways of seeing made possible by the various discourses of the social groups of which [we] are members” (Davies, 1993, p. 17), we can start to see differently given the right tools. By “actively taking up the terms of subjection” we can locate how we are constituted by binary oppositions (teacher/student, male/female) and, therefore, able to perform “multiple readings of ourselves” (Davies, 2000, p. 62) as resistance. Feminist poststructural theories help to make clear the ways that we are positioned by the stories we tell and how our stories simultaneously position others, opening up space to begin to change the nature of storytelling and inquiry into stories.

This change must, however, attend to what Lather (1991) calls the “crisis of representation”, suggesting that not only are stories told within classrooms partial representations of experience but that the story of these stories, the final research text, is one, as well. Critically, “stories are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretations but products of a fundamentally interpretive process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces and requirements” (Carter, 1993, p. 10). Charged with telling one of the many stories that could be told about my students’ storytelling practices story of this classroom, I acknowledge the authority I have to represent them in ways that makes use of and creates new boundaries around “who they are”. Yet, while we cannot get away from structure, only change structures, we can surely begin to question its necessity in circumstances that are both implicitly and explicitly rooted in power. While this project, in many ways, stays within the bounds of the more “traditional” dissertation, it is also one that should serve to question how this structure operates as a form of storytelling which may privilege some interpretations over others.
Chapter 3
Situating the Story: Review of Literature

Inquiry into Preservice Teacher Beliefs Through Stories

Educational research during the 21st century has encountered no shortage of literature suggesting the need to prepare teachers for the increasingly diverse P-12 student population they will likely encounter as they move out of the university and into their own classroom (e.g. Gay, 2010; Milner; 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Recognizing that our nation is becoming increasingly diverse and the population of teachers is remaining primarily White, middle class and female (AACTE, 2010), academics have called on teacher education programs to work with preservice students to define alternative pedagogical and curricular strategies for creating high quality and equitable circumstances for non-dominant students. This is certainly a charge for not only White, female teachers, but for all future teachers who are likely to teach children from non-dominant communities. Thus, calls for culturally responsive education (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Villegas and Lucas, 2002) have been prevalent and are aimed at affirming students’ backgrounds and cultures, as well as providing a way to question normative conceptions of what it means to learn and teach with all students. For example, Cochran-Smith (1994) outlines six principles of pedagogy for teaching for social justice, including recognizing students’ unique funds of knowledge, and “making inequity, power and activism explicit parts of the curriculum” (p. 77). Recently, however, there has been a renewed call to address and interrogate the underlying beliefs that preservice teachers hold when entering teacher education classrooms as perhaps the first step in preparing to teach in diverse environments. Gay (2010) asserts that, “Many prospective teachers do not think deeply about their attitudes and beliefs
toward ethnic, cultural and racial diversity; some even deliberately resist doing so” (p. 145).

Similarly, Howard (2006) notes that:

> We cannot fully and fruitfully engage in meaningful dialogue across the differences of race and culture without doing the work of personal transformation…We cannot help our students overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still linger in our hearts, minds and habits. (p. 6).

Gay (2010) and Howard’s (2006) calls to interrogate beliefs and attitudes about diversity is not a new phenomenon in the teacher education literature. Multiple studies have explored the so-called, “diversity treatment” in teacher education programs at the empirical level and have noted the various impacts on preservice teachers. The following focused review of that literature identifies studies that centrally engage with preservice teacher beliefs and, specifically, grapple with the notion of students coming to “critical consciousness” through an exploration of these beliefs through narrative. While the studies all approach this goal in slightly different ways, each study explores the prospect of bringing students to a new level of understanding about their educational history and future teaching through the use of elicited stories, autobiographies and life history interviews. Additionally, each project understands narratives as “both phenomena under study and a method of study” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 4) as well as a way for students to encounter new ideas and perspectives in order to reflect upon and potentially alter their own beliefs about non-dominant communities. While not all of my students will become teachers, this scholarly territory suggests important theoretical and pedagogical implications for all students in social-justice focused classes that privilege personal experience. The following studies focus on future teachers, but I suggest that the work of interrogating beliefs belongs to each and every one of us.
A pedagogy of storytelling. Gomez et al. (2000) explored a “pedagogy of story” (p. 733) in which preservice teachers told stories of their initial experiences with fieldwork teaching, as well as their personal educational biographies. The research questions suggest that stories could be used as a vehicle for critical reflection and to highlight identity as a factor in future teaching decisions. Importantly, storytelling for critical reflection became problematic as students failed to acknowledge the differences in context in which they were educated as compared to the students with whom they were working. This caused some direct transfer of teaching practices from students’ educational histories to their present teaching circumstances as well their planning for future classrooms. For example, one case study student, Carla, held strongly to the notion that individualized attention, which was part of her own educational success, would address the various educational issues with which Miguel, one of her students, was struggling. Instead, that approach was seemingly not enough for Latino students, like Miguel, to become academically successful in a school that failed to recognize their heritage. Gomez et al. note that storied educational histories, like the one Carla told about herself, “appeared impermeable to interruption as lessons learned from personal experience were echoed and fortified around the seminar table” (p. 742).

What is particularly notable in this study is the conclusion about how the stories function to promote future pedagogical decisions, as well as the researchers’ reflections on what should have been asked of the prospective teachers as they moved through the class. Questions considering the context in which stories were told, including what was potentially missing, were noted as ways to potentially interrupt stories that have the capacity to reproduce existing power relations. For instance, the authors suggest having prospective teachers tell their stories of teaching and learning from multiple viewpoints (i.e. students, community members, etc.) to help
highlight the contingency of these narratives on how and where one is positioned within the school system. Indeed, such considerations of the dependency of stories on context are critical to my proposed study.

Similarly, Coulter et al. (2007) take up this pedagogy of storytelling in their study with two preservice teachers who participated in interviews and written reflections with the researchers, telling their stories of teaching and learning as they moved through their education courses into their first year of teaching. Coulter et al. note the deconstruction that necessarily accompanies such a story-centered practice with preservice teachers. As part of a particular narrative inquiry model that emphasized not only storytelling but also dialogical reflection on this practice, the researchers collaborated with the two participants, Carmen and Paul, to get at the “social, cultural, political and historical contexts” that influenced the narratives’ content and production. For instance, Paul, one of the participants in the study, came to understand education as thoroughly and unavoidably political as he storied his student teaching in a bilingual classroom. He notes, “In schools where they support bilingual education, it’s, it’s, um I guess it’s that, anti-, anti-bilingual atmosphere that I’m against” (p. 114). Although Paul’s hesitation to take up an explicitly political agenda is notable, the researchers became particularly interested in the forum in which he was able to story his teaching and eventually reflect on revised understandings of teaching and learning through his narratives. The study was originally designed as a narrative inquiry within a preservice methods class and the researchers had no pedagogical aims in mind. Nevertheless, it “provided an opportunity for Carmen and Paul to examine their growing teacher identities within real-life contexts beyond the preservice methods class…and continue to learn about their own evolving classroom practice” (p. 120). Again, the
value of *reflecting* on stories of teaching and learning was a critical finding and indicates the growing need to build this practice into preservice teacher development.

Heydon and Hibbert (2010) in their work with preservice literacy teachers heavily promoted such reflective practice and did so by framing it as a move from the personal to the political where socio-political and cultural contexts were taken into account. Specifically, the researchers understood stories as interested representations, rather than accounts of unmediated experiences, and encouraged their students to “make the labor of creating the stories more visible; less naturalized…and treat the stories as learned cultural practices, so that the process of productions and representations produced can be unpacked, examined, and analyzed rather than just celebrated or surveilled for the right/wrong use of the features of a given mode (e.g. voice)” (Kamler in Heydon and Hibbert, 2010, p. 798). The study examined a range of data from seven teacher education candidates, including interviews, written responses to course readings and discussions, and a graphic life map that participants created to plot their literacy life history over time. With such data, the researchers noted both the similarities and differences in how preservice teachers came to understand their personal stories of literacy development in terms of a larger context, as well as their experience within the course itself. For instance, Natalie, one of the participants, acknowledged that “the old” ways of building literacy worked for her and filtered into her beliefs about pedagogy. However, she came to understand that other literacy practices, such as the use of oral language, were critical to include in her future literacy pedagogy. Course content, including current literacy research, enabled Natalie to ground her own story in a larger context that helped her beliefs about literacy evolve and, therefore, imagine what her teaching could look like some day. Alternatively, Carrie remained committed to dominant ways of thinking about literacy as she reflected on the rewards she reaped in her own
life and attributed these opportunities to this view of literacy. Despite being of Filipino descent, Carrie noted how westernized her literacy upbringing was and believed that “‘classic’ and challenging literature is better because of the depth of knowledge and signification such texts incite in readers” (Carrie in Heydon and Hibbert, 2010, p. 802). Initially, she also rejected the use of multicultural literature as it tended to promote the use of native informants but, upon reflection, noted that her future students may very well be interested in learning using texts outside of the canon. In both Natalie and Carrie’s cases, dominant literacy practices were put into contact with new ways of thinking about literacy and, although not totally replaced, were disrupted in a way that could potentially influence each candidate’s future teaching decisions.

Heydon and Hibbert (2010) did not find that all students reflected on their stories in the same way. Another prospective teacher, Brianna, made comments about the value of telling personal educational stories and their connection to beliefs about teaching and learning that are riddled with contradiction. She notes that, “what is expected is not… a personal philosophy or belief [about literacy]…but rather ‘sound learning theory’ on which to base my instructional strategy” (Brianna in Heydon and Hibbert, 2010, p. 802). Initially appearing as an “entrenched consumer” who merely takes in teaching knowledge from “expert” sources, Brianna also stated that, “when we unpack how we’ve been taught things, then we’re made aware of that and we recognize that that’s why we tend to rely on those strategies” (p. 802). She simultaneously clung to the notion that our beliefs, stemming from the stories we tell about ourselves, should not influence decisions about pedagogy and that they should be recognized as actually having such power to impact instructional choices.

**Stories to live by.** Such reflection has been taken in a critical direction in some of the most recent literature by framing it as an interruption of the “stories to live by” (Mitton-Kukner
et. al, 2010, p. 1168) that prospective teachers tend to hold onto as they start on their path to teaching. These narratives are “experientially situated in different social and cultural landscapes” (p. 1164) and, therefore, have the power to not only define who others are but who preservice teachers are in relation to these others. Notably, two projects have taken up this notion of reflection upon stories as interruption of these stories (Mitton-Kukner et al., 2010; Gomez and White; 2010). While they depart in important ways, both studies are centrally concerned with using stories to get at the ways that prospective teachers come to understand their teaching selves and their students. The authors’ take the perspective that “teacher education [is] as much about who we are as much as it [is] about what we [are] learning about curriculum and how to enact instruction” (Gomez and White, 2010, p. 1015). I would add that these studies, unlike those previously reviewed, are also concerned about other peoples’ stories in relation to one’s own and the stories we tell about others.

Gomez and White (2010) explore this notion of positioning in relation to others in their study involving sixteen prospective teachers who were involved in life history interviews that were “designed to elicit stories of prospective teachers’ experiences and the meanings values and emotions participants attach to these” (p. 1018). Importantly, these stories are not seen as isolated events, nor are they static interpretations. Rather, stories emerging from life history methods are understood as dynamic representations that merge into each other or “drop out [when they] no longer fit with [stories] they currently tell” (p. 1018). Gomez and White chose preservice teachers, Aurora and Desiree, to present as case studies of this process of storying themselves, as well as others. Both students did so in terms of racial and cultural life experiences and reflected on their social positioning over time. Aurora, an African-American woman, described her experience of being “Othered” as she took university classes with
primarily White students and teachers who failed to take her voice into account. Simultaneously, however, Aurora notes instances with a very supportive, White teacher who believed in her and was personally interested in her life. Similarly, Desiree, a White woman, had conflicting experiences with individuals and groups of color as she thought of herself as an ally, yet felt marginalized by them at the same time.

Despite the possibility that the conflicting stories that both Aurora and Desiree told could aid in interrupting the well-established “stories to live by”, many of which were about those who they positioned as different from themselves, Gomez and White (2010) contend that there was no significant “turn toward the ‘other’ and then back towards themselves” (p. 1021). In this sense, they continued to Other and stereotype, failing to acknowledge that while they struggled to be seen as unique individuals whose identities could shift over time, they did not afford the same principle to others. The study concluded that the value of stories lies in the potential they held for preservice teachers to “turn their gaze toward the other to understand an alternative to the point of view that they habitually see, but [eventually] learn to return their gaze inward” (p. 1022).

Mitton-Kukner et al. (2010) had a similar purpose in their study with both preservice teachers and in-service teachers in Australia involved in service learning in which they engaged with those who were positioned differently from them in terms of social markers of difference. Using narrative accounts, the researchers attended “to moments of learning, particularly those moments wherein individuals, participating alongside individuals whose lives were often quite different from their own, experienced shifts in their understandings of who they were in the world” (p. 1162). Importantly, space was created for participants to restory their own understandings of themselves and others, perhaps an answer to the call that Gomez and White
(2010) placed on teacher educators who use narratives to require prospective teachers to “turn towards the other, and then back to themselves” (p. 1021).

For the purpose of situating my study, I will review one of the three case studies that Mitton-Kukner et al. (2010) explore in which preservice teachers were placed in an after-school youth organization situated within an ethno-culturally diverse, low income community. The purpose of the study was not only to understand what occurs when preservice teachers are exposed to individuals and groups different from themselves, but also to understand “how they composed their knowledge of diversity” (p. 1164) through the use of story. The case study concentrates on Monique, a prospective teacher who has developed deficit views of the Aboriginals in her community stemming from her own family stories that promoted such views. Monique explained that while working with one child, Willie, she found that his story of how his hands came to be deformed contrasted to her initial assumption that what happened to his hands was the result of his community’s cultural practices. Upon learning that it was actually a birth defect, Monique was able to restory her own understanding of Willie, as well as “live and tell a new story of *herself* in relation to diversity” (emphasis added, p. 1165).

Importantly, this research goes beyond merely using stories as information about self or others. Rather, “dispositioning” moments, similar to the one Monique found herself in relation to Willie, became critical instances when she was able to revise her own story in light of another’s. What is important to note, however, is the way in which the researchers created a context in which Monique and other prospective teachers could intentionally reflect on their stories and, thus, allow them to “consider, reconsider and reshape their knowledge of diversity as part of their narrative histories” (p. 1167). This process of restorying produces new understandings about our multiple and shifting identities and provides new ground for
prospective teachers to consider who they want to become as teachers amongst diverse children and their communities.

Similar to the research reviewed here, my study explicitly engages with students’ educational narratives with the understanding that these stories are partial representations of experience that can support certain beliefs about education. Additionally, these studies lay the groundwork for important pedagogical work with my own students, suggesting a reflective process that allows room for restorying and reconsideration of stories in light of alternative ones, despite the difficulty in doing so. Nevertheless, my study departs from those reviewed in important ways. Consistent with my framework, I understand stories as not merely pieces of data that can tell me about my students’ beliefs about education, inequity, or diversity but as constitutive forces within classrooms with the potential to reproduce power relations. With this, both student and teacher storytelling over time, and not just the stories themselves, becomes the focal point of my study. Additionally, stories emerging from talk-in-interaction, not just those that are purposefully elicited, are also an important consideration when it comes to exploring how stories function within my classroom. I address the literature that supports this view of stories in the next section.

**From Canonical to Small Stories**

The second part of this literature review situates my study within a body of work that redefines narratives as those that go beyond the conventional narrative canon. This canon, according to Georgakopoulou (2007), stems from two distinct story prototypes, both of which can be found in preservice education research using narrative theory and methodology. The first is the life story “that mostly takes the form of a reflexive representational account of self that amounts to a more or less coherent autobiography” (p. 31). Johnson’s (2007) study on
preservice teacher’s initial beliefs on equity uses this model, examining students’ early experiences towards literacy pedagogy and curriculum and the ethical decisions that accompany such practices. Similarly, Johnson’s (2002) research with White teachers examining how “their lived experiences have influenced their conceptions of race” (p. 164) fits into this definition. Importantly, this study supported the use of autobiographical narratives to expose prospective teachers to alternative racial standpoints while problematizing that practice as potentially creating a “sense of sameness and personal empathy” (p. 164) without contextualizing the narratives in historical and institutional privilege and oppression.

The second prototype is considered a “short-range narrative that gives an account of a certain landmark of key-event or experience that is considered to be pivotal in the formation of the interviewee’s sense of self” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 31). This model can be seen in much of the previously reviewed literature as it is akin to the “stories to live by” (Mitton-Kukner et al., 2010, p. 1168) that characterize and influence preservice teachers perceptions of and choices about who they will be as future teachers, as well as who their students will be. The literature focusing on these types of narratives typically looks at a sequence of these short-range narratives that create a larger story about what teaching and learning for equity and diversity should look like. For example, Gomez and White’s (2010) work with two future teachers illustrates the way that lives can become fixed into a certain narrative when we begin to put together particularly meaningful moments. Both Aurora’s and Desiree’s senses of self, and therefore future teaching self, were impacted by their experiences with and stories told about those who were positioned differently.

Canonical narratives are also characterized by the fact that they are typically elicited through interviews and can subscribe to certain researcher and participant roles. The interviewer
is seen as having no part in the construction of the interviewee’s story and “receives” the story as it is, rather than being seen as an active participant in its construction. Such an understanding of stories elicited through interviews, or any elicited stories for that matter, seemingly removes the context within which the story was told. Indeed, Georgakopoulou (2007) writes that, “the interactional features of narratives are specifically and inextricably bound up with the context of occurrence” (p. 33). Notably, preservice teacher education research suggests that future teachers’ personal stories be grounded in the larger context of educational access and opportunity (e.g. Coulter, 2007; Johnson, 2007). Yet, little work has been done looking at the immediate context, which is also characterized by power and privilege, in which preservice teachers tell both elicited and spontaneous stories. Critically, this shift moves us towards a “practice-based view of narrative; what narrative does in specific sites; what the local theories about it are” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 39).

Thus, in understanding narrating as “an act that takes place between people” (Bamberg, 2006, p. 140) rather than merely an individual act to merely get across content, “small” stories research has started to filter into educational research. Fundamentally, these more “mundane narratives” (Young, 2009) are understood as potentially small, everyday stories embedded in and reflective of context (see Ochs and Capps, 2001). Such stories may allude to “ongoing events, hypothetical events, future events and intertextually linked events” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 34), as well as the past events that are the focus of traditional canonical narratives. Moreover, small stories research pays attention to “re-tellings, allusions to tellings, and refusals to tell [and] stories we tell about others” (p. 34). Importantly, such a redefinition alludes to the human condition where “less polished, less coherent narratives” (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 57) consistently emerge amongst individuals. Furthermore,
The plotlines of these narratives may or may not encompass a beginning, middle and end, given that the plot is what interlocutors are attempting to craft and that life events are not necessarily coherent nor immediately resolvable. Such narratives collaboratively build one or more perspectives, which may conflict (p. 57).

**Small stories in classroom conversation.** In what follows, I outline three studies that take small stories as the unit of analysis as they explore either preservice or inservice teachers’ storied identities, as well as the identities constructed for their students through this same storying process. While all three studies fall under the discourse analytical tradition and the methods used to analyze the data are certainly important for scholars studying identity formation through talk, their relation to my particular study stems from their understanding and definition of small stories. It is here where these studies, as well as my own, depart from other preservice teacher education research that centrally uses narratives as a methodological tool. I understand each study as an example of how to re-define stories in my own classroom to include the potentially shorter, more fragmented, co-authored, and unfinished narratives that characterize our everyday interactions with others.

Kathryn Young’s (2009) work with preservice teachers centrally takes up this definition of story as partial, diffuse and co-constructed. The study investigates the stories told about students, impacted by various identity categories (i.e. disability, gender), comparisons of students, stories about contextual variables that impact education, and stories “that preservice teachers tell that assert their developing professional opinions on educational matters” (p. 360.). More specifically, the project focuses on a class designed to discuss issues surrounding

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2 As my framework suggests, the term ‘identity’ is limiting in that it typically refers to essential, unmediated qualities located within individuals (see Davies, 2000). While I will use ‘subjectivity’ throughout the remainder of this dissertation to address the ways that we are positioned by and position others with the storylines available to us, I will remain consistent with the literature reviewed in this section in using the term ‘identity’.
children’s behavior in special education classrooms. In analyzing talk-in-interaction, Young found that a co-created narrative strand emerged following a brief lecture on the impact of students with disabilities challenges with social cognition on their access to the hidden curriculum of school. Through their various small, co-constructed stories, the preservice teachers and professor built this larger narrative strand that suggests deficit views of students. For instance, one of the preservice teachers, Andi, tells the story of a girl in her practicum class who “doesn’t have the gendered female peeps” (p. 365). She continues with the story, effectively storying her special education student as not being a proper girl and in need of “fixing”.

So, like, for her, I think it would be very beneficial to maybe, sort of, have like a playgroup with other girls in her grade once a week or something, just sort of to learn to, makes those chances to learn about, because I think she really needs that and lacks those- You know cause there is code for girls, like how you play with a girl… (Andi in Young, 2009, p. 365).

Here, Andi is constructing her student’s gender, as well as her status in special education as someone who does not understand how to “be a girl”. Moreover, another student affirms Andi’s narrative with an “Amen”, reinforcing this view of gender and disability. Importantly, Andi’s narrative is one among five other small stories that have built off one another, all of which contribute to the greater construction of “category systems”, such as gender and disability (p. 368).

In Young’s analysis, the students are prompted to share stories of the students they work with, yet the stories that emerge are far from canonical. These are what Ochs and Capps (2001) have termed “living narratives” in which stories are often refuted or affirmed, lie within other stories, and/or resist clear closure. Identifying and critically engaging with these particular narratives is an important part of what it means to study stories amongst prospective teachers for these everyday, consistently told stories help construct larger, normative, and perhaps highly
fixed, narratives about teaching, learning, students, and teachers. Notably, these stories also have the power to create resistant discourses that question fixed category systems.

Watson (2007) designed a similar study around both teacher and student identities in her work with two preservice teachers, Andrea and Jim. Through their conversations with each other, and the multitude of small stories told, Andrea and Jim constructed their own, each others’, and their students’ identities. Similar to Young’s (2009) study, Watson understands stories as being relational, arising from talk-in-interaction and allowing us to “focus attention on the performative aspects of identification” (p. 374). In doing so, Andrea and Jim position themselves, each other, and their students variably throughout their interactions. For example, they discuss what it means to be a competent teacher amongst “uncontrollable youth”. Notably, Andrea presents an ambiguous story of herself as she quickly moves from stating that she “didn’t have any problems” with her class to having doubts about her ability to control the “aggressive” 4th year boys, clearly indicating the “complex and messy business of teaching” (p. 380). These assertions happened within a few lines of her story, indicating the importance of the fragmented, contradictory story. Moreover, Jim is a considerable co-author in this story as he gives Andrea the space to story herself with little interruption, positioning himself as a reflective practitioner who is willing to listen to alternative viewpoints. According to Watson, these interactional effects of this story are of central importance and indicate the need to understand stories as co-authored, even by another’s silence.

Like Young’s (2009) work, Watson’s (2007) study is also notable as it centrally takes up the tension between talk-in-interaction and the larger discursive frames that are aspects of “professional acculturation” into a particular field (p. 382). More specifically, Jim and Andrea, through their stories, adhere to the pervasive discourse in schools that “equates ability with
niceness…and lack of ability with deviance” (p. 381). Nevertheless, a second look into Andrea’s storytelling shows her acknowledging the need to support students with behavioral difficulties, illustrating the potential of local talk to “reconfigure the [more global] discursive field” (p. 383). This aspect of Watson’s work with preservice teachers is critical for educational research, including my own, that understands stories as doing ”self-making” but always within a particular context. Indeed, there is an “aporetic relationship” between local talk and the discourses that circulate within classrooms (p. 384).

Both Watson (2007) and Young’s work (2009) work focused on what Bakhtin (1991) termed a “chain of speech communication” in which prospective teachers’ small stories became linked by a common theme, playing off each other in order to story both their own and their students’ identities within larger dominant discourses. Alternatively, Jezwik and Ives (2010) use “living narratives” to explore the construction and reconstruction of one teacher’s identity amongst her students. In telling the story of a particular literacy event in Mrs. Wagner’s sixth grade classroom, the project highlights how the everyday stories that teachers tell their students, within the context of curricular goals, help their identities “emerge and respond as they interact with particular others, in the here-and-now” (p. 58).

Indeed, Mrs. Wagner’s story, “My Worst Mistake”, told within the context of a narrative journal-writing event, is not merely representative of “who Mrs. Wagner is”. The story she tells about smoking cigarettes and then being caught and humiliated by her father is contingent upon the context in which she finds herself. That is, with her students, in this particular classroom, on this particular day. Notably, she relates her father’s actions to “kind of like how I teach you kids sometimes” (Mrs. Wagner in Jezwik and Ives, 2010, p. 50) and sheds light on how she construes her own teaching identity. Additionally, her students make moves in response to her oral
storytelling. For example, laughter and an “OOOOHhhh” at one point in the story most likely spurred Mrs. Wagner to continue the story in a highly emphatic way. Moreover, a few students anticipated the story in such a way as to literally co-tell the story at points, talking on top of Mrs. Wagner, in what the researchers identified as “supportive interactional resources” (p. 55).

While Jezwik and Ives’ (2010) micro-analysis of stories is important, their broader recognition of and use of small stories is particularly applicable to my research. First, Mrs. Wagner’s narrative performance was contingent upon the space she was in with her students. As Mishler (2004) notes, “we story our lives differently depending on the occasion, audience and reason for telling” (p. 103) and, thus, suggests that our subjectivities are multiple and always shifting. He goes on to ask, “What confidence can we place in one story of a life event as the basis for statements about an individual’s identity, if we cannot factor in- or partial out- the effects of the specific context in which it was told” (p. 103)? Jezwik and Ives, with their use of living narratives, recognized this very bind and designed their study accordingly, acknowledging how student interactions and the curriculum context were important to Mrs. Wagner’s story. The researchers did, however, admit that a larger scale study, across space and time, would be more thorough in accounting for “shifting teacher identification” (p. 58). I am also interested in such movement but recognize subjectivities as being created in the moment and potentially shifting when access to different discourses becomes available.

Although Jezwik and Ives’ (2010) study portrayed an in-service teacher’s story, their study has important implications for future work with preservice teachers. Unlike many studies that place context as outside of storytelling practices, theirs re-defines narratives as those that are simultaneously shape and are shaped by context. Narratives-in-interaction, co-constructed by multiple parties become the focal point rather than those purposefully elicited by the researcher
or as part of a curricular plan. Georgakopoulou (2006) makes the point well in stating that, “the small stories interactional features [are] both constituted by and constituting their sites of engagement as culturally shaped liminal spaces” (p. 126). In this sense, norms for telling stories become important characteristics to identify, expanding beyond the more typically documented what to the how and why of narratives.
Chapter 4

Constructing the Story: Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this study is to explore, describe, and deconstruct the ways in which stories are developed and function within a preservice teacher education classroom in which I am the instructor. This suggests that I not simply follow a traditional narrative inquiry design that may look at what stories “reveal” about the teller, but one that takes feminist poststructural theories into account to focus on the contingency of narratives and how they operate to invoke and constitute larger storylines around issues of difference and equity. Thus, the following design is one that not only looks at the content of my own and students’ stories, but what “the work” of storytelling is in terms of positioning both teacher and students amongst larger storylines surrounding educational inequity. With this purpose in mind, a focus on language, not for what it tells me about the “truth” of things, but rather for what “meanings it holds in place” (Davies, 1993, p. 13) is a necessary turn for this project. In this chapter, I describe the context of the course, provide a rationale for my methods, and describe how data was collected and analyzed using both positioning and critical deconstructive analysis.

School and Society: Purpose and Background

This study takes place in School and Society, an upper division education class in a large, public university in the Rocky Mountain region. The class is offered through the School of Education to all students at the university and is a requirement for those enrolled in the teacher education program. For those who do not have future plans in teaching, the class fulfills the “Culture and Diversity” requirement that the university has set out for all undergraduates to meet. As this requirement, School and Society addresses the social context of education, specifically examining how race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language and disability are
constructed and operate within schools as they exist within the larger historical, political, and cultural landscape of the United States. Thus, educational equity, diversity and social justice issues are at the forefront of the class.

**Class structure: curriculum and pedagogy.** The curricular and pedagogical design of the course is important to consider as it is part of the backdrop of much of the classes’ storytelling practices. As Davies (1993) notes, “The processes through which subjectivities are constituted are imbricated, not only in ways of speaking and ways of making meaning, but also in the contexts and relations in which particular acts of speaking take place” (p. 9). Like many of the instructors who teach this course, I have designed my particular class section to cover three larger areas of interest with regard to educational equity. The first examines various curricular and pedagogical philosophies, including the conservative (e.g. E.D. Hirsch), progressive (e.g. John Dewey), and critical traditions (e.g. Paulo Freire). While this course is not a teaching methods course, per se, access to these traditions, in my experience, works to give the students the historical and philosophical background for decisions they may need to make in their future classrooms. Students also find that learning about these traditions is helpful in reflecting upon their own educational histories and their current college classes.

The second part of this class more directly concerns how social markers of difference are taken up in schools, as well as how their meanings are reinforced in school environments and the impact that these categories have on educational opportunity and access. For instance, my students and I talk through the gender binary and, to what extent, it is reproduced in schools through both macro institutional practices and more local discursive ones. My students read the work of Lisa Delpit, Jean Anyon and Jonathan Kozol, among other writers, both well-known and up-and-coming, to explore the interaction between these factors and schooling. As such, the class
explores how both teachers and students are positioned and often “Othered”, through a variety of research and case studies. Additionally, intersectionality is often used as a framework through which my students can think through how the combination of “race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality and class, for example, shape any group’s existence across specific social contexts” (Collins, 1998, p. 208). I find this framework particularly useful when it comes to talking about issues of privilege and power with my students, as it helps them to see categories of difference as not existing in a vacuum and isolated from one another but as constructed in context and as “moving” classifications.

The last section of the course concerns educational policy and its impact on educational equity in this country. Charter schools, tracking systems, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top are just some of the issues and policies I have explored with my students. We attend to how these policies have been designed, for what reasons, and the potential costs and benefits for particular groups.

While these three sections are designed to more broadly get at how inequity and issues of diversity permeate education, I privilege personal narratives throughout the course as much as possible. The most explicit way this occurs is through an educational autobiography that each student writes throughout the course. As an iterative process, each student is required to submit three “versions” of this autobiography of their P-12 school experience. This takes on various forms, as some students choose to expand and revise their papers given the new course content they are encountering. I find this process of “re-storying” to be valuable for allowing students to see the stories they tell about themselves as subject to change given new ways of seeing. Although other sections of the course include an educational autobiography as a final paper, I have found additional ways to include narrative into my curriculum, including weekly personal
journals. I believe, as Cochran-Smith (2000) does, that, “narrative is not only locally illuminating…but also that it has the capacity to contain and entertain within it contradictions, nuances, tensions, and complexities that traditional academic discourse with its expository stance and more distanced voice cannot” (p. 158). Of course, much of the more academic texts that my students read contain stories within them (e.g. Delpit, 1995) but I make sure to include what are seen as more narrative texts (e.g. Kozol, 1991; hooks, 1991) in order to both give my students a chance to ground theory in experience and also give them access to experiences that are different from their own. I also use journal groups, in which my students respond to readings, the class and each others’ personal educational histories. I will return to these instances of storytelling, including my own, in the ‘Data Sources’ section found below.

**Participants.** The participants in this study include the thirty-one students who were enrolled in my Spring 2011 section of *School and Society*, as well as myself. The class contained a mixture of teacher education students, those that are thinking about applying to the School of Education, and those that are taking the class to fulfill the “Culture and Diversity” credit for the School of Arts and Sciences. Because of this mix, there was a wide variety of majors represented, including those outside of the social sciences. In addition, there were two students who were “non-traditional”, returning for their first or additional bachelor degrees, both of whom planned to become a teacher. Interestingly, the racial diversity of the class was more racially diverse than other sections I have taught, with four students of color (typically, there are one or two). Although this is a greater ratio than I have had in the past, this remains less diverse than the population of the university as a whole. In addition, there were thirteen males and

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3 According to the Office of Planning, Budget and Analysis at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the undergraduate population for the 2010 fall semester is comprised of 81.5% U.S. non-minority students and 16.4% U.S. minority students.
twenty females in the class and one student whom I knew was gay. Of course, to define diversity as merely along the lines of race, class and sexuality misses the very complex nature of the ways we all construct and live through our own subjectivities. It is here where I am, thus, limited by the categorizations of “race”, “class” and “sexuality”, as if these, once an for all, indicated the “diversity” in the class. It does, however, provide a sense of the possible different ways that personal experience could be storied and silenced.

Because this is also a self-study, I am also a participant, a storyteller myself, and an audience member in the midst of my students’ stories. As discussed in the framework and literature review, my position in this class is not merely one who listens to stories and tells her own but, rather, as a co-author, helping to affirm certain storytelling practices within the classroom. I identify as a heterosexual, White, female from a middle to upper class family and am currently working on my doctoral degree at the university where this study takes place. After attending K-12 public schools in upstate New York, a private school in the Southeast for college, I headed to New York City as a corps member for Teach for America. There, I taught second grade literacy and third and fourth grade social studies in a public school in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. It was while working within the New York City public schools system and my school in particular that I became increasingly interested in issues of social justice within education and decided to go back to graduate school to have more time and space to explore such issues. This School and Society section was my seventh I taught for the university. In line with the theories that underlie this project, I also recognize that this is a particular version of my history, partial and in-process, contingent upon the genre within which I write and the audience for whom it is intended. My position throughout the various stages of this
project shifted accordingly from teacher to researcher and, often, the lines between these two blended together so that each was indecipherable from one another.

**Data sources**

In this section, I describe the contexts and artifacts that comprised the data for the study. I will then discuss the interpretive approaches I used to construct meaning out of these sources.

**Class discussions.** My classes’ daily discussions, while they often focused on interpreting the class readings and themes, are also spaces where stories were told about education, often in light of new understandings about teaching, learning, and the greater context of education. Given my informal observations prior to starting this project, I noticed that these stories often revolved around a student’s educational past, present, or plans for the future. In addition, hypothetical stories were told to suggest “what if” scenarios. However they were oriented, these were stories that, because of the classes’ focus, tended to center on issues of diversity and equity. Drawing on “small stories” research (Georgakopoulou, 2007), these are also stories that are co-authored through discussion and often arise as fragmented bits that may accumulate to construct a larger story or lay the groundwork for a longer story that is shared by a student at a later time. While I have attended to these fragments, tracing them throughout the semester, I also recognize that do not flesh out into complete narratives that take on a more canonical form. As my framework suggests, I am more interested in the ways that partial stories are taken up or not as the class progresses, paying particular attention to who is telling and the nature of responses.

In order to document the oral stories that my students and I told, I audio recorded both large (the entire class) and small group class discussions. During almost every class I split up my students into smaller groups to do various activities, answer discussion questions concerning
the readings, workshop papers, and plan projects. These often had four to six students in them, although this number varied based on the nature of the activity. When students were in small groups, to ensure some level of consistency, the recorder stayed with a group for one full class period. In the beginning of the semester, I randomly choose a group to place the recorder with but, as the semester continued, I placed it in groups that contained one or more of case study students (see below for case study student discussion).

Because of the large amount of recorded data that this project entails, it was not possible to transcribe all discussions in detail after the course ended in May 2011. Therefore, I took reflective notes on each audio recording, a process that helped me identify particular discussions for full transcription in which I was aware that stories were arising in important or surprising ways. These were stories that explicitly revolved around issues of equity and diversity in education but may have implicitly reflect these topics, as well. After listening to all recorded conversations and reading through my reflective notes, I choose three “narrative events” with which to transcribe in full and attend to as particularly important conversations where stories were operating to position self and others. As is discussed in the finding sections, these were events that centrally revolved around students’ personal narratives with equity and diversity and, often, contained “moments of tension” where various narratives and their attendant storylines sat in “disjuncture” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 9) with one another.

**Student work.** One of the assignments that my students completed over the course of the semester is an educational autobiography. They are initially required to write their educational history within the first two weeks of class in a two-page paper. Similar to what Cochran-Smith (1995) did with her preservice teachers, I have my students expand and re-write their story twice in light of course content and themes in order to promote a “re-seeing of their
lives” (p. 548). This work was filed throughout the semester and later analyzed for how stories developed, shifted and functioned for students as they came into contact with new information and others’ stories throughout the semester. This assignment will also add to the pedagogical purpose of this project by purposefully eliciting stories from students concerning educational equity, but also opening them up to the “possibility of retellings” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 60).

I also placed my students in 3-4 person journal groups at the beginning of the semester and they were required to complete weekly journals responding to the readings and relating them to their own experiences. According to Williams and McKenna (2002), “Journal entries (more so than open class discussions) tend[... to a multiplicity of “I’s”- subjects- front and center, which in turn succeed in transforming- democratizing, if you will- the dynamics in the classroom” (p. 150). Given this premise, I would argue that journals provide a way for students to assert their own subjectivity and provide an alternative way of looking at how subjectivities are inscribed. I collected my case study student (described below) journals after the semester was over and noted where stories emerged

**Student interviews and case studies.** In the beginning of the semester, I planned on inviting approximately six students to participate as case-studies with the purpose of looking more deeply into the processes and functions of the individual student over the course of the semester. After holding informal, individual conferences with my students during the first and second weeks of school, a practice I have followed with each class I have taught, I choose these students based on the breadth of their experiences in terms of the type of education received (private/public/home schooled), whether they grew up in an urban, suburban or rural setting, and how they identify in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and other markers of social
difference. Although I realize that students who “match” in terms of these criteria will necessarily story their experiences differently, it has been my experience that variation in these characteristics leads to stories that are more disparate and students who may, in fact, interpret theirs and others’ stories differently.

After having these initial meetings and consenting the whole class for recording over the course of the semester, I choose seven students to participate—Austin, Lisa, Catherine, Emily, Mark, Sophia, and Adam⁴. I learned early on that Lisa and Emily planned on becoming teachers, Mark and Adam were considering the idea, Austin was interested in becoming a school psychologist, and Catherine and Sophia were taking the class for credit unsure of what they would pursue in the future. Each of these students, except for Mark, went to public schools at some point during their P-12 education. Catherine went to private schools at different points in her life and she, along with Austin, just transferred into the university. Additionally, Lisa and Austin are students of color while the other five identify as White.

I met with each of the seven students three times over the course of the semester for semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews. Interviews “proceed[ed] inductively so that [I was] able to hear the unheard and unimagined” (Belanky in Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). Such an inductive, grounded approach implies building theory from data, rather than theories being “applied” ahead of time (Glaser, 1992). Open-ended questions are one way to proceed in this fashion, as they allow a level of flexibility with interviews that enables both the participants and myself to move the conversation in a way that feels natural and may, in fact, reveal nuanced ideas and thoughts that are potentially valuable to the study. This structure aids in “valuing the digression” so that participants were encouraged to tell their own stories in their own way.

⁴Pseudonyms I choose or were chosen by the students.
While some may see these digressions as problematic, feminist researchers view this as just one way to address the power differential between researcher and participant. In fact, the unknown that comes out of such digressions is potentially “the unheard and unimagined” that we often exclude with our everyday use of language.

The three interviews consisted of the same open-ended questions with room, as noted, for the conversation to take unexpected turns. This series of three interviews helped me to examine how the function of stories shifted for these particular students as the semester progressed. In creating the interview protocol (See Appendix A), I focused on the student’s experience in the course as a whole, their experience writing and listening to other students’ stories, and questions concerning specific stories that they told in class or in their writing. As is consistent with this study, I also listened for storytelling within the interview itself.

Ultimately, I chose Lisa, Catherine, Mark and Austin to focus on for this project, although the other three students voices are present throughout the “narrative events” as well as within a focus group I held with all case study students at the end of the semester. The four students presented intriguing narratives throughout the course of the semester that played off one another in important ways. More information about each of these students’ personal histories and storytelling practices within class and interviews is found in their respective findings sections (chapters 6-9).

**Researcher notes and reflections.** Because this is also a self-study, I kept a journal to record any thoughts and reflections about the class’ storytelling efforts. The purpose of this was threefold. First, it provided an alternative source of information about my students’ stories, as well as a reflective space to consider how stories were functioning in the classroom. Second, the journal allowed me to access some of the content of the discussions prior to actually hearing
recordings, providing a way to identify some of the discussions that I eventually transcribed in full. Third, I reflected through this journal on my own stories shared in class in a way consistent with a feminist poststructural lens. Although the value of observing oneself and intimately participating in the research setting in this way has been questioned as a reliable source of data through more traditional lenses on validity in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005), my framework requires me to acknowledge that “the texts of our lives, like that of our ethnographic subjects, do not sit still” (Behar, 1997, p. 86). Implicating myself in the research process was an important step for coming to terms with how my position in the classroom continually shifted as the research cycle continues. As I mentioned earlier, my teacher/researcher roles often bled into one another but, at times, felt quite far apart. In a study that is centrally concerned with the positions closed off and made available to us through language, observing my own shifts in subjectivity, as well as that of my students, was critical.

**Analytic Frameworks**

There are two analytic frameworks that are useful given the nature of this project. The first is self-study research, specifically within the teacher education field, and the second are feminist poststructuralist methods, most notably those that attempt to identify positioning of self and others and deconstruct the ways in which subjectivities are developed and maintained. While I will address each of these research traditions separately it is important to note that they work with and support each other in critical ways. Indeed, a feminist-poststructural ethic requires locating myself as a subject in the process of becoming who may very well subscribe to the very discursive rules that render some narratives more valuable than others.

**Self-study of teaching practice.** This project consistently brings me back to idea of “who a researcher is is central to what a researcher does” (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13).
This is a profoundly interested way of understanding the research process and stems from the idea that separating oneself from the research context, especially in the case of a teacher educator studying her own classroom, is an impossible feat. As Bullough and Pinnegar note, self-study does not simply mean studying one’s own practice in isolation. Rather, it recognizes the self as always in relation to others, as well as embedded in context, and renders the space between these factors the focus of inquiry. With this in mind, I turn to the self-study research tradition understanding it’s core rationale as Foucault (1980) does: “if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, than this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in questions” (p. 64).

A study of my own teaching, as it unfolds, is a powerful way to follow Foucault’s advice. This suggests continual reflection on my own practices in order to not only deepen my understanding of their impact, but to inform any possible revisions that must be made to them. Moreover, because this project centrally engages questions having to do with storied beliefs and attitudes about educational equity and diversity, it is necessary to interrogate my own assumptions about certain groups and individuals, attending to how my own personal stories circulate amongst those of my students, creating a web of stories that continually play off and inform one another. As I will discuss in the following sections, this self-study requires not only identifying and analyzing my own and my students’ stories, but also a close look at my responses, both implicit and explicit, voiced and unvoiced, to the narratives that arise in the classroom.

By taking on this interrogation of my own positioning within the classroom, I recognize the responsibility “to own [my] own complicity in maintaining systems of privilege and oppression, and to grapple with [my] own failure to produce the kinds of changes [I] advocate”
(Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 158). This “self-study as self-critique” (Lather, 1991) falls squarely within the feminist poststructural tradition and suggests deconstructive processes in which we begin to unravel how our language functions to reproduce and potentially challenge systems of privilege and oppression.

**Feminist poststructural methods.** Feminist poststructural theory, when used as a lens throughout the entire research process, suggests methods that pay attention to how language works to position individuals and groups and, thus, how it can be deconstructed to reveal how unjust this positioning can be. As such, this framework relies upon research methods that engage with the idea that language “does not simply point to preexisting things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). In attempting to intervene at this level, research and teaching for social justice moves “to new grounds, the ‘grounds of discourse’, where the ways we talk and write are situated within social practices, the historical conditions of meaning, the positions from which texts are both produced and received” (Lather, 1991, p. 89). Thus, this project seeks to “locate the exclusions, limitations and restraints placed on practice” (Sholle, 1998, in Lather, 1991, p. 96). In this case, storytelling is seen as this socially constituted and constituting practice with the potential to constrain as well as reconfigure new ways of being for both students and teachers.

Acknowledging stories in such a way suggests that we work to break down, or deconstruct, the language that literally creates these stories, attending to the seemingly “clear” ways that meanings are constructed and, thus, what other projects may be behind this apparent clarity. As I will discuss in more depth in later sections, positioning and critical deconstructive analysis will work to reveal the boundaries that our stories produce, whether through locating discursive binaries that limit possibilities or situating the final research text as a story itself, partial and
incomplete, resistant of neat conclusions. This also suggests that the relationship between myself and my students be reframed as I must ask, “Who speaks for whom?” Just as our stories can speak for others and position them in various ways, the research-researched relationship can also participate in maintaining systems of domination. I fully recognize my capacity to story both my students and self into existence, as they do for themselves, and the responsibility I have to interrogate the ‘truths’ that I create in this process. As part of the process of “moving away from dichotomies (west vs. rest; self vs. other) that characterizes much of anthropology” (Behar & Gordon, 1996, p. 22), and in full recognition that we mutually create what is possible to experience in the classroom, the data sources and techniques have sought to, as much as possible, blur the boundaries between myself and my students.

**Data Analysis**

In order to make meaning out of the aforementioned data sources under both the self-study and feminist poststructural analytic frameworks, I followed two broad guidelines to help narrow down and analyze the narratives being told throughout the semester:

- Both small and big stories were identified throughout the data sources that had to do with issues of justice, difference, equity, privilege and/or power.
- These narrative events were then analyzed using positioning and critical desconstructive analysis.

In the following sections, I describe in greater detail how these guidelines helped me to make meaning out of the talk occurring throughout the course and interviews, as well as the written artifacts.

**Identifying “stories” in the data.** In order to identify what counts as a story as I reviewed my data sources, I turned to literature that works with more canonical narratives (e.g.
Carter, 1993; Labov, 1972;) as well as “small stories” research (e.g. Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Ochs and Capps, 2001). In regards to the former, and perhaps more established narrative research tradition, stories are understood as a temporal sequence of past events with a plot, characters, conflict, and resolution. Carter (1993), drawing from literary studies, outlines it similarly. She notes that fully formed stories should have at least three elements: “(a) a situation involving some predicament, conflict or struggle; (b) an animate protagonist that engages in the situation for a purpose; and (c) a sequence with implied causality (i.e. a plot) during which the predicament is resolved in some fashion” (p. 6). While these stories are often found in situations where stories are purposefully elicited, as in interviews, they can also be found in more spontaneous dialogue, as often happens in class discussions. My students’ educational autobiographies are also places where these more canonical narratives can be found. For example, they often write about a specific teacher who has centrally addressed a problem they were having in school (i.e. low engagement) and the pedagogy and curriculum they used to solve the issue.

These more fully formed narratives have certainly found a place in my classroom. Yet, “understanding narratives compels going beyond these exemplars to probe less polished, less coherent narratives that pervade ordinary social encounters and are a hallmark of human condition (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 57). The everyday interactions that my students and I have are riddled with “small stories” in that they stray from the canonical narrative form and may be partial, co-constructed, and resist neat closure. These stories occur throughout class discussions, interviews and within my students’ journal entries, and may be oriented towards the past, future, or hypothetical in nature (e.g. “If someone were to go to school in that neighborhood, they would…”). For instance, my students will often start relaying stories of their educational
histories and, before this narrative becomes fully fleshed out, they are interrupted by another student who moves the story in another direction. At other times, students may provide just a fragment of their autobiography in order to affiliate themselves with another student’s claims (e.g. “My high school also offered AP courses”). This process of co-construction is interesting for how the story takes shape, but I was also intrigued by what was potentially left unsaid. Thus, I examined “allusions to tellings, and refusals to tell” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 34). Here, it was important to trace students’ storytelling practices over time and across data sources to identify where, when and how these practices were engaged. For example, a student shared stories in writing, but those that were perhaps never brought up in class. Similarly, sometimes the students would, upon hearing a story (partial or otherwise), fail to engage with this story and it went by the wayside. Notably, this story may be “picked up” at a later date during different circumstances. As such, the silences—the stories untold or not “taken up”- become points of interpretation and indicate what becomes public knowledge and how narratives, specifically ones concerning educational equity, may be regulated in the classroom.

Positioning analysis. The primary analytical scheme that I used throughout this project draws on positioning theory that focuses on “the normative frames within which people actually carry out their lives, thinking, feeling, acting and perceiving—against standards of correctness” (Harre et al, 2009, p. 9). As such, positioning analysts are focused on the discursive, dynamic nature of persons in interaction and the way that various rights and duties are distributed to self and others. As Davies and Harre (2007) note, this process is intimately connected to the notion of storytelling for positioning necessarily entails “giving people parts in a story” (p. 3) amongst available conventional storylines. Critically, positioning entails making available only certain ways of being, thinking, doing and saying to certain individuals and groups. In other words,
there is a “narrow repertoire of actions that a person could properly perform, engaged with other
people, and for which a social context is taken into account” (Harre and Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). Through an analysis of these repertoires, I can begin to see the normative orders- “what
ought to be”- discursively constructed around both storytelling practices and issues of social
justice and, therefore, how alternative positions could become available to students and teachers.

As an analytic scheme, there are three main components of positioning that must be taken
into account. “It is through acts (which have social force), within the contexts of storylines, that
the players are positioned” (Slocum and Langenhove, 2003, p. 227). This triad of social acts,
storylines (Discourses, as Gee (2010) has termed them) and ascribed positions suggests an
interactive field of social work where, in this case, students and teacher create their own
subjective realities and claims about the world. In Figure 1 (below), the three building blocks of
meaning are taken as mutually reinforcing one another in order to produce particular claims
around, for example, enhanced educational opportunity. Turning to this example relevant to this
project, I illustrate how the practice of telling personal narratives can operate as a discursive act
that works with larger storylines and positions to produce larger normative (moral) orders.
The question of who deserves “enhanced educational opportunities” is one that occurs regularly within my School and Society classes. This particular positioning triad suggests one way that normative orders about who deserves enhanced educational opportunities get constructed through the telling of personal narratives that tap into larger storylines and position others as particular types of persons. As often occurs, the “American Dream” (the direct connection between working hard and deserving and receiving enhanced opportunities) storyline emerges as salient given students’ understanding of their personal history. Through positioning themselves as hard-working and, therefore, deserving, those who are perceived as lazy are positioned as not having the right to certain educational opportunities. Importantly, such positionings can also be challenged through the telling of “competing” narratives of experience.

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While this example pertains to how particular versions of the world are discursively constructed and what potentially comes to count as official knowledge through the telling of personal narratives, the rules surrounding how to tell stories and who gets to tell them are also subject to the positioning triad. As discussed in the findings sections, for example, various rules emerged as to what a “valid” story was given the emotional tone, as well who was allowed to tell their stories given their perceived emotional state. For instance, Catherine positioned Lisa Delpit, an African-American author that the students read, as “aggressive” in her writing and, therefore, not a valid storyteller. Through her own stories of experience, Catherine positioned Delpit as not having the right to tell her own, tapping into the larger cultural storyline concerning “the angry woman of color”. This ultimately contributes to the normative order around who is allowed to speak and what they are allowed to say, contributing to larger concerns around reinforcing the very power relations we, as a class, seek to critique.

**Critical deconstructive analysis.** While positioning analysis focuses on the more macro ways in which students and teachers discursively construct versions of their world and that of others’, more specific techniques are needed to locate the ways that language operates in performing such functions on the micro-level. I, therefore, turn to critical discourse analysis (CDA) which focuses on language as not revealing of any ‘real truth’ but for how such language works towards the “repressive politics…of representation (Davies, 1993, p. 8). As CDA suggests, I understand this project as a way of studying language in relation to power and ideology and, in particular, “how textual constructions of knowledge have varying and unequal material effects and how constructions come to “count” in institutional contexts and in a manifestation of larger political investments and interests” (Luke, 1996, p. 12). As such, these
texts help to create subject positions or “possible worlds” for those discursively invoked (i.e. teacher, students, community members). In line with CDA, I examined lexico-grammatical choices (Halliday, 1978) whereby word choice and sentence structure can be tied to larger ideological and social formations.

I also turn to the tradition of deconstruction (Derrida, 1978/1997; Lather, 1991; Davies, 1993; St. Pierre, 2000), which can be thought of as subsumed within CDA, to locate the ways that stories can work under and simultaneously create a system of norms or rules that govern not only what gets said, but how it is said, what is silenced in the process, and how they are allowed to shift and change throughout the course. As Derrida (1997) notes,

The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things- texts, institutions, societies, beliefs, practices of whatever size and sort you need- do not have definable missions and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy (p. 31).

One of the ways to locate the boundaries that particular stories create around issues surrounding educational inequity is to identify when binaries are being used to “hold certain meanings in place” (Davies, 1993, p. 13). Such dualistic thinking inevitably leads to the privileging of certain subjectivities over others and maintains what Lather (1991) terms “power-saturated discourses” (p. 89). For instance, the term “valid” as it relates to stories suggests what is “invalid” and “spawns hierarchized oppressions” (Spivak in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482). Another way that my students will often set up such dualistic thinking is through positioning their education as “normal”. Here, “normal” fails to become a neutral word and, instead, eludes to what an “abnormal” experience growing up looks like and, therefore, one that is not as valued. In my experience teaching this course, this invoking of the normal/abnormal dichotomy most often occurs with students who come from economically privileged circumstances who come to see their school experiences as the “default”. Importantly, to deconstruct this discursive practice
is “not about tearing down, but about rebuilding; it is not about pointing out an error but about looking at how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces” (p. 482). Indeed, even my use of the word “privileged” suggests what it means to be “under privileged”. Though it may be impossible to get away from structure, itself, deconstructive analysis, with its understanding of the foundations as contingent, gives us a way to see words and phrases as not having fixed meanings. The ability to “rewrite the world and ourselves again and again and again” (p. 483) becomes available.

The following questions, adapted from analysis questions suggested by Luke (1995) and Fairclough (1997) guided this critical deconstructive analysis:

- What binaries are present in written or spoken stories? How does this binary language function in individual stories and in classroom discourse?
- What are the ideologically-contested and value-laden words and phrases used in written stories and transcripts of discussion in which stories are shared?
- What ideologically significant meaning relations are there between words?
- What means are used for referring inside and outside of a course text? In other words, how does a story build from or become embedded in a discussion of course texts?
- What textual structures does the stories employ? In other words, do students write or speak stories in ways that conform to or challenge the expected form and structure of narrative? How do these structures convey meaning?
- What larger scale structures does the text have? In other words, what are the larger storylines in which the story is embedded, whether explicitly or implicitly?
- Is there grammatical agency? If so, with whom is it located?
- How does turn-taking occur and function in spoken texts? How are stories introduced? How are they taken up or not by others? How does talk shift toward or away from stories that arise?
- How is metaphor used in both spoken and written narratives?
- How do students’ stories build and/or shift over time in the course (in content, in the larger storylines they signal, in level or amount of public sharing)?
Importantly, this series of questions works in tandem with an understanding of positioning theory for they tap into the discursive mechanisms with which students position themselves and others amongst available storylines using primarily small stories. With such analytic tools, I now turn to three “narrative events” that occurred across the course of the semester through which my students co-constructed claims around issues of educational inequity and who they and others ought to be amongst these claims. These events were chosen for the way that personal narratives of experience were invoked throughout conversations, as well as for the more explicit ways that narratives were referred to by both my students and myself. The following conventions\(^6\) were used to transcribe these narratives events, as well as the interviews that followed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>Utterance boundary (placed at the end of an utterance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(#)</td>
<td>Measured pause length [e.g. (3) indicates a 3 second pause between words]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Pause of .5 seconds or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underline</td>
<td>Emphatic stress; increased amplitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>Exclamatory utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>::</td>
<td>Lengthened syllable (e.g. scho::l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Self-interruption (- placed at point of interruption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Uncertain transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(word)</td>
<td>Tentative reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((   ))</td>
<td>Transcriber comment [e.g. ((sighs))]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5

Storied Constructions of Educational Opportunity, Difference and Understanding

In what follows, I examine three “narrative events” identified amongst my students’ conversations throughout the course of the semester. This conversational data was critical in enabling me to see how personal, hypothetical and future small stories were operating within a space purposefully designed to have critical conversations around educational inequity and difference. In all three events, these small stories were used to both position selves and others along normative storylines concerning educational opportunity, difference and diversity. Such discursive work also indicates the need to examine the rules attached to both the practice of telling stories and the idea that stories, themselves, will often become regulatory forces.

I examine such regulations throughout these events, paying close attention to the nature of the stories (what, how, and who), the way they are taken up, as well as the way they function to both create and close down new conditions of possibility. The first event follows my students during one class period in the third week of the semester after they have read Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities*, a narrative driven text that explores how educational inequality plays out in multiple urban schools throughout the U.S. The second occurs after the students have watched a film, *The Color of Fear*, in which seven men of different races have a conversation, driven by narratives, about their experiences with race. The third takes place after a panel of individuals in the GLBTQ community spoke to students about their experiences as those who are “Othered”. While each of these events was prompted by stories, the purpose of this chapter is to neither glorify nor negate “a pedagogy of storytelling”. Rather, it is to illustrate the importance of viewing storytelling as part and parcel of conversation and to complicate these practices as they operate to both subvert and maintain oppressive conditions. Additionally, various storylines (in
italics) are drawn out from the following conversations to highlight the claims students made as they narrated themselves and others into existence.

**First Narrative Event: Small Stories as Socially Meaningful, Regulated, and Regulatory Acts**

During the third week of the semester, I organized the classroom into a “fishbowl” setup with four students in a smaller circle in the middle of the room and the rest of the students formed a circle on the outside of this group. The smaller circle proceeds with a discussion about a given topic and other students in the larger circle can “tag” the smaller group members out if they would like to get into the inner circle discussion. I often use this setup to encourage students to talk to each other rather than directly to me, a practice I attribute to the way classrooms are often constructed, as both physically and epistemically teacher-centered. For this particular day, the students were to have read Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) *Savage Inequalities* as an introduction to thinking about educational inequity and to give them detailed narrative accounts of how this is built throughout major urban centers in the U.S. To structure the activity, I gave small groups quotes from the text and asked them to talk through their reactions to these quotes with each other. The following narrative event follows my students’ conversations, spurred on by Kozol’s work, as they moved in and out of the smaller, inner circle, positioning themselves in particular ways around notions of schooling and educational opportunity through their storytelling practices. Through the use of small stories, in particular, students created storylines around what it is for differently situated individuals to come together, and educational equity, and constructed particular moral orders within which to position themselves and others within these storylines. The “scene” begins with the inner circle of students reacting to Luther, a high school student Kozol interviewed for his ethnography of East St. Louis schools. Luther was asked about the hypothetical situation where the state government would provide an enormous
amount of money into his school, allowing them to become a “modern, well-equipped school”, and whether this would make racial integration still desirable. Luther answered that, no, “going to school with all the races is more important than going to a modern school” (p. 38), paving the way for my students to begin to consider who they were amongst Luther’s statements and within larger storylines around educational opportunity.

**Constructing the “ideal modern school”**. Lisa begins the group with a small story that does not directly refer to Luther’s quote, but is certainly illustrative of how personal small stories are often cued by and “off shoots” of already occurring conversation. Lisa’s father was African-American and her mother is White and, being one of four students of color in the class, her opening narrative provides important insight into the way she is beginning to story and, therefore, position herself in this particular space. To the smaller circle of students, she says:

> I notice things that other people do not and it does make me feel very alone/ but it also makes me feel very privileged cause I feel like I’m going to school for a purpose/ like I’m the only one in this classroom of all my friends that has made it this far/ like I’m doing it for more than myself/ I’m doing it for like a race of people/ I’m doing it historically for other people/ and I’m doing it for my family/ cause ya know they really want me to succeed regardless of whatever environment I’m in/

In kicking off the conversation with this small fragment of her autobiography, Lisa positions herself as having a notably alternative educational experience than her peers, the majority of whom are White. Yet, in an interesting play with words, she also contends that this experience contributes to her own “privilege” and towards her “making it this far” in school. Signaling an alternative meaning of “privilege”, a word typically associated with abundant educational resources and opportunities, Lisa restorys using the word to speak to her particular experience, one that did not allow many of her friends the same opportunities for higher education. As Lisa starts to discursively construct who she takes herself to be in this very small
moment, she positions herself as having the duty to get an education, not just for herself, but for her family and the larger race with which she identifies.

While this initial small story provides information about who Lisa takes herself to be, how others—her “co-conversationalists”—respond to Lisa’s embedded narrative is important for the way it suggests “creation of characters in time and space” (Bamberg and Georgakopolou, 2008, p. 379). As other students respond to both Luther’s quote and Lisa’s response, storylines concerning how schools ought to look into terms of racial diversity begin to emerge, are taken up, played with and also resisted. In the following excerpt, Sara and Kylie, both White female students, return to Kozol’s *Abundant Educational Resources versus Racial Diversity* storyline, one that includes taking up Lisa’s story in a particular way.

**Sara:** Hmm mmm/ so does that mean you would choose a modern school over a lot of race/ since you did do that? /

**Lisa:** See that also implies that a modern school is/ doesn’t have race/ like one of those quotes that is on here/ modern implies segregation/ 

((Hmm mm mmm Hmm mmmm, from a couple of students in the inner circle))

**Lisa:** So it’s like this is a very modern school and it’s not diverse so like I actually I agree the quote that he said/ I mean it actually does imply that modern is (.) whiteness/ I mean I know we’re gonna talk about another article in here (.) about White privilege and you all will kinda see where I’m coming from but I feel like yeah (.) modern kind of implies (.) privilege/ and not everyone has access to privilege/ 

While Lisa’s personal story kicks off this episode, it is what happens in its wake that is of particular importance when we see talk as an activity that makes use of narratives (Bamberg, 2006). The question becomes, given Lisa’s initial positioning of her through her own, fragmented story of educational experience how do she and other participants make use of this story in order to situate themselves along particular normative orders in light of difference and
educational equity? Part of the answer lies in Sara’s question which returns to the *Abundant Educational Resources versus Racial Diversity* storyline (as if they cannot happen together) and attempts to position Lisa as having the right to choose a modern school because her experience with racial diversity had already been “checked off”. It is an important question at this point, as it represents the kickoff of a dialogic interaction where knowledge and selves vis-a-vis difference and inequity start to become negotiated and contested.

While Sara wonders how Lisa positions herself within the storyline that maintains the dichotomy between a technologically modern and racially diverse school, Lisa alters the storyline, effectively changing it to *Modern Schools Equal Privilege and Whiteness*. This discursive shift suggests that with cutting-edge resources comes not only segregation, but also oppression and unequal access to privilege. All of this is, in turn, connected to whiteness. Not only does this shift in meaning get taken up throughout the rest of the episode in the interaction between Lisa and Kylie, but it also enables Lisa to position herself as someone who has the right to be heard in terms of these issues within this particular classroom setting. She speaks with conviction and from her own history, effectively moving the conversation to “get real” about the importance of racial integration and its connection to whiteness as privilege and power. It is a critical move for this classroom, as it is the first time that privilege and oppression as it is connected to whiteness has been explicitly named as such in this larger group setting.

Nevertheless, Lisa also recognizes that for others to “see where [she] comes from” sources other than her own personal story are necessary to support the developing storyline around privilege. In other words she positions others as naive and necessarily needing other sources to enable new understandings around white privilege. It is a discursive move that acknowledges that, for her, to name forces of privilege and oppression through her personal stories may not be
enough for these peers. She points to the “official” sources that also contain claims about how white privilege operates that will bolster her own storied claims. Despite the fact that Lisa has the floor throughout much of this conversation thus far, she is aware of how she may be positioned in this space as having less authority than those who have published (such as Peggy McIntosh) on white privilege.

The remainder of the episode is punctuated by Kylie taking up and extending the storyline that Lisa created. With privilege and its connection to whiteness squarely on the table, there is an opening for Kylie to tell her own small story concerning privilege, specifically at the university. As she affiliates herself with Lisa, Kylie’s storytelling extends the larger, developing storyline concerning the impact of racial diversity on their fellow White students.

**Kylie:** Hmm mmm/

**Lisa:** Um/ yeah/

**Kylie:** I’m sure the other side of the coin/ I mean not just for the few minority students who are at this university/ for the greater whole/

**Lisa:** Hmm mmm

**Kylie:** I’ve met some people here/ especially when I was living in the dorms in a high concentration of new students who had never seen a Black person in real life until they came here and saw a football player walking down the hall/

**Lisa:** That’s devastating though because it’s like/ yeah/

**Kylie:** Which is like so alarming to me/ and um ((small chuckle))

**Lisa:** Because it leaves a lot of/ ya know/ we’re afraid of things we’re not familiar with so you’re just gonna always associate negative implications with somebody that you’re/ you don’t know/
**Kylie:** Yeah

**Lisa:** It’s like if you were to expose yourself and actually have this ideal modern school that they talked about in the Kozol book/ then you won’t be so ignorant when you get to the campus and you’re like oh my god!/ he’s Samoan like/

Positioning those students who "had never seen a Black person in real life" as not only privileged but as "afraid of things [they're] not familiar with", “ignorant students” are now characters in of Lisa and Kylie's jointly produced storyline. Notably, Lisa’s use of the pronoun “we” signals a positioning of herself as having the capacity to also have this fear of the unfamiliar, though she quickly switches to using “you” in order for her to position others-White students- as having this capacity at this very university. Together, Kylie and Lisa position these White students as having the duty to expose themselves to racial and ethnic diversity so they will, at least, not be shocked when there is a person of color on the same campus. While Kylie problematically invokes one of the stereotypical depictions of Black males on college campuses-as athletes- she also implicitly takes up the critique of whiteness that Lisa began moments earlier. As the first White student in this conversation to do so, Kylie positions herself alongside Lisa and as critical of the White students at the university, many of whom have little experience with those outside of their race. In turn, a particular moral imperative has been set for these White students. They *ought to* take these steps that Lisa eventually lays out in order to create the "ideal modern school", one that is distinctly different from the one Kozol initially suggested. Lisa and Kylie’s small stories, in just a moments time, help to shift the meaning of “modernity” from being about abundant resources, racial segregation and white privilege to actively seeking out racial diversity in order to redress the ignorance that creates such inequities. This shifting of storylines suggests that that normative orders surrounding educational inequity have been
reworked to create value in students from different racial backgrounds being in schools together. Within this shifting of storylines, subjectivities are taken up by Lisa and Kylie, as well as distributed to others, notably White students with whom they go to school. Importantly, Lisa begins to emerge as outspoken but also aware of how her stories may need support from more “academic” sources. While small stories aided in creating some initial claims about educational equity and opportunity, they are, apparently, regulated linguistic devices, as well.

**The ideal modern school as merely theoretical?** This newly constructed version of the “ideal modern school”, one that purposefully organizes itself around difference and actively works to address ignorance, is indicative of a particular moral order being constructed through Sara, Lisa and Kylie’s talk and storytelling practices. The value of diversity and what is the “right” type of schooling in light of difference and inequity is developing. Yet, in just the next few moments, this “ideal modern school” is questioned as even a possibility, as the students come back to consider what it is like to enable differentially situated individuals to come together in a school environment. Riley, a White male student who has just “tapped” into the inner circle questions what this newly developed version of the “modern” school would look like. Lisa answers:

I think this is all real theoretical/ and it’s really gonna be hard to empirically place it in there/ like you could get a bunch of people from different cultures/ but that doesn’t mean you’re going to learn anything/ like everyone’s gonna sit around and be stupid!/ I don’t know ((said with some dejection))

Lisa’s thoughts on whether developing a modern school that prioritizes diverse perspectives is merely theoretical certainly echoes the motivation for this project. She wonders, as I have, whether a mix of stories leads to new understandings of one another or whether, in effect, it could reify the existing storylines we hold about one another. Importantly, however, this story
is a hypothetical one as Lisa positions the generic everyone as “stupid” and as, therefore, having little ability to learn anything from interactions across difference. In doing so, Lisa questions the implementation of the “Ideal Modern School” storyline that was previously established for she is concerned with the potential “stupidity” that could ensue when differently situated individuals are brought together. Notably, Lisa ends her turn using a dejected tone, as the “Ideal Modern School” may not be even a possibility. Yet, in responding to Lisa’s positioning of the generic you, the rest of the fishbowl group affiliates themselves with her, helping to construct this new storyline around this capacity for differentially situated individuals to come together and have a “productive conversation”. In what follows, students’ small stories are front and center, helping to do this discursive work. Liam, a White male student, responds to Lisa’s invitation to question the developing storyline, staying with a hypothetical story about the generic “you” and the potential reasons why “stupidity” may ensue. Notably, a few students laugh after Liam speaks suggesting a sort of levity to the conversation that is also serious in nature.

Liam: I think a lot of it is like self-segregation/ I think privilege/ you’re like born in uh an area and you’re kinda used to a certain routine/ and you’re not used to mingling with certain people and then you just (1) go into an environment where there are more diverse groups of people and (.) you just (.) ya know wanna talk to you’re own (1) buddies/ ((a few laughs))

Kylie: Yeah I- I think that’s like a horrible side effect of when you’re not exposed to different races at a very early age you do tend to group to the people you are comfortable with/ that you recognize/ that you’re familiar with/ and that you can relate to

Austin: Yeah I think it happens in college too cause like when you’re a minority in college and you’re goin’ to a school with not a lot of other minorities/ you’re more likely to (.) ya know (1) make friends with other minorities/ cause ya know sometimes it’s like you’re in it together even though you might not come from like an area with a lot of minorities/ suddenly you feel like you know you have this connectedness with them because ya know you guys are (small percentages)/
Indeed, a different picture on what it is for differently situated individuals to come together starts to emerge. Liam responds to Lisa’s hypothetical story with one of his own, affiliating himself with her statement about the potential trouble inherent with bringing “different cultures together”. He adds to this storyline, suggesting that those with privilege, given their routines, prefer to “talk to [their] own”. Kylie follows up and places a more direct moral evaluation on this propensity for these groups to avoid difference, positioning students as having the duty to expose themselves to difference (or for others to help them to do so). Austin’s small story performs similar work on behalf of students of color, yet positions them as having the right and the need to engage in “self-segregation” because they’re “in it together”. Importantly, and as he will reveal in later narrative events, this was also a small story of personal experience for Austin, as he identifies as Hispanic, though not revealed as such in this instance. His small story remains on the level of the hypothetical using the pronoun “you” as if to refer to any racial minority student in college.

Liam, Kylie and Austin’s hypothetical stories, in helping to co-construct and question the possibilities around the “Ideal Modern School”, provide justification for why this meeting of difference is less a possibility than had been originally thought. The “privileged” are sheltered and need exposure to those from different backgrounds. People of color, being “in it together”, have the desire, right, and need to stick together when on primarily White campuses. Their stories of generic others are stylizations of these others (Georgakopolou, 2007, p. 126), helping to construct larger narratives around certain groups and their capacity and desire to talk across difference given their unique positioning. Additionally, these students are negotiating the very basis for an educational system that is becoming increasingly diverse but may not be established for students to do the work of talking across difference. Sara comes back into the conversation
and adds on to this emerging storyline with her own small story of personal experience:

You have to remember that like where you’re from/ like for me when I went to school I think there was a total of like four people of (1) color in my entire school (laughter from a few class members)) and so I mean when I came to CU like yeah I wasn’t used to it but it didn’t (1) freak me out?/ I guess?/ I mean like/ I don’t consider myself a racist but it’s like you have to keep in mind that a lot of schools can’t have that diversity because they’re just/ aren’t that many people

The capacity for difference to come together has now shifted from being contingent on people’s wants, needs and desires, to a question of this even being logistically possible in many of our nation’s schools. While resisting the label of racist, Sara does acknowledge a certain naiveté when it comes to being around racial diversity due to her limited experience with students of color. In doing so, Sara positions others as obligated to take this into account when passing judgment on how she may react given increased racial diversity. It is a nuance to the storyline circulating throughout this conversation: we ought to promote difference coming together but pay attention to the way our personal stories influence this requirement. Sara’s personal response, as it turns the conversation away from the hypothetical, signals this shift in understanding as the “Ideal Modern School” now must be considered in light of the personal histories of its students.

**Constructing educational opportunity.** This negotiation of what a school that recognizes diversity ought to look like soon becomes couched within the frame of educational opportunity. As new students enter the middle and introduce a new Kozol quote, this frame becomes the dominant one within which students begin to discursively construct themselves and others. In the following excerpt, Allie and Robin, both White, female students begin with a quote by a wealthy parent in a suburban area.

**Allie:** Uhh our quote is ((reads quote)) *so as long every child has a guarantee of education what harm can*
it really be to let us/ those living in wealthy suburbs spend a little more?/ isn’t this a basic kind of freedom?/ and is it fair to tell us that we cannot spend some extra money if we have it/

Robin: I mean I guess we can touch back on what we were talking about earlier that um wha- what exactly do you mean when you say guarantee of education/

(Unknown): Yeah

Robin: It- it’s such a big ambiguous statement/ it could be anything/ I mean you don’t actually have to have a great education to have had an education/

Allie: Technically yeah/ (5) this was sort of a tricky quote um (2) I guess I took it more in sort of the social context (. ) that um I think a lot of ya know the wealthy suburbs is dominantly a White population um and so I feel like there’s a lot of social apprehension towards letting/ we were talking about this in our group/ ya know letting those students then intermingle or giving their money to the poor schools which ya know are predominantly Black or people of color/ and so um ya know tha-that (. ) socially I think (. ) people are just sort of like oh ya know we don’t our/ we don’t want that kind of socialization to happen just because what are the/ they’re less educated?/ soo ya know maybe that they’ll start getting into drugs or start ya know start having unprotected sex or something/ like that ya know and so I sort of saw is as a sort of socially kind of thing that these people (. ) are saying ya know / ya know they want to spend money on their own schools because that’s what they know/ ya know that’s - that’s what they feel like they should be supporting/ rather than these others schools which they might not be totally um educated as to what the reality is (. ) in those schools/

As Robin attempts to focus more closely on the wording in this quote, Allie uses positioning analysis, herself, to get at the meaning of the speech act inherent in this quote.

Again, hypothetical stories of other communities are important linguistic choices for these students. They are hypothetical but have real consequences for constructing the world. In stylizing wealthy individuals, Allie posits what they could think and say about the potential of poor kids to socialize with their own kids (“soo ya know maybe that they’ll start getting into drug/start having unprotected sex or something” ). This ordering of potential events positions wealthy individuals as having a myopic view of students in poorer areas. Because of this view, Allie suggests wealthy communities think of themselves as having the right to support “what they know” or, in other words, their own kids. Simultaneously, her turn also positions wealthy
people (again, connected to whiteness) as having the duty to become more “educated” about the reality of life in poorer schools. Indeed, it is a clever discursive move on Allie’s part in suggesting the *wealthy* need the improved education.

In many ways this opening interaction is similar to the one that came before in terms of what storyline is being produced. There is a negotiation around the degree to which it is possible for differently situated individuals, this time in terms of social class, to come together given who they take themselves and others to be. Yet, this interaction also suggests an emerging storyline that more explicitly works within the frame of educational opportunity. Allie’s hypothetical story about what wealthy individuals could think about the poor simultaneously acts as an evaluation on this group’s orientation towards who deserves what in terms of distribution of educational resources. Mark, a White male upper-class student who attended K-12 private schools, reacts to Allie’s turn and repositions the wealthy, through his own personal family story, as having the right to provide their children a high quality education.

**Mark:** I like (. ) uhhh was super frustrated with the whole like inequality of public education this whole time we’ve been talking about it/ and seeing this quote kinda made me be like hmm like (. ) I think that everyone should get an education but people/ like individuals and communities that ya know/ I feel like a lot of the reason that people want to make money/ the incentive to make money is to (. ) give your children something better that you had or what you had/ and education/ I think education is incredibly important to like giving your kids what you want them to have/ and (. ) kinda (. ) almost changes your mind a little bit thinking about it this way/ like my Jewish grandparents came over to the US during the Holocaust and like they didn’t have that much and worked their asses off to give me like a crazy education/ an::d like threw like all their money into that and like I’m not saying I’m better than anyone but like I think that it has a lot to do with like (. )/ the incentive to like work your ass off/

While there has been an influx of hypothetical narratives throughout this conversation, Mark’s past family story works in important ways. First, Mark reveals how he has shifted a bit in his conception of inequity in education and begins to establish his own positioning around the
educational opportunity frame put forth by Robin and Allie. A critical moment in this conversation, Mark has not only invoked the personal, but has tapped into what is one of the weightiest and emotional narratives of oppression. Mark now claims this narrative as part of his reasoning for why some individuals, like his grandparents, deserve to give their children or grandchildren such an expensive, “crazy education”. While he is careful to suggest that affiliating himself with this variation of the “American Dream” storyline doesn’t make him “better than anyone”, he does position himself as having the right to this education because of this particular family history. Importantly, and unlike the other White students thus far, Mark establishes himself as not only White and wealthy, but as also someone with a family history of persecution. While he does not acknowledge what the likely impact of his whiteness was on the opportunities provided to his grandparents upon their entrance in the U.S., the Holocaust narrative is not taken up by his fellow peers. Instead, Kylie enters back into the conversation, takes up, and critiques Mark’s story as if he was speaking more generally for any wealthy family’s pursuit of the “American Dream”.

**Kylie:** I’m not sure the question is (.) uh why::/ ya know I don’t have any problem if you have a lot of money and you wanna/ ya know you love your kid and want to provide them with the best education possible/ I don’t have any problem with people raising like-the local property taxes to give the school better resources/that’s great!/ do it!/ send money to school!/ but the problem arises/ in the reading there was that uh section talking about the school that the uh new rich people that moved into the neighborhood started and they didn’t let the other local kids into the school until third grade?/ and at that point they were already so far behind that they couldn’t keep up/ so ya know the question becomes why not let those kids in right from the get-go?/ ya know if you want to start a great educational facility for your child/ pour resources into it/ that’s fantastic/ but why not let people who are less fortunate who can’t do that for their own children (.) benefit from that/ because regardless of what the parents have done with decisions they’ve made the children start with sort of like a clean slate/ they should be able to/ they should be able to have the same opportunities (.) that ya know other children in the district have/
In retelling Kozol’s story about a particularly wealthy community that used their privilege to exclude “local kids”, Kylie aids in questioning what she perceived was Mark’s original storyline that presumably gave “rich people” the right to be exclusive. While she acknowledges their right to “provide the best education possible” to their own kids, they do have an obligation towards others’ kids to provide them with the same opportunities. In doing so, however, Kylie effectively ignores the Holocaust narrative that Mark invoked in order to make claims about a more complex version of the “American Dream”. Instead, she picks up where Kozol seemingly left off, invoking the larger, and perhaps stereotypical narrative around what it is to be a wealthy (and likely White) individual who claims particular rights for their children. Mark’s Holocaust narrative, told to lend nuance to this particular storyline, is subsequently ignored, marking a moment where a small story was not particularly resonant for these students beyond what it invoked through Kozol’s opening narrative of wealthy families. It is in this moment where the rules for telling and listening become apparent as Mark’s Jewish identity and ties to the Holocaust are apparently not realized by the rest of the class. The particularities of his story that served to complicate what it means to be white and wealthy are ignored. Importantly, Mark did not bring up this aspect of his history again during this class period and I did not pick up another recorded account of this throughout the rest of the semester outside of our interviews together.

**But who’s we?** As students switch “fishbowl” groups, questions around what education can and should look like for certain individuals and groups in our society linger in the air. There is a sense that such topics are weighty and important as students silently play musical chairs, some hesitating to enter into the middle circle, and some readily doing so, eager to talk through their thoughts. Dane, Liam and Allie, all White students, are part of the new inner circle and, without beginning the circle with a Kozol quote, Dane quickly enters into the conversation with
his own thoughts on educational opportunity. In doing so, his use of a hypothetical story suggests a return to the storyline that calls for communities to lift themselves up in order to obtain enhanced educational opportunities. This was, indeed, what Kylie was speaking against and what Mark was attempting to complicate with his small story of personal experience. Lucas’ response to Dane is also notable for the way it asks Dane to question who he is casting as characters within such a storyline.

**Dane:** Ya know education obviously/ it’s much more advantages to have ya know a good education from a ( ) area but at the same time your education is what you make of it/ especially with all the resources we have these days/ like say you’re not learning something in school/ if you have to drive ( )/ just jump on the internet/ you can find any/ ya know even if you don’t have it in your house/ libraries/ something like that/ ( )

**Lucas:** But who’s we?/ the resources we have available ((a few students laugh))

While Dane acknowledges the vast educational disparities that exist between neighborhoods, he constructs a storyline that suggests it is possible and necessary for everyone to create enhanced learning opportunities for themselves, particularly those from marginalized communities. Indeed, he is beginning to tap into the *Pull Yourself Up By Your Own Bootstraps* storyline that is so pervasive throughout our society. His use of pronouns is also telling in terms of his positioning of self and others and encourages Lucas to question his use of “we”. Lucas’ question, however, is really a suggestion that perhaps this collective “we” do not all have the same resources to tap into to essentially educate ourselves if formal schooling is not meeting certain standards. As Dane’s story assumes that the internet is readily available to all, Allie is prompted to restory using her own personal community narrative. A short conversation between her and Dane ensues:

**Allie:** Um well when you mention that/ ya know that you can just/ I mean but there are communities that don’t even have those resources/ and I- I wanted/ for me personally my neighborhood where there/ there
is a lot of households that don’t have computers or the internet and so they were going to the library (.)
but then there was this problem that ya know so they had to sign up for times to use the computer/ but
then as it turned out (.) they shut down the library/ I mean ((chuckles))

**Dane:** You can shut down a library?

**Allie:** Yeah you can/ I mean there’s no funds so they were just like/ up well I guess that’s it/ and then that
was/ and that was the place where people could get added education or/ and jobs too/ I/ ya know a lot of
people I knew were actually working there/

**Dane:** And so I guess we also need more funding for libraries ((some laughs from class))

**Allie:** And I’m just saying/ I’m tying that into like education/ because people ya know/ where one
resources are abundant for one group of people/ is not necessarily abundant for the next group of people/

Allie, with her transition into the personal, responds to Dane’s conception of the means
through which disadvantaged individuals ought to seek out enhanced educational opportunities.
In doing so, she provides an entry point into an alternative way of seeing this situation and,
effectively, a speaking back against Dane’s interpretation. Allie’s response is quick and
deliberate as her personal story serves to rework the storyline that Dane spoke into existence.
Her small chuckle at the end of her personal story communicates the absurdity of actually
shutting down something as fundamental as a library. Additionally, Dane’s statement about
needing more funding for libraries, said with a bit of levity, incites laughter from a few in the
class. However, there is sense of discomfort at this point, similar to that which attended the class
laughter when Sara and Liam were discursively coming to terms with the way their own
privilege was manifest. With Drew’s claim that now even libraries need funding, the class is
seemingly coming to terms with the enormity of the challenges faced by a system with limited
resources and the need to fund important public educational institutions, like libraries. In line
with this recognition, Allie responds to Dane in a more serious tone, asking Dane and, indeed,
the rest of the class, to continue to pay close attention to her personal experience with this
reduction of resources. “And I’m just saying” is a discursive move that draws attention away
from the storylines that Dane was pursuing back to her own. Dane’s words constitute a speaking for her community; her responses are a repositioning, introducing an alternative storyline around what educational resource distribution has looked like for her community.

“Privilege” speaking back. As the third and final ‘fishbowl’ group moves into the circle, I silently reflect on how well I think these discussions are going. There are disagreements regarding conceptions around difference and inequity, positioning and repositioning occurs, yet, for the most part, it feels to me like a “safe” conversation, without obvious “tension” or disagreement as students negotiate who they are in light of issues of power, privilege and educational opportunity. Even the last interaction between Dane and Allie, though notable for the way Allie’s personal narrative served to rework what educational opportunity meant, was “neat” and without further complication. Additionally, the laughter that infuses the conversation on a regular basis worked to bring some levity to what are ostensibly “heavier conversations”.

Moreover, the comfort I feel is derived from the nature of the storyline negotiation. It seems “clean” and, despite the few personal stories told or referred to, a distant conversation that tends towards the hypothetical.

Yet, during the remainder of class, there is a glimpse into the messiness that this process can afford as students more explicitly bring in their personal stories of educational experience to alter prevailing storylines that position them in ways they find unfair. In reaction to an interview quote in Kozol’s text, “Surely there is enough for everyone in this country. It is a tragedy that these good things are not more widely shared. All of our children ought to be allowed [a] stake in the enormous richness of America” (p. 282), the following interaction occurs between Sophie, a White female from a working class family, and Lisa who moves right into using personal small stories to align themselves with one another.

**Sophie:** Well lemme just say because the majority of our reading today was on my high school/ annd uh
ha/ it was ya know/ I definitely/ I’m at CU now too just like everybody else/ but I came from this high school that just had a ridiculous amount of anything you could ever want as a high school student and not even realize and ya know in the end just like everybody else/ just like every student who might have not had as much and/ I think that ya know a lot of those things that were in are/ a lot of the money that put towards my- put towards my high school and all those like parents and families who voted to not put that money anywhere else/ it was just/ it almost was wasted being put back into my high school because a lot of these kids had so much that/ I know a ton of them/ I probably know more of my friends/ I/ cause I had friends from different high schools/ one where people ha- were very wealthy and the other one where they weren’t and more of my friends from my wealthy high school ended up going to college not knowing what to do there/ not knowing how to be there on their own/ do their work/ and teachers expecting anything from them/ ya know and not giving them credit because of who their family and how much they donated and then compar-/ and then dropping out of college compared to my friends who like had less and it means so much more to them to be where they are and like work hard for what they have/

Lisa: Absolutely I agree/ I think people who have had to struggle that much more value education and that’s where actually I come from/ but I actually am glad that you brought up the point that you were able to make it out because again that’s like the importance of storytelling/ we tell stories but we also shouldn’t make generalizations/ like just because me and you got here doesn’t mean everyone else is going to/ I know that students are here cause mommy and daddy are paying for it and they don’t know anything and so they like sleep in and that’s the privilege that they’ve been given/ but I also know people who are on complete financial aid that like stay up twenty four hours just to get through their degree/ so it also just depends on what your personal like motivations would be

Sophie: Exactly/ its really hard to judge that because ya know personally going to this high school and having it/ a lot of the writings that he had to say with it were very stereotypical of the high school and yeah there were a lot of kids at that high school (class laughs) who are/ who are involved in that and ya know I was not one of them and I am on financial aid here but I did go to that high school and I/ my parents don’t pay for anything/

Lisa: Hmm mmm

Sophie: And so it’s kind of/ ya know just (1) seeing things like that and ya know even for myself being a minor- minority economically in that and then coming here it’s like/ it’s just/ it- it opens your eyes to things like that/
Sophie begins with the phrase “well lemme just say”, signaling an importance about what follows- it is “news-worthy” (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 120). And, indeed, it is. In claiming special knowledge of New Trier, the high school Kozol profiled and the one Sophie attended, she positions herself as someone who has special knowledge and the right to speak in this circumstance. Notably, she proceeds to story other students in this school as being disadvantaged because of these enhanced educational opportunities. Just as Lisa and Allie played with the meaning of “privileged” and questioned just who needs enhanced educational opportunities, Sophie alters the more conventional understanding of what it means to have educational privilege. Through this discursive move, she positions this group’s entitlements as a barrier to them receiving a full college education (“and ya know dropping out of college compared to my friends who had less”). The attendant storyline is, again, around educational opportunity- opportunities are “wasted” on those that do not appreciate them.

The personal continues with Lisa as she affiliates herself with Sophie and sees an opening to present an autobiographical telling that also positions her as having the right to comment on this emerging storyline. She has lived what Sophie is talking about and can attest to the value she places on education because of her experiences but also warns of the danger in using these narratives to generalize to others. Despite such awareness of the potential danger in storying others, she returns to Sophie’s original storyline- The Educationally Privileged Devalue Education- through a hypothetical story concerning two types of groups at the university. Indeed, it is a reversal of the grand narrative that positions the wealthy as hard-working and the poor as lazy.

As the storyline, The Underprivileged are Hardworking and Deserving, comes into existence, Sophie takes another opportunity to use an autobiographical account to claim footing
in the conversation. Kozol’s depiction of New Trier students is not who she takes herself to be and reveals more of her personal story around education. Importantly, her emphasis on “not” and “am” (“I was not one of them and I am on financial aid here”) suggests she has purposefully distinguished herself from the portrait of New Trier kids in Kozol’s text and, given her positioning of them, wears this proudly. Coming from a working-class background, she can now “see” differently, if not only for Kozol’s portraits of her well-off school, but also because of her experiences on this campus.

Sophie and Lisa’s small, personal stories help to do the work of positioning themselves and others within particular storylines that effectively make claims about educational opportunity. As they work within the positioning triad, counternarratives that challenge the more prolific narratives around issues of deservedness based on character and socio-economic status emerge. The less well-off are positioned as more deserving of educational opportunities. The privileged, less deserving due to their inability to appreciate these opportunities. Yet, in what follows, Robin taps into the circle to challenge Sophie and Lisa’s positioning of those from socio-economically privileged backgrounds, a community to which she belongs. The following interaction suggests a breach in the developing discursive rules, as Robin moves quickly into the circle to respond directly to how Lisa positioned her.

**Robin:** I just want to res-respond to something that you had said earlier

With this statement, Robin enters into the conversation with purpose. The tone in the room changes—suddenly there is a heightened sense of importance for what is to come next as Robin sets up an opportunity to restory what Lisa and Sophie co-constructed. While Allie did the same with Dane when she questioned the storyline he developed, there is an emotional tone to
the interaction now that suggests Robin was directly offended by Lisa’s words. Robin continues:

Ya know I know you guys were talking about coming from a ya know harsh backgrounds and- and being able to come to CU and everything and (.) I have come from/ I was lucky enough to come from ya know a wealthier family/ not rich but ya know they were able to pay for my schooling/ my mom and dad are paying for my college and I don’t feel that I’m slacking off here as a student because my parents are paying for my education/ I work my ass off when I come here/ I’m working full-time/ I’m paying rent/ and I’m doing all of my school work at the same time/

This challenge to the way one has been positioned by others in the class is of a different nature than the challenges put forth previously during this class activity- it is the economically privileged speaking back. Robin claims a privileged status by virtue of her parents yet alters the positioning status that was assigned to her. In doing so, she claims she is not the person that has been constructed during Sophie and Lisa’s previous conversation, for she works diligently at both school and another job, as well as always paying her rent. Indeed, Robin repositions herself, placing Lisa and Sophie’s storyline *The Educationally Privilege Devalue Education* under the microscope for further consideration. Yet, Lisa rejects such repositioning.

Lisa: But that’s—that’s an individual story again of you taking advantage of the privileges that you’ve been given just like I am/

Robin: But I also feel/

Lisa: ((interrupts)) But that doesn’t generalize everyone at this school is doing that/

Robin: ((louder, speaking more quickly)) I also feel it’s a generalization to say kids that have mommy and daddy paying for their (.)/ their schooling to be here/ I think that’s making a generalization to the kids whose parents are paying for it/  

Lisa: Oh ok/ hmm mm

Effectively, Lisa revokes her earlier comments about not using a single story to generalize
to others, as she has just done this with Robin’s small story. In a second attempt to argue for the way educational privilege operates, Lisa rejects Robin’s attempt to position herself as a student who comes from economically comfortable circumstances but works hard for and deserves her education, claiming that her “individual story” is still influenced by privilege. In an affiliative move, Lisa even places herself under this condition (“that’s an individual story again of you taking advantage of the privileges that you’ve been given just like I am”). Yet, Lisa’s claim that Robin’s lived experiences do not reflect everyone at this school continues to position at least a part of the student body within the previously established storyline, *The Educationally Privileged Devalue Education*. Robin’s final turn, louder and more quickly spoken, uses Lisa’s conception of generalization and suggests that we should not assume that all those who are economically well-off have “mommy and daddy” paying for it. Indeed, the phrase “mommy and daddy” in association with supporting adult lives, is a negative one, positioning “these people” as being dependent on their parents to establish their quality of life.

As Lisa closes the interaction with an “Oh ok/hmm mmm”, it is unclear whether this is an acceptance of Robin’s repositioning of herself or a move to close the interaction as quickly as it came upon them, or perhaps both. Indeed, the interaction between Lisa and Robin did come to a somewhat abrupt end, but it also illustrates the difficulty of talking across difference when our competing storylines come into contact with one another. Davies and Harre (1990) note that such an “unfolding narrative” is dynamic in nature as participants “are constituted in one position or another within the course of one story, or even come to stand in multiple or contradictory positions, or to negotiate a new position by ’refusing’ the position that the opening rounds of a conversation have made available to us” (p. 4). Both Lisa and Robin positioned themselves and each other within storylines that held different meanings for each. As Lisa illustrated the
negative consequences that results when the privileged do not appreciate their education, Rachel used her own personal story to put this storyline under question.

This was also the case with the other episodes throughout this larger narrative event as students shared small stories, both hypothetical and personal, to help negotiate the grounds upon which educational opportunity ought to be defined. Notably, these small stories were ones that helped to create nuance around already existing and, often, more dominant narratives. Yet, this use of small stories to present, and often alter, prevailing storylines was not always taken up by the class. Early on in the conversation, Lisa presented a heightened awareness of the possibility that her views on white privilege may need extra support from more “official” sources. As a person of color in a predominantly White class, her story may not carry the same weight as those who are White or have certain credentials. This position is laid out in more detail throughout her case study analysis in a later section.

Such local regulation of stories was also illustrated by Mark’s narrative of his family ties to the Holocaust as students failed to take up this aspect of his story. Instead, Kylie recognized the larger, more conventional, “American Dream” storyline woven throughout Mark’s claims. Admittedly, I also only initially recognized the way his whiteness and class privilege worked their way into the claims he made about who deserved what quality of schooling, ignoring the fact that the inclusion of his grandparents’ story signals an important complexity in considering what it means for him to be “privileged”. As it did when Kylie responded to Mark, his privileged status became the overriding factor in positioning Mark, while his Jewish identity remained secondary, if not non-existent. Alternatively, Robin’s attempt to alter the dominant storyline around “the privileged”, infused with more palpable emotion, seemingly carried more weight. While both Robin and Mark “spoke back” against the storylines circulating about
privilege and power from which they each benefited, Robin held the floor for longer and continued to “fight for” her personal circumstances to be recognized as significant to the developing order around educational opportunity. Perhaps the difference in how their stories were taken up was due to the casual nature through which Mark made his case and the more forceful way that Robin did so. Or perhaps it was the fact that Mark’s claim to his Jewish identity was not “allowed” in a space that had already begun to categorize what it looked like to “be privileged”. Nevertheless, what is apparent is that rules governed the way stories were told, taken up, and rendered worthy of consideration amongst students as they negotiated who they and others were amongst dynamic and shifting educational storylines.

**Second Narrative Event: Attempts to Understand**

Moving into the eighth week of the semester, I showed the documentary, *The Color of Fear*, so my students could observe a conversation explicitly designed to get at issues of power and privilege, particularly in terms of race. The film depicts eight men of different races and ethnicities coming together to talk about race and their experiences with racism and it is driven by personal narratives. Though it is problematic that there are no female participants in this film, the viewer gets an in-depth look into each man’s upbringing and his current views on race relations. While I have shown this film before, mostly to get at the *content* of the conversation (it is particularly powerful in terms of its portrait of everyday and institutional racism), I wanted my students to reflect upon the *form* of the conversation, as well. I decided to use the fishbowl exercise for the second time this semester as it lent itself well to being in the midst of conversation around difference, but also to observing this interaction with peers. Additionally, prior to opening up the space for student discussion, I challenged them to have a conversation similar to the one that the men in the film had. It was gutsy, as it strongly named personal
experiences and circumstances, and there was an honesty about it that was palpable and often created tension between the men. As the following narrative event will suggest, the deeply emotional tone of the film, infused with anger, sadness and even a sense of hopelessness at times became a critical point of departure for students to consider the value of storytelling in terms of both teller and form.

“You can’t ever understand, but you kinda have to”. After little prodding, Lucas, Mark, Adam, and Daniel start in the ‘fishbowl’. These are four students who often contribute in class and I prompt them by asking “How did defining privilege and oppression play out in The Color of Fear?” Immediately, Lucas, a White male, uses a personal story to begin the conversation, initially relating to David, one of the White men in the film who struggled to seriously consider his place in a racist system. This was an invitation for the other three White students (Mark, Adam, and Daniel) to negotiate and begin to establish storylines around privilege, oppression and who they are in the midst of these societal conditions.

Lucas: A few years ago when all that- all that stuff about ya know/ um reparations (.) was going on/ I was kind of / I was kind of in the same emotional place as David in that movie/ well ya know like that/ whatever that happened ( )ya know hundred years ago/ like you're all equal now/ we’re done with racism/ it’s all good right?/ and like that’s/ that’s the impression I get/ and that’s kind of the impression I get from media and- and everywhere is like oh ya!/ we got rid of that racism thing/ now we’re all/ now we’re all enlightened so it’s just ya know obviously ( )/ and it’s like/ and and and David’s perspective/ ya know that was like he was genuinely oblivious (hmm mmm from a few others in class))/ he was I/ ya know/ he didn’t even realize it was happening and that helps to perpetuate it/

Adam: I feel like the/ it seemed like the worst of it’s over or somethin’ like that and I feel like ( ) with equal opinions/ cause I feel like I was kinda on the same page as him/ ((I interrupt to ask Adam to talk a bit louder))/ oh ok/ I said I feel like the worst/ or like the worst of it’s over or whatever/ like most extreme acts/ but umm it just takes people learning like how to/ like how little sayings can hurt just as much and things like that/ um and I feel like I was kinda on the same page as (.) as the ( )/ the guy
Kantor

in the cool shirt ((meaning David in the film)) but I was just kinda like I don’t understand why that/ why they hurts so/ like what-what/ ya know/ and I don’t know/ and somethin’ that also stuck out to me was the/ he kept saying like I understand and like ya know/ like ok like ((speaks in David’s ‘voice’)) I hear where you guys are coming from/ here’s what I have to say/ and then it just seemed like/ seemed like everyone else was like OK you have to understand but you can’t ever understand but you have to understand/ ya know what I mean?/ that- that kind of stuff got to me/ like you can never know but he kinda has to/

Mark: And that’s the thing is that like really you can never know what it’s like/ like there’s so many little subliminal things that like/ like a lot of the comments I heard from the- the people of color in that- in that uhh movie/ like my first reaction was like yeeeaahh like tending to put myself (           )/ it’s-it’s not (1) that bad/ but then like (.) when you really like try and have like an out of body experience like what would it really be like to be of a different color/ when like (.) when like ya know you’re hearing about like all the founding fathers and how great and White and like whatever they did/ did so much great things in our country and like patriotism and like White people and like how would that make me feel?/ like- like not feeling like I don’t even have a chance to like (1) be:: a part of that or like that I had nothing to do with the founding of- of/ that would make me feel like shit/ and it’s like you don’t really think about that cause you’re just kind of like (.) learn it how it is and you (           ) cool/

Adam: Hmm mmm/

Daniel: Right/ I mean you don’t even/ you don’t think about it on a systemic level/ um (1) like I/ I’m sure there’s no doubt in your mind that when you graduate you’ll have no problem finding a job/ you’ll have no problem ya know (.) afford a loan for a home or/ or continuing on/ continuing education/ I mean given people of our age that’s not necessarily something that we’re thinking about just yet/ but then I mean the next stage of our lives is moving into that adulthood/

Lucas’s opening story and reflection about how he “used to be” works to affiliate him with David whose ‘emotional state’ was one of ignorance to the role that racism played both institutionally and on an everyday basis. Yet, in reflecting upon David’s narrative, Lucas eventually disaffiliates, actively positioning himself as having moved away from this ignorance. Similarly, in telling the small story of his encounter with David’s narrative, Adam positions
himself as once “on the same page” as David, but eventually having learned about the impact of “little sayings”. Both Lucas and Adam are aware of their shifting positions within the developing storyline concerning the meaning of privilege and oppression, yet it is Adam’s comments towards the end of his turn that shift the storyline away from what privilege and oppression are to more centrally about who we ought to be in the midst of coming to understand Others. Adam questions his obligations under such circumstances, introducing a storyline in which he wonders whether White people must, but cannot ever understand what it is to be a person of color in this society. Such positioning seems to bother Adam, as it places him in a double-bind of sorts. From the film, he gathered that he has an obligation to come to a new understanding about how difference operates for individuals of color, yet he repositions himself as being unable to fulfill this obligation.

Mark reacts to Adam’s attempt to reposition himself, also telling his story of watching the film as he wonders how “bad” it really was for the men of color. Yet, as was the case with Lucas and Adam, this affiliation with David was short lived and Mark attempts to actually fulfill the obligation that caught Adam in a double-bind. Using a hypothetical story, placing himself in the role of a person of color, Mark suggests how he would feel if he continually heard about the nation’s White founding fathers. As has been the case with hypothetical stories in other discussions, this one allowed Mark temporary access into what could be someone else’s lived experience. In effect, Mark has responded to Adam’s double-bind, positioning himself as able to understand, even in this moment, what it is to be a person of color. He meets this obligation and, while it is unreasonable to assume that he is necessarily correct in his depiction, he positions himself as having the potential of a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of people of color. Such positioning is at once problematic for it suggests that individuals in dominant groups
can simply imagine what it would be like to be part of a non-dominant group to gain access to their experience, a “passive empathetic” response (Boler, 1999), yet also renders Mark sensitive to the ways that Others could feel given the way history has been written to exclude various communities of color.

Daniel follows up, telling a future story (“when you graduate you’ll have no problem finding a job…”) that positions White people (although they are not named as such) as typically oblivious and ignorant to the privileges they are afforded and the access they are granted on a systemic level. Importantly, he works within the storyline that Lucas started that understands White people and people of color in a binary relationship, with the former being the privileged and the latter being marginalized. While this negotiation simplifies matters as it ignores the effect of our intersecting identities, it does provide grounds for these four White men to start to establish who they are and what their responsibilities are in the midst of inequitable circumstances. They take it as their duty to begin to not only understand what it means for them to be White and privileged, but also feel the obligation to understand the experiences of being a person of color.

In effect, Lucas, Mark, Adam and Daniel are establishing storylines around how they are obligated to understand privilege and oppression given their whiteness and, consequently, what it is to be of color in this society. The conversation again picks up as Daniel reacts to Lucas’ opening statements about the common perception that racism is over. Austin, who has up until this point revealed little about his personal history in the large group setting, taps into the middle for Lucas. In taking his first turn, he comments on the storyline that his peers began to unpack and questions- that of *A Post-Racial America* - yet also moves on to narrate his own experience with oppression.
Austin: Yeah especially like in oh eight like when we had/ when we like elected a Black president/ I think a lot of people were just at that point/ ya know just done/ on CNN when they announced it like all these Black people ya know celebrating/ and like some people might have mistaken that for ya know/ a- a lot of people were celebrating/ but they (       ) people of color celebrated/ may have just mistake that/ mistaken that as ya know/ this is over ya know/ let’s move on from racism/ cause like no one wants to deal with it/ like White or minority people/ everyone would like it to be over/ so we kinda of like pretended like it was over

Daniel: Hmm mmm/

Austin: But/ um I don’t think that/ I mean I think the people would’nt have believed if you told em’ like ya know fifteen years later after this was made there would be a Black president/ but at the same time (1) it just/ it hasn’t changed (.) a lot/ cause like I read a lot of these like ya know different privileges that- that ya know (.) this author describes ya know White people having (.) and like ya know a lot of them/ like I realized oh yeah that affects me!/ cause I- I don’t have that/ but I never thought about it as oppression but now that I like think about it like/ ya know when/ I would want/ I wanted to go to Russia a few years ago and like I w- I went online and I was researching about traveling abroad there and like I read that it- it’s/ a lot of people of color said it’s not the most safest place to go if you were a person of color cause it’s ya know um/ there are a lot of hate crimes there against people that are dark-dark skin complexion/ so yeah it kinda like/ [ put me off more than go] / and if I like ya know go anywhere in the South like from where I live/ I like would prefer to fly cause I would’nt ya know wanna drive through Mississippi or Tennessee or like/ and so like that kinda sucks/ and I’m/ like I’m looking at grad schools right now for school psychology and like I notice like um (.) some of em’ are in the South and like I’ve thought about that and like ya know is it/ do I really wanna live in the deep South for seven years?/ cause like I’m from Texas but (.) I’m like/ I live in this like little like North Texas bubble where it’s like so different from like the rest of Texas cause it’s like so diverse and stuff/ it’s like a big city but it’s not like ya know West Texas er/ I wouldn’t feel/ I wouldn’t feel comfortable living in West Texas/ (his voice trails off a bit))

The room shifts a bit. There is a lingering pause after Austin’s extended turn that has brought forth personal experience in a way that has not yet been invoked within this particular conversation. In presenting three distinct narratives regarding where he can and cannot go given his skin color, Austin positions himself as someone who is living through a particular
manifestation of oppression, one that continues the storyline that Peggy McIntosh (1988), whom the students read for today’s class, developed around the everyday of privilege and oppression. In doing so, Austin claims the right to speak about this experience in this space given his first-hand knowledge of oppression. Moreover, while the storyline, *Oppression is in The Everyday*, is bolstered by Austin’s narratives, it is the follow up to his turn that provides a window into the interpretive nature of storytelling. After the palpable silence that slowed the pace of the conversation, Mark responds to Austin’s small stories albeit not directly. Instead, he addresses the question of understanding the experiences of oppressed communities of color and returns to *The Color of Fear* to do so.

**Mark**: And like the whole ummm/ when that/ when that uhh person/ that Latino person was s-s-speaking about how they were afraid to drive down some freeway cause like probably one crime or something got to (               ) at some point/ like it’s- its almost like a defense mechanism to not feel like shit (. ) for like the White person to just be like uh that’s unfounded/ but it’s like in thinking about it like ( . ) I’m uncomf- like if I was in Mexico driving down the street and I was like there’s just Mexican people everywhere like ( . ) I don’t/ like it’s it’s/ you can kind of explain to yourself like rationally that you should be fine but like inside like I could imagine just kinda just like being on edge/ but/

In his retelling of one of the film’s narratives that parallels Austin’s, Mark positions White people as shielding themselves from new and potentially difficult understandings around the realities of everyday racism. In recognizing this, his own hypothetical story about the fear he would feel if he were to drive in Mexico works to affiliate himself with Austin and suggests a fulfilling of the previously established obligation to more fully understand the experiences of people of color. Mark, once again, attempts to place himself in the shoes of both Austin and one of the film’s characters. This final story positions Mark as the kind of White person who works to understand that which he does not experience and mimics the stance he took moments earlier as he posited how it would feel to be excluded from the “official” portrayal of United States
history. Yet, Mark again relies upon Boler’s (1999) conception of passive empathy to come to this understanding of Austin’s experience with racism. This “placing oneself in another’s shoes” gives Mark a sense of identification with Austin and a perceived right to speak about this experience as if it could be the same as Austin’s. Of course, this claimed right is misguided as Mark’s hypothetical story is ignorant to the fact that his fear is likely influenced by whiteness and the rampant stereotypes of Mexicans rather than a product of simply being a racial minority in a new place. In doing so, Mark has returned the conversation to himself, claiming the right to “know another’s experience through [his own]” story (p. 160) and ignoring Austin’s claim that his personal experience is intimately connected to white privilege and power.

Similar positioning work is done in the next few moments as Daniel, in response to the film’s discussion of assimilation, asks his fellow fishbowl members whether they feel as though they have lost their ethnic roots and if this is what it means to be white in this country. This question itself suggests that to be white is to have been subjected to assimilation, rather than contributing to this demand on communities of color. Daniel tells the story of losing his German roots, Adam claims no “cultural attachment”, and Mark says that both sides of his family “rejected the background they came from”, all playing into the storyline that whiteness is devoid of culture. These small, personal stories, told in a rather somber way, reinforce Daniel’s positioning of whiteness, claim the pain of assimilation and, as Mark did in his response to Austin, rely on passive empathy to “feed on the consumption of the other” (Boler, 1999, p 160). Austin’s small stories have opened the door to his peers’ personal narratives that invoke a “we’re all the same” mentality— to be white is to have (or potentially have, in Mark’s first case) the same experience as a person of color who is subject to the demands to assimilate to mainstream norms. Whiteness as power and privilege is, now, not part of the students’ conversation as it was in the
beginning of the conversation. Austin enters back into the conversation, responding to his peer’s construction of whiteness as assimilation-based, asking them to personally reflect on their construction of what it means to be White.

**Austin:** Is that being/ like identifying as a White male in America/ is that like (.) kind of hard for like (.) you/ ya know if you (.) um realize that/ do you wish you were more in tune with the culture of your parents/ like where you descended from or are you ok ya know just saying/ oh! I’m American/ that’s ya know my culture/ cause that is a valid/ ya know

Unlike his White peers’ responses to the small stories of oppression that both he and the men of color in the film told, Austin uses questioning as a response to the recent influx of small stories with which he cannot immediately identify. Although he co-constructs this storyline with them, bolstering the problematic notion that whiteness is devoid of culture and not challenging it as devoid of power and privilege, he also positions himself as wondering about the ways their personal histories have impacted their experiences. This wondering, and subsequent affirmation of the validity of their potential choice to claim American as a culture, suggests that personal narratives of experience may also be met with wonder and validation, rather than with other stories of personal experience that may reduce difference to a minimum.

Daniel responds to Austin, continuing to negotiate the costs and benefits of assimilation for his ancestors and continuing to construct whiteness as the product of assimilation. Similarly, Adam positions “every culture” as oppressed, continuing to ignore whiteness as connected to power and privilege.

**Daniel:** I mean/ there’s- there’s elements of both/ ya know I think um I understand that we’re/ ya know my ancestors had to like slaugh off their identities in order to be accepted/ (1) but at the same time that’s- that just/ it’s so tragic to me/ that they had to give up like what was unique and special about them in order to be successful and get ahead/ (1) so it’s- it’s like give and take/ like how do you- how do you choose that/
Adam: It’s crazy having the like/ that we’ve always been focused on like the (. ) white and black thing or things like that/ but it’s weird to think that every culture’s been oppressed in every (. )/ ya know what I mean?/

This new storyline, *Whiteness as Assimilation as Oppressed Group*, prompts Lisa, who has just entered the fishbowl, to take her first turn within this conversation. Through her response, Lisa asks her fellow students to return the conversation back to one that is, again, focused on white privilege.

Lisa: There/ certain groups are probably/ within the United States have been oppressed by the system of white (. ) (privilege)/

Adam: Yeah but we’re so focused on (. ) that/ but no I’m just saying that like other cultures too

Lisa: Right

Adam: Like my parents had the/ like we’re Bohemian and they said that like they were always/ that like my grandparents gave like/ they said they were German not Bohemian because that’d be something that like would help them get across the border or something weird like that/ and like it’s weird to think that everyone’s exper/ or every cultures experience/ not everyone but/

Daniel: It’s nothing new ((small chuckle))/

As Lisa restorys, positioning whiteness now as the driver of systemic oppression, rather then the product, she returns to the storyline that emerged at the beginning of the conversation that rendered whiteness as privilege, itself. Yet, Adam meets this bid to shift storylines with resistance, who positions Lisa and others as not having the right to focus so intently on what he has termed the “white and black thing” when discussing assimilation. To bolster this claim, Adam tells one more story about his family history and their experience with assimilation.
Daniel affirms this positioning effectively giving anyone the right to speak about their family’s history with assimilation given the frequency with which it occurs. Lisa’s attempt to pull the conversation back to one that centrally concerns issues of power and privilege fails to shift the storyline her White, male peers constructed around everyone’s right to claim the pain of assimilation. Indeed, while I encouraged the class to have a conversation similar to the one the cast of *The Color of Fear* had, I certainly did not mean for them to exemplify the white, male privilege to construct and control narratives interrogated within the film. Even as Lucas, Daniel, Mark and Adam began with an interrogation of their whiteness as it was connected to privilege and even questioned how to begin to understand marginalized Others, the conversation quickly shifted into these four White males claiming their own history of assimilation and, therefore, marginalization. In the historical sense, this is likely the case–various ethnic groups have been subject to demands to assimilate to mainstream norms, with “the mainstream” shifting in meaning. However, their responses to the stories told in the film, Austin’s personal stories, and Lisa’s attempt to bring the conversation back to a discussion of white privilege, suggests that the way they have listened and taken up stories from currently marginalized others is highly contingent on how they story their own history.

**Narrative validity.** Thus far, the negotiation of and subsequent storylines around whiteness have shifted from being squarely connected to privilege to being an experience that, despite Austin’s stories and Lisa’s assertions is similar to, if not the same as, that of individuals and communities of color. Furthermore, this negotiation has highlighted the way particular students have claimed their right to tell their own stories and managed their obligations to listen to and take up those of others’ and Others’. As Austin claims his right to narrate his experience with oppression and duty to listen with wonder, how he is responded to by his White peers
suggests an obligation for them to understand his experience through their own. In the next few moments, however, Lisa more directly challenges such passive empathy as she shifts the storyline back towards the racialization of privilege and to inquiring about an alternative storyline that directly challenges how we narrate to make claims and the “validity” of these claims. As Lisa briefly affiliates herself with Daniel’s previous comment (“It’s nothing new”), a new conversation ensues in which Lisa brings up a text the students read for this class, “The Trouble We’re In: Power, Privilege, and Difference” by Allen G. Johnson (2001). Notably, Lisa alludes to an “official” source to bolster her case to return to a more explicit conversation around privilege and to even question Daniel’s earlier claim that “there is no legal slavery anymore”.

Lisa: No and what Johnson talks about in her/ in his article excuse me/ is that um specifically in America we’ve racialized um privilege/ I think that she specifically says that ya know when an African woman is in Africa she’s just African/ she’s not really seen as black/ but when she comes into the United States that’s when she’s labeled as a black woman/ so I found that very powerful that we have this set idea of what we think is American and what we/ how we just/ kind of just put people into groups/ um kind of just back tracking from what you ((speaking to Daniel)) had said earlier/ um when you said the system ya know/ this country was built on ya know our founding fathers who owned slaves and that slavery is over/ well what if I said that slavery wasn’t over/ or that there’s a sector of government that allows for slave labor to go on and specifically it’s in the prison systems that are populated with people of color/

Daniel: Right/

Lisa: So would you think that would be a valid- a valid argument?/ or do you think I’m just kind of/ just trying to see that as something to turn (a racial eye on)/

Daniel: It’s (2) it’s more hidden/

Lisa: Hmm mmm

Daniel: It’s not open/
Lisa: So would you say that slavery is over then?

Daniel: I would agree with you/ well not/ o-obviously not/ I think/

Lisa: In that aspect then/ huh

Daniel: In that aspect of (.) like (.) ownership/

Lisa: Right/

Daniel: Its obviously not/ but now it’s like the system has ownership/

Lisa: And the system has been perpetuated to privilege a certain group and oppress another group/

Daniel: Right right/

In retelling the story Johnson (2001) told concerning the unique racialization process that occurs in the U.S, Lisa simultaneously bolsters the *Whiteness as Privilege and Power* storyline and gains significant footing in order to shift to an examination of the restorying process, itself. As, Lisa calls for Daniel to reexamine his previous assertion that slavery is over she positions herself as having the right to not only restory that which has been taken for granted (slavery being over), but to draw Daniel’s attention to the restorying process, itself. It is the first move of its kind in this class- a pedagogical one even- that encourages Daniel to consider the lens through which he sees the world. Lisa’s question about the validity of the argument is also telling in that it is preemptive strike of sorts, aware of how she, as a person of color, may be positioned within the dominant discourse of “pulling the race card”. As Daniel responds to Lisa, he sequentially builds an allegiance to her newly introduced definition of slavery, eventually recognizing that “the system has ownership” and affirms that they are now, once again, talking about privilege
and oppression.

Lisa continues along this storyline, naming Daniel (and likely the other White students in the room) as part of this privileged group who are obligated to “to understand that when the system benefits you it’s going to disenfranchise someone else”. Understanding, according to Lisa, requires moving beyond passive empathy and towards a more holistic understanding of our own complicity in the structures of privilege and oppression. Lisa continues with this obligatory call and asks Daniel to consider the potential contingencies attached to her storytelling.

**Lisa:** And there’s a lot of guilt that comes with that as well and/ ya know it is hard to see and even ya know as a person of color/ I don’t think I’ve ever actually explicitly said what nationality I am/ I just keep saying that I’m a person of color/ what if I were to say I wasn’t a person of color?/ do you think that argument may change how you look at things?/ cause of who it’s coming from?/ (1) do you think that actually matters in some sense/ that ya know when you make an argument and you are a person of color/ you may just see it as that person of color’s just complaining/ or if they to be you/ maybe people might be like huh maybe he’s on to something/

Asking Daniel to consider the impact of someone’s race on how their argument is perceived, Lisa explicitly asks about the storytelling rules of this conversation. Moreover, Lisa draws attention to the ways in which he considers her a “valid player”, given her perceived race, in the current, unfolding narrative. In what ways, she asks, does he position her? Is she someone who has the right to speak about privilege and oppression in the way that she is, or is it merely “complaining” and this right should be revoked? Daniel responds:

**Daniel:** I- I have the opposite actually/ um/ when the arguments are brought up by you/ I feel like they have more validity (1) because you do experience that on a day-to-day basis/ and so I give more backing (.) to things that you have to say/

**Lisa:** You don’t necessarily see it as like oh she’s just complaining/ kind of/ (1) whatever
**Daniel:** No no/ right right/

In moving towards more explicit talk around the rules for narrating and making claims throughout this space, Daniel resists the positioning made available for him as someone who would discount her talk. In fact, Daniel places extra value on Lisa as someone who is allowed to use her experience to create storylines concerning privilege and oppression, positioning her as even having the right to do so given her experience. In towing the line and referring to these storylines, Austin enters the conversation:

**Austin:** I think it has more validity when it comes from both sides like from people of color and from White people/

**Daniel:** Hmm mmm/

**Austin:** Because then/

**Lisa:** It doesn’t look like it’s sided/

**Austin:** Yeah the group’s that it’s in power (.) also agree/ agrees with the group that’s ya know been historically oppressed/ and they both ya know are saying it/ yeah there is the whole thing/ like well obviously you- you think that there’s ( ) cause you know you were part of this historically oppressed group/ and yeah you’re gonna/ you’ve been complaining about that ya know

After creating slightly different rules around who should narrate, given the importance of being *perceived* as valid, Austin also reaffirms Lisa’s prior claim about the perception of people of color as merely “complaining” about their experience with oppression. It is a moment that positions everyone in the room, no matter their racial identity, as having the duty to speak directly about issues related to privilege and power. Yet, there is no return to the questioning...
that defined Lisa and Daniel’s interaction moments before concerning who is seen as speaking with more validity. While Austin confirms the perception of people of color as speaking with less validity, he does not challenge this perception as Lisa had moments before.

“Constructive narratives”. Despite Austin not following suit, Lisa’s “poststructural sensibility” suggests a questioning process concerning who and what are to be deemed “valid” narrators and storylines. The availability of this discursive order is in jeopardy, however, as the students’ conversation moves on to talking more directly about Lisa Delpit’s (1988), “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” and its relationship to McIntosh’s (1988) text. After I asked a new fishbowl group, What does it take to start recognizing your own personal “invisible knapsack”? What are the barriers in place that keep us from doing so?, Lisa responds with her own personal story of reading McIntosh’s text:

Lisa: So this is like the fourth or fifth time I’ve read um the Peggy McIntosh article about white privilege and just (.)/ I guess it didn’t hit me cause I hadn’t read it in a while/ but I was only able to say that two things on this list gave me privilege/ and I think it had to do with my skin complexion/ (.) I think it was number ten and number twenty-six/ ya know I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh colored that were like/ more or less match my skin/ um (.)/ya know that just/ I mean I just didn’t think going into this that I would/ actually I only have three/ so three out of twenty-six/I mean I just never thought about how much privilege that society gives people/ um just overall and how much I felt like ya know (.)/othered from this article/ I- I really felt like (.)/ I just didn’t have any power/ I didn’t feel empowered at all/

In telling the story of her reading, Lisa suggests the way she is positioned by McIntosh’s article (“othered”; “didn’t feel empowered at all”), claiming the right to expose these feelings within this setting. With Robin taking her turn next, Lisa’s right is affirmed, but not until Lisa Delpit, an African-American woman, is chastised for writing an “offensive” piece. Storytelling form is now under examination as Robin discusses what it was like to be White and reading Delpit’s text that questioned the motives and practices of the White educators with which she
Robin: This article had a really um ((clears throat)) a big um impact on me because we read/ I think it was the Delpit article that um talked about the reverse racism/ and we talked about it my own (.) discussion group but I was offended by the article/ not by what it was saying but I think that the manner in which things are stated definitely have an effect on how people are going to react to them?/ and I’m a really strong willed person/ and I feel that I’m being attacked somehow my defense is not to tell you well no this this and this/ my defense is to just fight back/ not to be listening to what an-/ not to hear the points that they’re saying/ like I’m angry/ I wanna tell you why I’m angry/ and I felt that way with the article/ and I even wrote that/ ya know that maybe there is some valid points in here/ I can’t see past them because I feel like especially somebody that is White and going into the teaching curriculum that I shouldn’t even be doing this!/ because if this article is telling me that god White teachers are terrible/ I should not be looking into this profession at all/ but reading something like this (referring to McIntosh’s article)/ I think it’s a really big step from the racism and the preconceived notions that people already hold about it/
list of items in the invisible knapsack of white privilege.

Lisa: So this is was kind of more constructive for you all than Lisa Delpit’s saying like this is what this is/ this is what this is/ this is how the structure of power goes/ I actually always appreciate reading um Peggy McIntosh as well because it comes a very/ I guess leveled view/ and she goes into like everyday things that you can do/ like I definitely/ when I go out in the world/ I can’t just pick any restaurant and bring all my friends to it/ the restaurant/ it just might not turn out well/ um we might be treated differently/ and there have been incidences where we have been treated differently/ I can’t just pick up hair products at the store/

As Lisa positions her mostly White peers as needing to read something more comfortable and perhaps less angry to alter their understandings of privilege and oppression, she affiliates herself with Robin’s storyline and sees an opening to speak of her own experience with oppression. Next, Robin and Sara affiliate themselves with Lisa’s story, all three of them now following the same storyline concerning the effectiveness of McIntosh’s text.

Robin: We’re just taught to see it as the norm/

Lisa: Yeah exactly/

Sara: And it’s not brought to our attention/ at all/ and that’s what can (.) like slowly change/ if that/ if like this awareness was (.) if this was brought up (.) then people/

Robin or Lisa: In a constructive way

Sara: Yeah in a constructive way/ then people could slowly begin to understand/

In reasserting the value of a “constructive” way of bringing up privilege, in this case, to White people, Sara affiliates herself with Robin’s original storyline and Lisa’s coining of this very term. It is a moment that caps off a normative order around who and what kinds of narratives should be listened to, heard and taken up as necessary for altering understanding around privilege and oppression. Similar to the earlier conversation around story “validity”, a
A “constructive” story is one that enables someone to more fully consider someone else’s story about living through oppressive circumstances. While both Delpit and McIntosh’s text speak to manifestations of white privilege, it was McIntosh’s that ultimately held more weight for Robin and Sara, two White students. Importantly, Lisa also recognized the need for more “leveled” texts, such as McIntosh’s, but did so in light of what she believed her White peers needed to read in order to gain deeper understanding about their own privilege. She effectively recognizes the rules of understanding an Other’s circumstances— they may need to be framed or told in a less pointed way. These students come to a consensus about these implicit discursive rules without further question about what it means to render some texts more “valid” and “constructive” than others. Yet, Lisa’s conversation with Daniel in which she questions the contingencies of taking up others’ stories suggests a heightened awareness of the regulations attached to narratives within critical classroom conversations. Indeed, throughout this narrative event, there is negotiation of how to listen and understand when stories are told and claims are made in varying ways. Ultimately, and as the third narrative event will show, this negotiation also relies upon moving, if only momentarily, out of “striated orders” (Davies, 2009; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) where new ways of being, thinking, listening and doing become available.

**Third Narrative Event: Slipping In and Out of Striated Orders**

The first and second narrative events illustrated various storytelling rules that functioned, even momentarily, throughout the classroom space. These rules worked to position particular students within various storylines that determined how we should talk about, listen and negotiate our own stories in light of others—normative orders that constituted and were constituted within my students’ storytelling practices. These orders were not stagnant, however, as there were various moments where students attempted to reposition themselves and shirk the established
order that rendered them to be a certain type of person. Sometimes these challenges were successful, as in the cases of Robin’s repositioning of herself as hardworking despite coming from an economically privilege household and Lisa’s attempt to keep her peers narratives focused on the manifestations of privilege. And sometimes these were not, as in the case of Mark, whose family Holocaust story went by the wayside in favor of the more conventional narrative around “wealthy families” and educational opportunity.

Next, in keeping with a focus on the way stories were operating amongst myself and my students, I examine what it is for these students to encounter and negotiate stories of those who have been Othered. While this is similar to *The Color of Fear* discussion in that these stories became material for discussion, the following event emerges from an in-class panel with Bristol Pride, a LGBTQ community advocacy group in town. In particular, the following conversation traces both the discursive maintenance and subversion of the gendered and sexualized order that my students engaged in after hearing the stories of three panelists. While I prompted the class to think about their own histories in light of what they thought and felt about LGBTQ issues and the panelists, there was surprisingly little inclusion of personal narratives told throughout this narrative event. Instead, the following narrative event is significant in that it is centered on the panelists’ stories, particularly those of Taryn, a transgendered woman who was in the process of biologically transitioning from man to woman. I have had Taryn on a number of other panels prior to this one and, within them all, she details what it was like for her to grow up in a biologically male body, desperately wanting to not be there. Because of this, she lived through both physical and emotional violence but has seemed increasingly content as she her body has changed due to hormones. Additionally, Taryn is typically the most physically “striking” panel member, as she was during this particular class, as she often wears bright colors and “typically
female” clothing but retains some masculine features. She is also outspoken and quite explicit about her story, seemingly not censoring much of the details about what it is to now be living in San Francisco as a male to female transgendered individual.

The following event traces the discursive moves that my students and I made as we worked to question the taken for granted in terms of both gender and sexuality, making room for “old territories [to be] rethought, reterritorialized [and] new connections [to]occur” (Davies, 2008, p. 21). As the students reflected on their encounter with the panelists’ stories, as they did with the stories emerging from The Color of Fear and their own peers, they negotiated how they were to begin to understand that which stood outside of the binary oppositions of male/female and straight/gay. In what follows, I trace this negotiating process and, in particular, the ruptures and maintenance of normative orders as students encounter Others’ stories. Indeed, it is the students’ “constituting the viability and non-viability of the lives of others” (p. 29) that is of particular importance as I examine the “complex conditions of our mutual formation” (p. 30).

“You can accept it, but it’s hard to like wrap your head around it”. Mark’s words resonate with many of his fellow peers as he and the rest of the class negotiate a class we had, two days prior where three members of the GLBTQ community came and told their stories of coming out and being outside of the bounds of what too often is viewed as “normal” in terms of their sexuality and gendered performances. I asked the students to broadly reflect on their experience with this panel, which included two transgendered persons and a bisexual woman.

The large group discussion that followed was one in which students, as Mark foreshadowed, attempted to “wrap their heads around” the stories they heard, sometimes telling small stories of their own to bolster their claims, but more often negotiating the panelists’ stories
and larger storylines concerning gender and sexuality.

Following Mark’s lead, the discussion begins with students storying their experience with the panelists. When Kylie responds to Mark and states that it is, indeed, “more difficult to wrap your head around [people that are transgender] because that’s...a lot less talked about even than other GLBTQ issues” an invitation goes out to the rest of the class to provide their take on who they took the panelists to be. Taryn, in particular, is on the students’ mind. This positioning of Taryn’s story as something to be uncovered and, at some point, “finally understood” suggests that stories are perhaps being understood as autonomous and finalized versions of oneself. Yet, abruptly and in response to Mark and Kylie, Emily, a White student who, in our interviews together revealed her desire to but nervousness in becoming a teacher, shifts the conversation away from considering how to understand Taryn’s story to the story content itself. Notably, Emily wonders about the racist and gendered language that Taryn used within the various small stories she told to the class. I also noticed this language and was, admittedly, pleased that Emily brought this up with the rest of the class. Yet, Emily’s turn suggests a sort of discomfort with “calling Taryn out” given how she is positioned as someone who was transgendered and her peers acknowledgement of this positioning. Her turn is “choppy” and unsure as she questions the language Taryn used.

*Emily*: I think like/ I think part of the/ umm I was actually really surprised because (.) like they’re not in this class so they’re not necessarily like aware of like what we’re ( )/ with word choice and stuff/ and I was actually really surprised that like/ I mean they made that ( ) people like/ I don’t know like/ I think Taryn ummm/ (1) was saying like ya know walk more like a girl/ Asian steps ((a few in the class agree with “yeeahh”))

With her words, Emily refocuses the conversation on the *way* that Taryn storied herself, having simultaneously positioned women as being obligated to walk a certain way and linking
this to the perception of Asian women, in particular, as quiet in presence and small in stature. Emily’s surprise was rooted in the blatancy of Taryn’s positioning of women and Asians and the fact that Taryn, a member of a discriminated group herself, was doing this work to limit the conditions of possibility for other marginalized groups. Encountering other stories often takes unexpected turns and, in this case, the “turn” prompted Emily to question Taryn’s use of language and position her as discriminatory, herself.

Yet, in continuing to discuss Taryn’s use of language, new students enter into the conversation to negotiate what this use of language meant and position Taryn in nuanced ways. Kylie begins, naming the process of reclaiming previously derogatory words that is often so important for marginalized groups. In tandem with her own personal story of friends who have done this, she positions Taryn as someone who has the right to, for instance, use the word ‘dyke’ as part of this reclamation process.

**Kylie:** I think as far as language is concerned/ Taryn also used the word dyke which is something that a member/ somebody who’s not a member of the GLBT community/ that’s like a pretty um bad ya like bad/ ( ) words your not supposed to use/ um and I/ I have this uh group of friends cause I really ( ) a lot in Denver/ and um they call each other fags all the time/ and it’s sort of like a reclamation process/ like I ( )/ and I just think that’s really interesting/ how language can be used in different ways/

Kylie’s small story bolsters the new claim that perhaps Taryn ought to be able to use the language that she did, at least in terms of talking about the GLBTQ community. It is a claim that acknowledges the social work that language does, but also one that repositions Taryn as perhaps more aware of and intentional about her language use than Emily previously suggested. Dane, Kate, and Allie add on, helping to further position Taryn as someone who has the right to story her experience in a particular way. To do so, Dane deems language “too PC” at times, Kate alludes to the value of humor in telling stories about difficult circumstances, and Allie uses her
own personal story of gender performance to give Taryn discursive freedom to perform her
gender, but also questions this performance.

**Dane:** It makes me think that ya know political correctness/ too much of anything is a bad thing/ and I feel like thats kind of the case where we’re too P C sometimes/ like it/ ya know she’s making a joke/ stuff like that/ and if we didn’t have to deal with like the real hatred in this world/ it wouldn’t be a big deal/ ya know it would just be a word/ and cause there is this hatred/ um (.) you have to be PC and have to deal with it/ and have the/ the sort of like/ the tearing apart every little thing that everyone says/

**Kate:** I think it’s really hard to come from something like that/ and the fact that she’s thinking ( ) thoughts that/ you have to have a sense of humor/ and it’s like every other person drops jokes like that all the time whether they realize that or not/ and like you can say that you (.) hold yourself back when certain people are around/ but you can even see (.) stereotyping without even realizing just because you know that ( )/so I feel like in some ways it’s a way for her to break the ice/ and (.) an easier way to go about things/ it’s kind of just like everybody calls people names of their own/ where they come from or what they do and stuff/ and so like more and stuff/

**Allie:** Yeah I mean even Taryn was stereotyping herself/ she’s like oh I have to watch myself not take too big of bites or something/ and it’s like I don’t know I inhale my Chipotle/ ((class laughs))/ And like I still take my tequila shots without salt and lime ((class laughs))/ ya know so like it’s not necessarily/ I mean so she has like her understanding of what it means to be a girl to her/ ya know but it’s almost like/ I mean she went to the/ she’s taking it to an extreme of what it’s like to be a girl/ ya know like/ ya know small steps/ eat little/ ya know chaser always with food and drinks or something/

While he fails to acknowledge the fact that the world’s “hatred” is not separate from the use of these derogatory (but sometimes reclaimed) words, Dane moves the conversation away from both Emily and Kylie’s claims around the power of language in order to consider what he feels is the excessive nature of being “too PC”. It is a moment where I cringe inside, wondering how this will shift a conversation that was beginning to rupture the taken-for-granted in terms of encountering o/Others’ stories. I worried that his comment would move the conversation
away from considering how language is constitutive of and within systems of power. Kate furthers this claim, positioning Taryn as having the right to use stereotypical language to describe herself and others as a way to “break the ice”. Indeed, it is a move towards a normative order that suggests we *ought* to be able to place others and ourselves in stereotypical categories if not because we are being “too PC”, but because it can be a humorous way to talk about difficult circumstances. Yet, Dane and Kate also cede some authority to Taryn to story herself in the way that she sees fit, perhaps recognizing what is at stake for her in this particular setting given her history of being positioned as Other.

With her turn, Allie complicates the rights Dane and Kate ascribe to Taryn, as she uses her own personal story of what it means to be a female, positioning herself outside of the bounds of the presumed gendered order that Taryn firmly placed herself within. In doing so, Allie takes herself to be someone who consciously disrupts this order by performing traditionally “male” qualities around food consumption (“I still take my tequila shots without lime”). Yet, in claiming herself to be “this type of female”, Allie not only positions herself as the “opposite” of Taryn, but as perhaps valuing her “male” performances more so than Taryn’s typically “female” ones. Indeed, there is a judgemental quality to Allie’s comments about Taryn’s gendered performances, one that signals an awareness of the choices we can make around how to “do” gender, but also a maintenance of the *value* we place on these choices. Allie’s more “male” qualities were not only positioned in opposition to the “female” ones that Taryn chose, but as *better* choices. Nevertheless, there is also the sense that Allie’s recognition of the different ways she and Taryn perform gender is indicative of an awareness of the stakes involved in moving outside of the gender binary. While Allie can perhaps do so with ease, it may very well be more difficult and more desired for Taryn to do so given how she is positioned by the larger society.
The need to know? Allie’s consideration of herself and Taryn within the male/female dichotomy quickly ends when, within the same turn, Allie transitions into a question about Charlotte, the other transgender person on the panel. During the same turn, in a seamless transition away from her thoughts on Taryn, Allie wonders about Charlotte’s gender status.

Allie: Um the question that wanted to ask/ that I’m confused now too/ cause she (.) identifies as transgender/ but sometimes she presents herself as a man/ so what makes her transgender but not a cross dresser?/ ya know she’s not transitioning (. ) to be a woman?/ she’s/ I don’t think she’s taking any hormones?/ or anything/ I think she just dresses as a woman/ so like what’s the difference between someone who cross dresses and someone who is actually transgender?/ or who I (          ) as transgender/

It is a turn that contributes to the genuine curiosity that has been emerging from the students during this conversation about the panelists and who they took themselves to be. Mark’s invitation to “wrap our minds” around who the panelists were was also one that kicked off a process of positioning Taryn as having the right to story herself and perform her gender in certain ways and not others. Allie continues along the same vein and attempts to “wrap her head” around Charlotte, this time attempting to get some answers around what particular terms mean and who Charlotte could be in light of these definitions. Allie’s questions prompt Emily to both affiliate herself with this questioning process, but also to point out that perhaps all of their wonderings signal a troubling preoccupation with “needing to know” who the Other really is.

Emily: I was thinking about that (2) too but (2) I don’t know/ I guess I kinda figured like/ what I got from it was the labeling/ best thing I got from it/ that like even two transgenders that were in our class were like completely different (                      )/ what it means to be transgender/ so it’s like/ I feel like training ourselves from making that shift from like needing to know what somebody is to just kind of (.) taking them as an individual as they were saying/ like it was like human/ ya know?/ like (.) it’s kind of fascinating /
Emily’s turn signals a shift in the process of negotiating Taryn’s, and now Charlotte’s, story. She attempts to halt the process of positioning started by her peers, commenting on the willingness to label Others and wondering whether we could just “take them as an individual” and as “human”. It is a moment that simultaneously questions what it means to negotiate another’s story but also one that suggests a problematic blindness to the differences in experiences that individuals, such as Taryn, face on a daily basis. Additionally, Emily’s use of the word “fascinating” implies a sort of distance from that which is to be gazed upon, discursively marking Taryn and Charlotte as Other just moments after she challenged this process of Othering by her peers. Nevertheless, in the excerpt below, Kate follows up on Emily’s comments, taking up this obligation to see everyone on an individual basis, positioning those who are Othered as having the right to “present themselves in the way they want to”.

Kate: Yeah but it’s just like they’re just as unique as every single one of us/ like if all of us were like one single person then like it wouldn’t be normal at all/ and it’s like/ there’s people that like to wear animal stuff and tramp around with that on campus/ there’s people that like to dress up in like all leather and like ( ) clothes and stuff like that/ and it kind of just like/ there’s like this certain like kinda self that each person has and it’s just because (.) they are into/ whether ( ) or not they can still present themselves in the way they want to/

In answering Emily’s obligatory call to consider everyone as an individual, Kate suggests that perhaps “normal” is a constructed notion and that we are all situated in terms of a defined norm. She begins her turn by playing with this concept of “normal”, redefining it away from “standard” and “the same” and towards a sense of diversity (“like if all of us were like one single person then like it wouldn’t be normal at all”). Whether this means wearing “animal stuff” or “all leather” around campus, Kate eludes to the fact that there are various ways that we can all perform outside of normative expectations though perhaps varying degrees to which we feel it
acceptable to do so. It is a subsequent turn away from the need to position both Taryn and Charlotte as particular kinds of people to a broader call to simply recognize that our self presentations are necessarily going to look different and are all situated in relation to a constructed norm. Implicitly, then, Kate suggests that the “need to know” imposed upon Taryn and Charlotte is actually scrutiny that perhaps those who simply wear clothes outside of what is considered the norm do not face.

As such, Kate’s turn is also a slight move away from Emily’s desire to seemingly erase difference and see o/ Others as simply human. She provides a new way of considering the various ways we are all positioned as either inside or outside of the norm. Yet, Kate’s ascription of rights for Others and the duties placed upon the class to recognize Taryn and Charlotte’s “differences” in relation to all of their divergent identity performances are not fully taken up, as the conversation instantly moves back to Allie’s question about the definition of a transgendered person.

**Kylie:** I would think as far as our question is concerned um (.) if you look at any gender root/ like ( ) gender are- are/ two people in our class who are biologically (.) male/ who were identifying as female?/ as the female gender/ I think that um any of us who identify as female gender/ whether you have those biological parts or not/ there’s a huge range of diversity within that/ which is we have like a super girly girl/ ( )/ and um/ ya know that’s a spectrum ( )/ the-the gender role ( )/ so that’s my idea that it was just which/ on a spectrum/ transgender/ Given Kylie’s comments, the class transitions back to the struggle to understand what counts as “different”, but with a very different valence. Despite Emily and Kate’s suggestion that it is important to consider what it would be like to simply sit with difference, rather than to define it, Kylie’s words indicate the strong pull to know and the need to position others in order to understand. However, Kylie contributes complexity to this negotiation of the necessity of
“taking in and needing to know”, introducing the notion that there may be a spectrum of gender roles that the students, as well as Charlotte, can take up. It is a positioning of selves and others that not only plays with the male/female dichotomy, but extends the right to “do” gender in a variety of ways. With her peers as her subjects, Kylie uses the pronoun “us” to suggest that we all should pay attention to the ways our biology may not correspond to the gender role it is typically ascribed. Rather, the “huge range of diversity” along the gender spectrum is applied to everyone in the room, as well as to Charlotte. Similar to Kate, Kylie attempts to break down “normal” by invoking the experience of her peers and inviting them to consider who they are along this spectrum. Indeed, it is an invitation to consider the self and Others, like Charlotte, as experiencing the same pull towards a gendered binary.

This rupture of the gendered order and positioning of both Charlotte, Taryn, and the rest of the class as having the right to remain “in the ruins” (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000) is then taken up by Robin as she comments, below, on the different values we place on the “female” and the “male”. Indeed, it is a moment that stands in contrast to Allie’s earlier valuation of these categories even as she recognized the fact that gender is a performance.

Robin: [ ] I found it interesting that/ going off of the girl/ we/ in society it may/ it seems/ it feels like that it’s OK for girls to act more like guys and not be a guy?/ then it is for a guy to kind of act like a girl/ ya know what I mean?/ like (.) a girl can dress up like a guy and do their thing/ and they’re a tomboy/ but they’re still a girl/ um but a guy/ like whoever like cross dresses or like dre-/ which/ who says that a guy can’t wear a dress?/ ya know what I mean?/

Robin contributes to the extension of rights of Others to step outside of the gendered order by recognizing that disrupting this order operates differently for those that identify as biologically male and female. Her final question, “who says that a guy can’t wear a dress?”, incites a further conversation about the meanings attached to men wearing dresses. In the
excerpt below, I wonder with Robin about the valued meanings that become attached to men who take on the “feminine” such as potentially being perceived, and often devalued, as gay.

Kate, Liam and Lucas then provide their perspective.

**Julia:** Or a guy who is just/

**Robin:** Who like to paints his nails!/

**Julia:** Feminine

**Robin:** Yeah/ and he’s

**Julia:** Then he’s considered gay and (1) it’s devalued

**Robin:** He doesn’t need to be gay/

**Julia:** Well he’s seen as gay/

**Robin:** Yeah!/ he’s seen as gay/ but he doesn’t see himself in that ( )

**Kate:** Like I feel there’s also something really American about this/ because if you go to Europe you see a lot of guys that are way more feminine/ and like in touch with that side of themselves and like you/ if you plop them in America a lot of people would stereotype them to be gay/ and so I kind of just think that it’s more here then it is anywhere else in the world?/ and also just like different cultures have different things of (1) approaching people/ like whether it’s hugging or kissing or stuff/ I don’t know I just feel like it’s more open in Europe/ whereas here/

**Liam:** Yeah I feel like if you’re a guy wearing a dress it’s probably a joke/ ( )/ so I mean yeah like trans-/ all (1)

**Lucas:** Cross gender or transgender/

**Liam:** Or- or/

**Lucas:** So/ that’s interesting like if I see a guy wearing a dress/ like it doesn’t- it doesn’t mean gay to me/ it’s/

**Liam:** I mean like certain bands or whatever/ like play in a dress/ like it’s a joke/ like people don’t do it as gay/

**Lucas:** No no/ yeah but- but it’s like/ for some it/ there are/ there are signals that make me think oh that person’s gay for like wearing (1) female clothing isn’t one of them/ that’s

Lucas and Liam provide perspective on Robin’s initial question about the stakes involved when a male enacts the feminine. To do so, they acknowledge the signifier, “wearing a dress”,


as producing alternative meanings around “being male”. While Liam and Lucas position men as being able to move outside of the gender binary by, for example, wearing a dress, this right is only afforded to them under certain circumstances. On the one hand, it is a subversion of the “striated order” (Davies, 2009, p. 25) to even acknowledge that a male would have the option of wearing a dress. On another, performing the feminine by wearing a dress is “probably a joke”, a statement that further reinscribes it as something men would not seriously adhere to, if tap into at all. Furthermore, Liam and Lucas’s exchange is simultaneously an admission that there are particular signals that we rely upon to place individuals into categories but also that these categories are hierarchically ordered. For instance, Liam quickly adds that when bands wear dresses “they don’t do it as gay”, which signals the devalued status of this category, even as it also challenges assumed alignment of gender performance and sexual orientation.

In this part of the conversation, both Taryn and Charlotte’s stories are being negotiated through hypothetical scenarios that my students have constructed around enacting the feminine and the masculine. Accordingly, “lines of flight” (Davies, 2009, p. 21) afforded to Taryn and Charlotte were tempered by conditions that limited ways of performing the masculine and the feminine. As Robin acknowledges the conditioned meaning placed upon a girl who invokes the masculine (“a tomboy”), so did Liam as he contended a male invoking the feminine was merely a joke. The students’ language is important, for as Davies notes, “the molar lines of force create rigid striations, and at the same time offer places for experience and experimentation, in which new movements become possible, where old territories can be rethought, re-territorialized, where new connections can occur” (p. 21). However, even as the male/female dichotomy is ruptured in acknowledging the possibility of crossing into unfamiliar, non-normative territory, a “predictable moral order” (p. 25) is once again established when this crossing is interpreted as merely play.
Indeed, although the possibility of crossing over is named, the deviance behind such movement remains.

**Negotiating the gendered order.** As I show below, this perception of deviance becomes more deeply entrenched as Mark enters into the conversation, helping to kick off further negotiation of how Taryn performs her gender and sexuality. His comments serve as a stronger pull back to a more traditional view of the gender binary, attempting to delegitimize the, albeit limited, space that his peers had begun to open up for becoming. In the next excerpt, Liam responds to Mark acknowledging Taryn’s gender performances as perhaps “too extreme”, performances that tended to be stereotypically “masculine” (e.g. “buff” and aggressive) when Taryn was younger and more “feminine”. Other students and myself respond in turn, further constructing the conditions of possibility for being a gendered subject in this world.

**Mark:** I just don’t see the motivation behind like dressing like a girl/ ((chuckles a bit))

**Liam:** Yeah well/ I- I mean obviously Taryn like takes it/ gender roles to the extreme/ like first (.) I have to be like this huge buff dude and like knock people’s teeth in/ and then (1) like (.) she’s just flipped that/ and it’s like (1) the woman she’s trying to be is like the woman society has created/ ya know?/ it’s not like/ why can’t she just like be feminine and/ or be proud of like (1) her own views or whatever/ but why is she so uncomfortable like with her body that she has to change it/ ya know?

**Julia:** So let’s dig into that/ so/ like talk about Taryn a little bit/ cause I think she is/ from who I’ve talked to and your journals and stuff/ like she’s seemingly the most controversial I think? (1) from the panel?/ or not con- I don’t know if that’s the right word but just talked about right?/ yeah is she uncomfortable with who she is?/ like what- what/ how did everyone read her?/

**Kylie:** Well I think Taryn is really interesting because (.) I mean she uhh (1) sort of confused the line for me between gender and sexual orientation/ which is something that’s very different so identifying as- as transgender/ there would really have to/ my understanding is that it doesn’t really have to do with your sexual preference?/ it’s just a personal like you’re put in the wrong body/ so for Taryn/ she feels like she’s a woman in her body/ like- like her mind/ she feels like she fits better into the category of woman/ in
gender but she’s biologically male/

**Liam:** But that’s like the socially constructed one/

**Kylie:** Right/ exactly/ she fits into that social norm system better than she does for male (.) system?/ even though she’s in a male body/ cause I thought it was really funny when she was saying that she’s a bisexual man trapped in/ or a bisexual woman trapped in a bisexual man’s body/

((class laughs))

**Julia:** Body/ yeah something like that/ yeah yeah/

**Emily:** And attracted to/

**Kylie:** And attracted to- to/ I don’t

**Mark:** To beautiful woman/ attractive and beautiful people/

((Class continues to laugh a bit))

**Liam:** I was wondering though like did it make like having to become like buff/ this huge like bodygaurd to reach that point where she (.) had to flip into/

**Allie:** Well she said/ she said that the whole point of her like becoming/ that was to kind of suppress and hide the/ like her desire to be a woman/ and so like instead of ya know just kind of going along with life she like went to the extreme to try and trick herself/

**Liam:** But she still enjoys like biking and like working out/

**Allie:** Well right!/ and she said that/ and there/ I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that/ if a girl wants to be a mechanic/ I think that’s totally fine/

In responding to Mark’s inquiry into “the motivation of dressing like a girl”, an attempt to rebuild the gendered order that was under deconstruction, Liam, Allie, Kylie, and Emily weigh in
on the value of this practice for Taryn. In one moment, Liam acknowledges the constructed, 
gendered order of things with his comment that Taryn is perhaps “a woman society has created”. 
However, with his later comments, Liam relies upon this order to position Tami at one point as 
“extremely male” and at another as “extremely female” then asking, “why can’t she be just be 
like feminine and/or be proud of like her own views or whatever?”. Consistent with Mark’s 
opening comments, Liam’s question suggests a level of judgement about who Taryn presents 
herself to be, words that continue to position Taryn within a deviant storyline- she ought to 
choose either the feminine or the masculine ways of being in order to reduce discomfort.

I attempt to focus the students on this point, an invitation for Kylie to give her reading of 
Taryn. Indeed, it is one that works as a defense of sorts against the judgement Mark and Liam’s 
words suggested as she responds that Taryn “feels like she’s a woman in her body/ like- like her 
mind/ she feels like she fits better into the category of woman/ in gender but she’s biologically 
male”. Additionally, Kylie positions Taryn as someone whose stories encouraged her to see both 
gender and sexuality in a new light (“I mean she uhh (1) sort of confused the line for me between 
gender and sexual orientation”). With his next turn, Liam furthers illustrates the degree to which 
he understands gender as a performative phenomenom, yet he remains skeptical of the socially 
constructed category of “woman” that Taryn operates within. Kylie and Allie ardently defend 
Taryn, as they recognize her movement from biological male to biological female was 
accompanied by a change in gender performance, both acceptable from their perspectives. Still, 
Liam questions the fact that Taryn “still likes biking and working out”, practices that he 
associates with the masculine, but are both activities that are arguably shared across gender 
identities in the lives of college students. The striated gendered order is, again, on the line. Allie 
recognizes the work that Liam is doing to limit the conditions of possibility for Taryn and
affirms the way Taryn has positioned herself, once again positioning herself as an advocate alongside Taryn. Indeed, the gendered order is in the process of both being pried open and closed off from moment to moment. According to Liam, Taryn has the right to shift gender roles, but only to a certain extent. For Allie and Kylie, this order is more malleable, as Taryn’s gendered performances are viewed as necessary for her to have a flourishing life.

Next, and as Robin enters this conversations, she and Kylie continue to negotiate Taryn’s gender performances. In the following excerpt, Robin focuses more closely on her own gender performance using her own story to understand Taryn’s experience.

**Kylie:** I- I think it was interesting that she/ um/ when she was talking about that/ ya know she said that she often gets the response of well why don’t you just stay in a man’s body then act like a girl/ if you wanna act like a man/ why do you wanna be a woman’s body/ and I think that was really interesting/ because it’s not like she (        )

**Robin:** And even when she was saying thats he was um/ felt like she’s (.) um had to be kind of like manly girl/ it was interesting when she’s said that because a lot of her actions came off to me as very feminine/ like just her mannerisms and she would talk and she/ ya know/ like girls be like (        )/ playing with our hair/ and she did a lot of like the actions that to me were really girly and that’s/ I- I saw the same thing that you said/that it is like she was really masculine too/ and she even said to overcompensate for it/ but when she was able to embrace the feminine side of her/ I think she embraced a lot more of the feminine quaility of maybe even like she realizes/

**Liam:** Well I’m sure she practiced it/ ((After Robin finishes turn))/ I think/ but she/ she like apologizes for her voice/ it’s not like any of us are like/

**Robin:** See but that was self consciousness that a girl would have/ like if- if I came in and I was really sick the first thing I would say/ ((in a scratchy voice))/ oh I’m sorry guys for my voice/ ya know?/

As Robin alludes to the fact that Taryn felt obligated to be a “manly girl”, she claims that Taryn was perhaps more feminine than she realized. This does not close down possibilities for
Taryn, but actually acknowledges the ways that gender can be performed given particular social contexts. According to Robin, Taryn’s apology for her deeper voice was an entirely appropriate and acceptable feminine trait, as she tells a hypothetical tale of her doing the same with the class. Robin affords Taryn praise for getting the “feminine” right during her visit with the class, recognizing the fact that social conditions may help determine how gender is performed. This is in contrast to Liam’s positioning of Taryn as merely having “flipped” between the masculine and feminine with little acknowledgment of the fact that this movement is, itself, determined and contingent.

“I was kind of uncomfortable, even when I was accepting”. Discomfort and acceptance are two words that came to me as I listened to my students negotiate who Taryn was and who she was allowed to be. Typically, these terms can imply mutual exclusivity- if one is experiencing discomfort, they are likely not accepting of a situation. Yet, these conditions co-existed during our conversation, a circumstance that, indeed, made me uncomfortable with what was unfolding, but also hopeful that my students were doing important work in negotiating both their own and others’ narratives. I ask my students about these two conditions they were seemingly vacillating between. The following segments suggest that my question was an invitation for students to move closer to the personal, and consider how they personally encountered the panelists and what it meant for encountering those who are positioned as outside of the norm, in general.

As this part of the discussion began, Sara eagerly answers my inquiry about discomfort and acceptance first, noting the way she felt she was being perceived by the panelists. It was a moment that signaled a shift away from negotiating Taryn, to a reflection on feeling misunderstood by the panelists and the way Sara was being positioned.

Sara: OK/ I felt like I was kind of uncomfortable even when I was accepting/ I just felt like I was more on the defense because I think they naturally assumed that their audience wouldn’t understand or try to
understand/ cause there is a lot of negativity towards most of them/ so I felt like when I was listening/ I really wanted to like try and understand more but it was a lot of thinking that us/ not T girls/ I forgot what she called them

**A few students:** G girls

**Sara:** The G girls didn’t understand and so I was well ( ) so much/

**Robin:** That’s what I felt too/

While the conversation thus far has mostly focused on the one-way transfer of stories to the students from the panelists (the structure made it this way), Sara and Robin’s comments signal the presence and importance of their own stories. Being labeled as “G girls”, or the term Taryn gave to biologically born females who identify as girls/women, these students felt positioned as individuals who were not attempting to understand the experiences of those who lived gender differently. An obligation was placed upon them they thought they were fulfilling in the moments of listening to Taryn and her fellow panelists, yet felt perceived as not having done so or even as not capable of doing so. This dissonance was troubling for both of these students.

Although Robin is the only student who directly takes up Sara’s reflection, the comments illustrate a shift in the class discussion to considering themselves as a significant part of the exchange of stories. It matters that they and their performed identities were in the room. It matters that they were the ones listening to Taryn and her fellow panelists. And it matters that their positioning of themselves was different than how they were being positioned by the panelists. Just as their peers negotiated the conditions of possibility for Taryn and Charlotte, positioning them amongst normative orders that suggested particular rights and duties, Sara and Robin illustrate how they were similarly positioned as those “that didn’t get it”. In one sense this is the case, for they can never fully “get” what it is to be in Taryn and Charlotte’s experience. Yet, it is also a moment that draws me back to the idea that everyone’s stories, perceptions, and accompanying positioning of selves in light of others is always present. This is a necessarily
relational process, whether a one-way panel of storytellers is set up or there is room for more inclusive discussion.

Sara’s heartfelt response to my question about discomfort and acceptance was unexpected, raw, and vulnerable as she pulled the conversation away from who Taryn was and ought to be, to considering what it meant to “talk across difference” given the stories we tell about ourselves and others. It is also an allusion to the rules of storytelling that this class has been implicitly constructing throughout the semester. Here, Sara and Robin turn to the regulations placed on their own stories when who they took themselves to be in terms of listening and attempting to understand those who have “a lot of negativity towards them” is not acknowledged as even a possibility.

Moments later, Kylie takes up my question of discomfort and acceptance invoking a physical distance/closeness dichotomy that suggests some storied constructions are more valued than others. Similar to the discussion involving McIntosh’s “constructive” narrative and Delpit’s “invalid” one, Kylie begins a negotiation around what story form will help create the most comfort and acceptance.

Kylie: And as far as the discomfort and then acceptance/ how they relate intellectually?/ it’s easy to accept something/ or not easy but easier to accept something that you’re not aware of or you don’t see a lot depending on what’s in front of you/ and it’s something that (1) is uh sort of like socially unacceptable/ I mean uh actually having it right front of you/ it’s a lot harder to reach that level of comfort/ where intellectually it was like/

With her turn, Kylie alludes to two different ways that you can come to know about another’s experience. On the one hand, those things “you’re not aware of or you don’t see a lot depending on what’s front of you” allow for the greatest acceptance and comfort. On the other, having the “socially unacceptable…right there in front of you” does not necessarily provide such
comfort. Kylie’s words imply a difference between the emotional experience and stakes involved for taking in stories when storytellers are physically present rather than kept at a distance. There is, Kylie contends (and as Mark’s case study will later show), a different, more visceral quality to in-person storytelling by those that are marginalized and one that may, as a result, fail to get taken up, at all, or in equity oriented ways. Implicitly, Kylie recognizes that such contingencies will necessarily have an impact on what “talking across difference” looks like and how participants are positioned. Austin and Allie join Kylie in further negotiating these guidelines through which talking across difference ought to happen given these contingencies.

In the next turn, Austin begins by directly challenging Kylie’s claims that the in-person may be more uncomfortable. He uses Harvey Milk’s story, the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in the U.S., to bolster his own claims about the way new understandings about Others can happen.

**Austin:** I think their presence makes people more comfortable/ the presence of people/ cause I know in the film Harvey Milk/ he talks/ and I’m not sure if this part in the movie is actually true/ but I know/ um in the movie he tells ya know all the people ya know you need to come out because it’ll be different/ we’ll think about gay people differently when they know that their neighbor/ their son/ their brother/ their cousin is gay/ so I feel like when there’s more transgendered people/ when you know that someone is actually transgender/ or where the uh/ ya know people who are transgender are in power/ or they just have ya know/ or they’re visible/ I think that people will be more accepting/ just like they are/ cause like fifty years ago (.) not everyone knew gay people were ( )/ but there were plenty of/ gay sure/ gay people are minorities/ ya know there are more straight people on this earth than gay people but no one/ not everyone knew one/ ya know cause people weren’t able to come out/ and I feel like now with transgender um people being more (.) ya know out there/ even though they/ they’re more visible today than they were even ten years ago so a lot of people who maybe want to be transgender or they are transgender can finally feel comfortable with- with ( )/ or ya know finally come out as transgender/ cause you have to come out as transgender in front of you know being there with ( )/  

**Kylie:** I think change can happen if um/ if/ I think/ I really like what you’re saying about like seeing somebody and having like a presence and talking to somebody and realizing that you’re just a person/ and
that they’re not like a freak or anything like that/ it’s just a person to have an intelligent conversation with and not ( _______ ) angry and like being/ like it’s just a person/ and I think that we can see that early in schooling/ I felt that a lot/ before they have a / before they have like ( _______ )/ we can sort of like get that understanding/

**Allie:** Yeah I agree cause I think um/well I think introducing it to the schools/ to education because (1) while it would be nice to be like oh yeah they’re presence makes it better/ it just doesn’t seem that’s what happens in society/ it seems like the disadvantaged groups still have to do a lot of fighting for themselves/ by themselves/ before they’re actually heard/ before society will realize/ wait a minute/ ya know there has to be a lot of violence and hate crimes before society can take a step back and be like oh maybe there isn’t anything wrong with being gay/ after all these heinous things have happened ya know?/ and I just/ I feel like in that regard it’s still really unfair/ I think disadvantaged groups have to (.) go through so much before they’re actually heard and understood/ before they/ before someone who’s transgendered can be in the classroom and not ya know and tol-/ at least tolerated in the classroom/

**Austin:** They’d have to go from like being counter culture to like main culture/

**Allie:** Yeah/

Implicit within Austin, Kylie and Allie’s discussion of the value of an-Other’s presence in the lives of those considered mainstream are claims to what ought to occur for comfort and acceptance to develop. Kylie acknowledges that the in-person may be an effective way of coming to new understandings about Others. However, with her comments on the value of truly “seeing” someone as “just a person to have an intelligent conversation with”, Kylie positions the listener as having responsibility to reduce the process of othering. Allie aligns herself with Kylie and notes that she views the mere presence of those who are Othered as simply not enough for them to be “heard and understood”. Moreover, in stating that “it seems like the disadvantaged groups still have to do a lot of fighting for themselves...before they’re actually heard”, Allie recognizes the way marginalized groups can be positioned a less valued storytellers and that this
is also indicative of the lack of allies for these communities. Adding on to the developing storyline concerning how talking across difference, now for explicitly justice oriented purposes, ought to occur, Austin notes that these groups typically must shift from counterculture to be considered mainstream in order for them to be what Allie suggests is “at least tolerated in the classroom”. It is a recognition of how marginalized groups are typically positioned as having the duty to assimilate, rather than, as the students did at times with the panelists, redefine the norm itself.

Austin continues to challenge this storyline where an altered, more palatable narrative must be told in order for marginalized groups to gain footing. In his next turn, he uses The Cosby Show as an example of marginalized groups “assimilating to White culture”. A conversation ensues.

**Austin:** And what’s like/ with disadvantaged groups with races/ I feel like a lot of like what got um (1) African-American’s into like ya know mainstream/ they’re not like us they’re different/ or like shows that African-Americans as like um assimilating to white culture/ like the Cosby Show/ that was the first really successful show about African-Americans but ya know the first shows/ they didn’t ya know/ the first shows that came out weren’t ya know Friday ((referring to the film series)) and like all li/ ya know the ( ) movies/ those came later/ because ya know you have to ya know first show America that ya know Black people are just like us/ they ya know have jobs/ they wanna secure education for their future and they’re successful ( )

**Kylie:** Hmm mmm/ and I thought that that was a really good example because they’re also Christians and middle class which is like drawing parallels to like White male Christian middle class as (long) as possible/ and like Bill Cosby’s like the head of the family/ he ya know it’s a very American family structure/

**Lucas:** That- that connects with the-/ oh sorry/

**Kylie:** No that’s OK/
**Lucas:** Yeah um but that connects with the uh/ the ( ) reading for today though right?/ like- like our/ our culture has this (.) i- the picture of a gay person in our culture now that like we actually can picture those people is like White middle class male/ and- and I realize that was true for me/ it’s like oh yeah!/ that’s my picture of a gay person/ how interesting/ ya know/ um so/ I don’t know I- I think/ I think drawing parallels is important but I think it can also kind of distract from like the/ the idea/ it’s like oh they’re all/ they’re just like us!/ and you run into the problem with it/ yeah they’re not exactly like us and there are tons of problems/

**Kylie:** Oh yeah true/

As both Austin and Kylie analyze *The Cosby Show* in terms of the narrative it told of one African-American family, they consider how the story of this family had to be told in order for it to be acceptable to the “White, male, Christian, middle class”. The telling had to relay the message “Black people are just like us”, effectively creating the illusion of sameness with no mention of systemic privilege or oppression. Lucas picks up on this requirement, commenting that the “they’re just like us!” narrative is problematic as “tons of problems” are overlooked. In effect, Lucas is referring to Boler’s (1999) notion of passive empathy whereas experiences of privilege and oppression are considered but eventually consumed as sameness by those observing from a distance. Indeed, some of his peers relied upon passive empathy to engage with stories in previous narrative events. Yet, I would also argue that what these students in this conversation are so astutely getting at is even prior to Boler’s conception of passive empathy. Kylie, Austin and Lucas identify a troubling normative order that dictates those who have been marginalized to not even mention the conditions of their existence that led to this positionality. In addition to Lucas’s claim that such an order “distracts...from the idea” of considering how various communities have been positioned as more or less deserving, I would add that this particular order works to limit the conditions of existence for marginalized groups as they become limited in the stories they can tell and the forms within which they can tell these stories.
Notably, this final conversation with Kylie, Austin, Lucas and Allie illustrated a moment where students peered into the structure of things and questioned the regulations placed on these groups. Similar to Leah’s conversation with Daniel when she asked him to consider how he may be perceiving her stories given her race, these students stepped back to consider how the very ways that we may be “giving voice” to Othered groups, may be reproducing forces of domination. This narrative event explored this very question as students variously took up the voices and stories of the Bristol Pride panelists and positioned them along both dominant and counter storylines. In doing so, the gendered and sexual order of things was considered, played with, but not finalized. Rather, this narrative event illustrates the ways that students negotiated these orders for the panelists but also for themselves, at times closing down possibilities and, in others, opening up narratives of resistance.

In the next four chapters, I more closely examine Lisa, Catherine, Austin, and Mark’s experiences as they reflected upon their own and others’ storytelling practices throughout the course. It is this more focused lens that enables a look into how stories operated for these particular students and myself during class, as well as what it was be given the opportunity to reflect more deeply on these practices within the interviews.
Chapter 6

Negotiating Storytelling as a Seeing and Caring Process

Lisa

Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can.

(Grumet, 1987, p. 322)

Cause I want you to look at me and see like my olive skin and curly hair and like big nose. Like they’re there for a reason... Like you should- you need to see me.

(Lisa, February 15, 2011)

One month into the semester, in a busy university coffee shop, Lisa and I chatted about her father’s participation in the civil rights movement. She took great pride in giving me detail into his career that included working with Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King Jr., as well as helping to organize a local march similar to the one on Washington in 1963. As a civil rights attorney, Lisa’s father worked on Brown v. Board and, in her words, “felt that nothing should be separated. He always had a problem with the separation of races”. Yet, he was also, in her words, “readily aware of race” and helped to instill in Lisa an anti-colorblind ideology that required a recognition of race, a seeing of race and a seeing of someone’s outward characteristics as evidence of their stories and experiences.

As she asked the world to see her, to see the genetic combination of her White mother and Black father and the stories that are contained within, it occurred to me that to ask to be seen was the storying process for Lisa. Her storytelling was a request, an obligation even, of others to recognize the history, the struggles and the successes of who she was as a Black woman working
towards her Masters degree in education. Nevertheless, Lisa’s desire to be seen and heard within this class was hardly a straightforward process. Indeed, the emphasis with which she requested to be seen during our first meeting was one of the first indications that the process of storytelling was fraught with challenges for Lisa in a class that had predominantly White, middle and upper class students and a White, middle class instructor.

In what follows, I explore these challenges and the negotiation processes that Lisa went through as she acknowledged how she was positioned in the midst of narrative rules for telling and listening within discussions concerning difference, diversity, and equity. Through interviews with Lisa, her journals, educational autobiography, class conversations, and my own reflections I discuss Lisa’s keen awareness of these rules, her own storytelling and silence, as well as the discursive moves she made to reposition herself through the use of counternarratives. Indeed, of particular importance is the degree to which Lisa was able to put forth alternative storylines around the use of narrative in this classroom and reposition herself in light of these new discourses. It was a process of desiring to be seen by others on her own terms, being fully aware of the barriers to this process, and both countering and re-invoking master narratives around storytelling.

**Shifting**

During our initial interview, it was not entirely surprising to me that Lisa would open up about her family’s history. About one month into the semester, she was an eager and outgoing participant in class, willing to share her thoughts on educational injustice, thoughts that were bolstered by Lisa’s degree in ethnic studies and, certainly, her own experiences as a woman of color going to both public schools. Lisa was also interested in becoming a high schoo
history teacher to “actually teach history the way history was and not how they [dominant
groups] want to interpret it”. Yet, as I asked Lisa about the way she thought her stories of
educational experience and those directly related to being a woman of color were told and
listened to in class, she reflected on the decisions she made to not speak more candidly about her
personal experiences with her peers.

**Lisa:** But also I just don’t know which stories I want to share with the class /because I also have to
remember like they’re not my friends/ so I can’t speak to them as if I were in a conversation with
like my other friends down in Deacon who I feel in a way will be more empathetic and sympathetic
in my views/ because they are operating under the same conditions of oppression/

**Julia:** Hmm/

**Lisa:** Versus everyone in class who is predominantly White/ and attending the University of
Colorado Boulder regardless of class but ya know the- the racial lines/

**Julia:** The racial thing/.

**Lisa:** Yeah/

**Julia:** It’s very salient/

**Lisa:** It is and I think there’s just stories that I/ ya know my everyday life on campus might be funny
to somebody down in Deacon but if I were to tell somebody in class they might be a little offended by
ya know what I/ what I said/

With her comments, Lisa provides insight into her own potential silence in this class.

Aware of the way she was likely being positioned as an outsider due to her race, Lisa suggests
that her own tellings would likely be better received by those in her own community, especially
those that “operate under the same conditions of oppression”. Lisa’s silence is not simply one
of a “quiet student” or evidence of marginalization as is often touted by progressive educators
concerned with promoting student voice. Rather, Lisa’s voice is contingent upon her awareness
of how she may be perceived as a woman of color in her class full of White peers. As Jones
(2004) notes, silence can be a “pragmatic rejoinder to a set of conditions beyond [non-dominant
students’] control” and “a rational response to their (dominant) peers’ lack of ability to hear and understand (p. 60). Her “life on campus”, referring to the way she experiences being a woman of color on a predominantly White campus, would be taken up differently by those in Deacon, the city a half hour away with more racial diversity and where Lisa grew up. Indeed, the rules of storytelling are dynamic and shift for Lisa depending upon her audience.

Lisa theorizes these narrative rules more explicitly for me a bit later in the conversation and speaks of the precautions she takes in my class to “shift”, a “sort of subterfuge...where Black women are relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 6-7). In fact, Lisa refers me to Jones and Shorter-Gooden’s work as she identifies the shifting she does in order to tell her personal stories to her peers. Turning back to class conversations, it becomes apparent how she has shifted to navigate conversations where she perhaps, at times, feels “at home” and, at others, feels as though she must silence particular stories. For instance, during the first narrative event she and Sophie, who is White but comes from a working class family, shared their small, personal stories of “struggling” and, therefore, maintaining particular perspectives on education as opposed to their more privileged peers. By contrast, in the second narrative event Lisa never explicitly tells a small story of experiencing oppression when in conversation with Adam, Daniel and Martin, even after Austin paved the way in doing so. Instead, she more generally claims that, “there are certain groups” who have been oppressed by a system of white privilege. Notably, her first instance in explicitly speaking about her personal experience with the class is in connection to Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) text, Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of Whiteness, the more “official” source to which she initially referred. However, she spoke about the privileges she had, including
being able to choose blemish cover and bandages that matched her skin color. While she 
eventually tells the small stories of how she cannot just go to any restaurant with friends or 
readily pick up hair products, it is still in the context of McIntosh’s text. While I cannot be sure 
whether this was shifting in the sense that Lisa felt as though she had to “hide her true self”, it is 
apparent that Lisa altered her storytelling depending on the audience. Additionally, her insight 
into how her own stories are taken up by others, and the work she does to position herself is not 
something that is just occurring to her in our discussions. She was, during this first interview, 
merely making explicit what is part of the everyday for Lisa.

As she provides initial insight into the connection between storytelling and the demands 
to shift she feels in particular circumstances, Lisa also positions her peers as not fully capable of 
understanding her stories and the value they hold. I ask her what would it take for her to share 
something that was particularly salient to her, such as her father’s story.

Lisa: I think if I really felt like they would get something very valuable out of what I said?/ then I’d probably go ahead and share it/ uhhh/ cause eventually I probably will share a lot about my dad/ because again I know more about Brown versus Board probably then the ordinary person/ but yeah/ I feel like if they’re gonna be empowered by what I say rather than me feeling like I'm just saying like my side of the argument then I may feel more inclined to share/ 

Julia: What does that mean?/ that they’ll feel empowered/ what does that mean to you?/ 
Lisa: It’s like if we’re talking about a relevant topic and a lot of people are confused about maybe how/ why/ or how people feel about it if I could give some clarity to that situation/ then I think that it might be an empowering situation other than me just sharing the fact that ya know my dad was a civil rights attorney/ I don’t know if that would necessarily like benefit anyone in the class/ 

Julia: Hmm/ interesting. 
Lisa: By them knowing that/ ya know?/ I don’t know/. 
Julia: Why not?/ I mean maybe you don’t know/ but what is it/ 
Lisa: Again/ again it’s that I think it’s because their/ they operate under a system of privilege and so they may not readily understand why my dad did what he did.
For Lisa, an empowering situation is one in which her classmates would not merely see her stories as her “side of the argument”, but also take these stories in as important information, ideally moving them towards a greater understanding of the historical legacy of educational injustice in this country. Such, she implies, is the promise of stories. Nevertheless, Lisa is keenly aware of the importance of who her audience is and who she is to her audience as she remains concerned about her stories not fully being understood for their historical value. Through her use of “they’re”, “them”, “their” and “they”, Lisa suggests an awareness of this audience and positions all of her classmates as “operating under a system of privilege” and, therefore, perhaps not being able to take up her argument in the ways she hopes. While I would argue that Lisa is certainly aware of the other students of color in the room and the fact that they are not racially privilege, it is the critical mass of students who are positioned as dominant, as well as her experiences on this campus, that likely prompted these concerns.

Power, Privilege and Narrative Validity

The reduced chances of Lisa being “seen” by her peers became more apparent as we moved through the semester together. About a week after my first interview with Lisa, students read Lisa Delpit’s (1988) article “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” to prepare for a discussion on “the culture of power”. I knew that Delpit’s piece was often “controversial” for my students, especially the ones who had racial privilege, as they often struggled to acknowledge their role in the “culture of power”. It was also a turning point for many students, as Delpit’s use of narratives from teachers of color serves as the backbone of her piece. As such, Delpit suggests the necessity of “communicat[ing] across
cultures and addressing the more fundamental issue of power” (p. 46) when considering educational curriculum and pedagogy.

Leaning against the table at the front of the room, I casually asked the few students that were in class early what they thought of Delpit’s text. I heard a clear and resounding, “aggressive” coming from the right side of the room. No sooner had I turned my head to see that it was Catherine who had spoken first, than Lisa countered, exclaiming, “true”, referring to the accuracy of Delpit’s work.

The exchange was cut short, as the commotion of entering students pulled Catherine and Lisa’s attention away from each other and my question. However, I had the sense that Catherine and Lisa’s words were at odds with one another, despite the fact that “aggressive” and “true” are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The opening of Catherine’s journal entry for this day provides additional insight into the wider context within which she was positioning Delpit’s text as “aggressive”. She writes:

> After I read Delpit’s article, I was filled with mixed emotions. Personally I thought it was fallacious and aggressive. I will even go the extra mile and state it was slightly racist; not towards people of color, but to whites (Catherine, journal entry, February 17, 2011).

The word fallacious is striking when considered in light of Lisa’s perception of how she is positioned by others in this class. As she noted in her own journal entry for this class, Lisa felt that Delpit’s work was not only “true”, but that it spoke to her experience in nuanced ways. She writes:

> While reading Lisa Delpit’s chapter on Silenced Dialogue, many emotions and responses arose. Lisa Delpit addresses a critical issue in Education, and that is the power of dialogue. Not only do people of oppressed groups feel silenced in school and society, the teachers and educators of
color are often silenced by their white counterparts. This is an all too familiar scenario for myself. Pursuing a career in Education and Policy, I understand the power structure from which Delpit speaks of. Many people who operate within the power structure dismiss individual claims of oppression because research couldn’t support their everyday encounters that are continuing to happen...I feel often silenced by my peers and teachers due to this power structure and empathize with those who have had a similar experience, like the one’s discussed in this chapter. (Black Male Grad Student, Native American woman in Alaska). It is hard to have a conducive conversation with someone who has privilege and is oblivious to the implications of what their privilege does to others (Lisa, journal entry, February 16, 2011).

As Lisa notes, it is not simply that the majority of her peers will not understand her personal experiences for their value, but that they may actually dismiss them. Weeks after her encounter with Catherine, Lisa elaborates on the failure of others to take Delpit’s stories seriously as we sat down for our second interview. She recalled the second fishbowl conversation when Robin positioned Delpit as “attacking” and “aggressive”, countering that she thought, “[Delpit] was saying a lot stuff that was really valid and I didn’t really feel like I was being attacked”. In fact, Lisa aligns herself closely to Delpit’s stories and claims, telling her own stories of being silenced because of how she has been positioned as a person of color, particularly in educational contexts.

Yet, while she affirmed the value of Delpit’s claims, Lisa had to negotiate both Catherine and Robin’s devaluing of Delpit’s text and, therefore, her own stories. It was this issue of validity as it was connected to race that emerged as particularly salient for Lisa as we discussed various other class events during our interviews. For instance, after the class was shown two videos, one by Tim Wise, a White author who writes and speak about issues of privilege, and one by Pedro Nogeura, a professor of color who does the same, Lisa noted that the class would likely listen to and view Tim Wise’s speech as more valid. As she said to me, somewhat sarcastically,
“Yeah especially [Tim Wise] is seen as having all the power in society and if it’s coming from him then it has to be somewhat valid right?”

Lisa also reflected upon a class period where I had the Moving Voices Project (MVP), a campus-based group that presents short skits based on social justice issues, perform a skit having to do with a racist incident at a university. Two college aged women, one White and one Black, discussed hearing a White male student call their Black female professor a cleaning lady. The White woman, Claire, brushed the incident off, confused about its importance. However, the Black student, Dani, was visibly upset, clearly needing support for what she viewed as a blatantly racist remark. After the performance, my students were invited to ask the actors questions about the incident while they stayed in character. The first questions that arose were around the issue of responsibility including, “Why didn’t Dani say anything?” Dani, still in character, quickly responded back, “But people of color are always the ones who must respond”. The class continued to debate this question, and even whether a response should happen at all. I wondered about Lisa in these moments and, looking around the room, noticed that as she started to add to the conversation, few students actually looked at her when she spoke. At one point, she spoke up and related the fictional incident to the university and mentioned that, “This campus is racist”. However, her statement was not ever directly taken up by the rest of the class.

Interested in this event as one in which personal stories were explicitly being used to evoke responses around racist incidents on a college campus, I asked Lisa what this experience was like for her to witness.

Lisa: It was/ it was like seeing Dani as myself/ like she kind of just had to feel like she had to defend herself against everyone/ and against her own ya know fictional friend.
An important moment for Lisa, Dani’s story was so close to her own that she could actually imagine herself providing the same account and needing “to defend herself against everyone”, further signaling the ways her stories could operate amongst her peers. She continues:

**Lisa:** Um/ but yeah it just kind of felt like another voice in the struggle was being said for me that looks differently then me/ cause I also have to remember I’m lighter skinned and a lot of people don’t know what I am/ but for Dani/ the character/ they knew that she was a Black woman and there’s like kinda no mistaking that/  

**Julia:** Hmm mmm/  

**Lisa:** So coming from her/ I think people can either take it as like oh she’s just coming to complain or that she actually sees this as something valid/ cause a Black woman who definitely you can see is Black is going through this struggle/ and she’s struggling with this ignorant White man saying ignorant stuff/  

**Julia:** Right/  

**Lisa:** But it was also really hard to hear people ask her like well why did you say something/ and I know the implications behind like people of color speaking out on authority here/ it doesn’t always turn out well/ and even like on a large scale level like Malcolm X/ Martin Luther King/ like people who actually say stuff in- in defense of other races don’t necessarily get praised for it/ they get shot down and sabotaged and assassinated/  

**Julia:** Hmmm/  

**Lisa:** So/ that’s kinda one of the reasons why I don’t always say something/ because I don’t want to feel like I’m targeted/ I also think about the fact that what if I were to say something in this class that someone didn’t agree with and they took it really personally and wanted to bring physical harm to me/ that’s why I also find it really hard to share things with people because of that/ I don’t want to say too much personal stuff about myself because I don’t know if people care about my well-being/  

As Lisa wonders about how her peers took up Dani’s story and, by extension, her own, she uses the word “valid” referring to stories and claims that are worthy of consideration. In a return to the class conversation on story validity, Lisa distinguishes between stories that are driven by those perceived as “just coming to complain” and those that could carry weight because of who their teller was. In this case, Lisa notes two ways that her peers could be guided
by storytelling rules. They could render Dani a “complainer”, negating the importance of her experience as a Black woman relaying a story of racism. Or, they could treat Dani’s story as “valid” because, according to Lisa, Dani is “more obviously” a person of color to her peers than herself due to her darker skin tone.

It is a question for Lisa about whether her classmates, given their responses to the performance, would actually ascribe Dani the right to tell the story in the way that she did and, then, consider it a “valid” story. Lisa knows what is at stake when “people of color speak out on authority here”, acknowledging the very real threat to her own physical safety she feels on this campus where, in the past five years, there have been multiple racially motivate hate crimes. By invoking the stories of two of the most prominent voices in the U.S. struggle for racial justice, Lisa contends that not only is it possible that her experiences may not be valued but that it may actually bring her physical harm to precede with counternarratives.

Using this historical reference, Lisa comments on how she is potentially positioned in this class and provides additional justification for why she may not “say too much personal stuff” about herself in this context. Her choice to be silent is, indeed, an agentive move as Lisa “negotiates a new position by 'refusing' the position that the opening rounds of [the] conversation have made available to [her]” (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 4). In effect, Lisa anticipated the “opening rounds of conversation” made available through the MVP skit and what those might bring in terms of being given the space to story her own experience with racism and have these stories deemed worthy of consideration and importance. Indeed, Lisa’s classmates responses to Dani and what amounted to them essentially ignoring her are indicative of the positioning made available to Lisa, as well. Highly aware of the narrative rules that render her
personal stories of experience with oppression less valid because of them being perceived as “complaining”, Lisa preemptively repositioned herself, albeit with silence, to avoid the potential consequences, including physical harm.

**Shifting Through Feeling Rules**

Lisa’s repositioning through her silence was, in part, due to her concerns about how cared for she felt amongst her peers and throughout the larger campus. The ability of others to listen to her stories and grant them validity was highly contingent on how these others positioned her as a woman of color. In the broadest sense then, Lisa acknowledged her awareness of the narrative rules of this space concerning who could story their experience. What also emerged in conversation with Lisa was a more in depth understanding of the nature of these rules and their connection to her being seen as a valid storyteller. It was not merely that her presence as a woman of color would limit her storytelling rights, but that the emotional component of her narratives would regulate when and how she told these stories. As we continue to talk, Lisa elaborates on the way she “shifts” from one environment to the next and eludes to the “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1979) of the classroom space.

**Lisa**: And so the people that benefit from that overarching system of oppression are the key people to stopping that oppression/ so I also know that I almost in a way shift as I said before/

**Julia**: Right right/

**Lisa**: And appeal to them in a way so that I don’t come off as aggressive/ cause the last thing I want to do is look like an aggressive woman of color cause that’s what they want/ they want me to get all riled up/

**Julia**: It- it would confirm the stereotype right?/

**Lisa**: Exactly exactly/ we talked a little bit about that on Thursday/ like how you internalize some of these things from society like the ways society views you/ you internalize that in turn/ um so I just want to/ them to be aware of the social conditions from my standpoint/ it’s not just me just bitching and moaning about it like saying like oh poor oppressed me/ and seeing it as a real problem in society
that they could literally do something about.

While Lisa’s “shifting” is a repositioning of self in order to invite in allies, it is also indicative of what emotions are doing in this space, “what connections they do (or do not) permit, what enables teachers and students to feel and to engage in particular emotional practices that may be empowering in some ways and constraining in others” (Zembylas, 2007a, p. 67). Here, such emotional practices suggest a dismissal of the stories that are rendered more “aggressive” stances towards issues of justice. Lisa is highly aware of these rule-oriented emotional practices as she notes the potential of being perceived as the aggressive person of color, a stereotype that she noted Barack Obama had to negotiate in his first presidential run.

**Lisa:** So just like assigning those predetermined cursors on people/ ya know I talked about this during the election/ ya know/ and they were talking about McCain and Obama and how McCain had a lo-/ a lot of slandering to do and Obama didn’t really have anything to say/ but that’s the last thing he wanted to do is look like an aggressive Black man/ because like that’s like America’s worst fear!/

**Julia:** Right/ we don’t want him in office/ yeah/

**Lisa:** Exactly/ and I feel like he himself is like a prime example of like shifting/ ya know/ he has to live up to Black America’s standards he has to live up White America’s standards/ he has to uh live up/ ya know elite’s standards/ you know people in society/ people in government/ so it's like he’s having to shift all around/ and it- it probably has a lot of you know identity issues because of that/

Returning to the notion of “shifting”, Lisa connects her awareness of the emotional management she is subject to in class to what likely happens to prominent public figures of color. In doing so, Lisa taps into one of the dominant storylines around people of color in terms of what emotions they ought to show and when they ought to show them. In this class, she contends that to come off as too passionate and too invested in issues that ultimately relate to her own well-being is potentially setting herself up to be ignored and her stories deemed unworthy of consideration. For instance, her calm response early on in the semester to Robin
(Oh ok/hmm mmm) who did become visibly angry when Lisa and Sophie were constructing a storyline around “wealthy students” on campus suggests that perhaps she was not allowed to match Robin’s heightened emotion. While I cannot know for sure whether Lisa was toning down what could have been an angry response back to Robin, there was an abrupt quality to the way Lisa calmly ended the interaction, seemingly aware of how what it would mean if she were to become angry, as well. Additionally, when she would tell her more personal stories in class, I noted the way Lisa was often very “level” in the way she spoke with her peers. There seemed to be a careful balance that Lisa was striking between the message and the tone with which it was delivered.

While Lisa’s “shifting” still requires an adherence to the feeling rules of the space, rules that require her tone down what are perceived as angry and aggressive emotional responses, she also begins to challenge the larger storyline around anger and people of color as she reflects upon *The Color of Fear* and Robin’s in-class reaction to one of the African-American men in the film, Victor. After David, one of two White males, talks about “going to collect” the Native American “artifacts” of the land he lived upon, Victor becomes visibly angry, stamping his foot down and raising his voice in protest. Lisa recalls Robin saying how she stopped listening when Victor became angry, but suggests that there is another way of being amongst such anger.

**Lisa:** And again/ Robin said that she just stopped listening when Victor was yelling/ but I felt that was the most valid point made in the whole movie is that you’re standing on land that doesn’t belong to you/ you have the ability to go collect these BS artifacts like because you’re just so:: great/ she just/ the fact that she would tune that out/ I’m like/ I tuned in/

**Julia:** Hmm/

**Lisa:** So I feel like people’s reactions/ and again maybe it just stems from the privilege that you have
in being able to shut someone off that actually has a valid point about not only their existence but historically like our entire community/

Noting how seemingly easy it was for her White classmate to render Victor’s reaction as invalid because of its angry tone, Lisa goes on to shirk this feeling rule as she acknowledges the need to, in fact, listen more closely when Victor became angry over David’s racist comments. It is a moment that provides insight into the way that emotions can “play an important political role in enabling transformation and resistance” (Zembylas, 2007a, p. 67) in the midst of the larger storylines that work to limit them. In this moment, Lisa challenges the storylines that claim anger as irrational and unreasonable and people of color as stereotypically this way. She lends credence to Victor’s loud tone and pointed words in *The Color of Fear*, effectively flipping the script that Robin followed in terms of the perceived dichotomy between emotion and reason.

Nevertheless, what emerges is not simply Lisa constructing counternarratives against the master narrative that renders emotions contaminants in a space of logic and reason, particularly when they emanate from people of color. Rather, as Bamberg (2004) notes, it is the “co-presence” of the two storylines that defines Lisa’s complicity with and counter claims to such narratives. In what follows, I use the case study students’ talk during the focus group that I held at my house the last week of the semester to further complicate how Lisa strategically recognized and used master narratives around emotion that positioned her as an invalid Other. It was in these moments where she could artfully break down the emotion/reason dichotomy but also use it to position herself as a valid storyteller.

**Breaking Down and Reconstructing the “Emotion/Reason” Dichotomy**

Sitting around my coffee table during the last week of the semester, myself, Lisa, and my
six other case study students ate pizza to reflect on the class that we had all been deeply analyzing for the past four months. I asked the group to open up with any reflections they were currently having about the class and, immediately, the issue of emotion in the classroom as it related to the larger moral order around storytelling emerged. As Lisa takes her first turn during this final meeting, there is a subtlety that exists in her words in relation to the emotional rules that she has co-created with her peers. On the one hand, she claims legitimacy for her anger and, on another, rebukes this emotion with a certain “rhetorical finessing” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 363).

Adam responds in agreement with Lisa as reworked rules around anger become apparent.

**Lisa:** Also a benefit of privilege to be able to ignore the issues that happen/ and I guess for me because I came into this class/ earned a Bachelor degree but have a heightened sense of awareness of the system of oppression/ like my father made me very aware of social injustice/ so I feel like I see what other people don’t see/ it was like now I have to make other people aware of the system of oppression and not be angry at individuals who are racist but be angry at an overarching system of oppression that innately benefits others while oppressing others/ I will say this/ like he said/ we still have privilege/ like I’m in school/ education is a privilege/

**Adam:** I like how you said be mad at the overarching system/ cause like in high school it/ for me it seemed like a lot of people would be mad at like White people/ or like things like that and so like if you were White or if you were Black or if you were like anything that didn’t have like that person/ that like color/ that/ I don’t know/ I just like how you said that/

**Lisa:** It is about moving away from the individual/ like not being mad at you all because you’re White/ like you guys are all great people/ like what do you/ what do I have to be mad at you for?/ but I’m angry that there’s a system of oppression that arbitrarily puts you guys ahead of other people/ I just think that’s really fucked up/

**Adam:** And it just doesn’t make it/ like/ like that kind of attitude that were talking about/ like that doesn’t help ever/

**Lisa:** No like being mad at like whitey ((said sarcastically)) / like that’s not gonna do anything/ like that/ you’re just gonna be stagnant and stuck/ and you’re gonna look like/ really it just kinda makes you look ignorant because you’re not looking at it as something bigger than the individual having racist acts but then there’s a system of oppression that is keeping people out of schools/ jobs/
As Lisa implies, the central role that anger has played throughout her lifetime and, indeed, within this class is palpable in this moment. She is emphatic in her tone as she subtly shifts the feeling rules to now publicly legitimize (she already did so in her private journal entries) anger at systemic injustice. Even so, Lisa reaffirms Adam’s claim that an angry “attitude” geared towards individuals is not productive and may cause them to be “stagnant and stuck…[and] ignorant”, rather then see their emotional state as an “appropriate response to an absurd situation” (West, 2004, p. 295). Lisa has countered and reworked the “emotion as contaminant” storyline in one sense by showing her anger amongst her peers and using it to drive her nuanced argument. Yet, she also reinvokes this master narrative by placing a contingency on the use of anger. People of color ought to be angry at the system of oppression rather than at individuals who are a part of this system.

This apparent vacillation between the rules for how she and others should show and keep their emotions in check is again brought up when Catherine recalls her reaction to Victor in The Color of Fear and the sense of invalidity she got as she listened to him.

**Catherine:** When I saw Victor/ he::/ he was really angry and really emotional and that made me feel like/ I don’t know/ his point wasn’t like valid/ with emotion and facts/ I just get a little like/ I don’t know/ I just take them to be like serious/ cause I feel like in a debate everyone should be like calm and the more serious you are the more like (       )/ and then um after that I was talking with a friend/ and um we were talking about racism and stuff like that/ and I noticed that Victor said a lot of stuff about slavery/ and I’m wondering if there is a lot of resentment still from people that didn’t experience that/ but looking at their history and are resentful/ because we were talking about/ I still feel resentment towards the Japanese for Pearl Harbor/ and I wasn’t there for that/ ya know?/ it’s just something that comes naturally/ so I’m wondering if like racism will ever be solved because if we all just have that history/

**Lisa:** We all remember history differently too/ we were talking about that a lot in my history class because we’re studying the Civil War and it’s like how do Southerners et cetera/ all about you’re own
personal story/ we all weren’t there but it’s like somehow we have this collective history that other people shared and it’s like how did that come about/ I’m glad you brought up Victor/ I listened the most because I understood his pain and anger behind the system of oppression/ yeah he shouldn’t have been yelling but he was yelling at the racist White man/ he was like you’ll never get it/ you’re just getting artifacts down from like where the Native Americans live and I tried to understand where that anger was coming from/ and he also talked about ya know he does have a little bit of privilege being like lighter skinned Black man than the other gentleman did and so you have to/ yelling isn’t conducive, but I also had a reasons why he got so angry/

As Lisa counters Catherine and acknowledges the need to listen to anger and attempt to “understand where the anger is coming from”, she also claims that “yelling isn’t conducive”. Seemingly, she is vacillating between two opposing storylines that dictate what form storying oneself in light of issues of injustice should take. One is a master narrative that normalizes a perceived emotion/reason dichotomy and privileges the latter term in the binary. The other, a counternarrative that troubles the notion that emotion is without value.

I would argue that such seemingly opposing claims are not simply inconsistencies in how Lisa was managing her subjectivity amongst me and her peers. Rather, Lisa was purposeful with this management as she recognized the context within which she was narrating her experiences, as well as the “shifting” demands that were likely present in my course amongst her mostly White peers. As Foucault would desire, Lisa skillfully turned herself into a subject that acknowledged, worked within, and reworked accepted cultural frames around what role emotions should play in discussions that address issues of privilege and oppression. Anger was detrimental to her being heard amongst her predominantly White peers in class, but also a concept she could invoke to more readily be heard with her fellow case study students. As Adam and Catherine discursively constructed and supported the notion that anger “doesn’t help” and that it renders claims invalid,
Lisa could skillfully affiliate herself with her White peers (and encourage them to affiliate themselves with her, as is evidenced by Adam’s turns above) while questioning the boundaries within which anger has been placed. This “juggling of storylines” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 363) to enable them to push and pull against each other suggests how Lisa discursively managed her subjectivity amongst peers that she knew positioned her as a less valid player in critical conversations. Using master narratives as a guide for action, Lisa negotiated her own position as a storyteller and claim maker to set up circumstances to gain footing in these conversations. In this sense, the dominant and counter storylines that Lisa aligned herself with were not completely separate from each other, but interwoven, allowing her to become both complicit with and contest the “regimes of power and knowledge” that rendered her word less worthy of consideration than that of her White peers. I would argue that this helped create conditions where Lisa could story herself and make claims in a way that her peers could begin to, as she desired, truly see and care for her as a woman of color with experiences worth considering.
Chapter 7
Cultivating and Straying From Her Plot of Land

Catherine

*My life as a student of mind has taught me one incontrovertible lesson: mind is never free of precommitment. There is no innocent eye, nor is there one that penetrates aboriginal reality. There are instead hypothesis, versions, expected scenarios. Our precommitment about the nature of life is that it is a story, some narrative however incoherently put together. Perhaps we can say one other thing: any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told (Bruner, 2004, p. 709).*

*We are this AND that, always becoming something more, something else (Davies and Gannon, 2009, p. 28).*

Both Bruner’s and Davies and Gannon’s words inspire me to think about a classroom that privileges storytelling as a space that simultaneously limits and opens up space for our subjectivities to flourish. Lisa’s particular narrative certainly shows this to be the case. Yet, while the stories we tell ourselves about our selves and about others help to construct the normative orders within which we live our lives, we also must consider the seemingly simple question of how many different ways an experience can be told in storied form. Indeed, the story I have been constructing about this class and, in particular, my case study students, is merely a version of the many stories that could be told. As Bruner contends, these “hypothesis, versions and expected scenarios” construct what is “real” for participants, rejecting life as an “aboriginal reality” (p. 709). As the preceding chapters suggest, I too wonder about the process through which we can start to consider the “other possible ways in which [our stories] can be told” (p. 709), as well as what it is to consider alternative versions of experience from others. To further delve into this aspect of how stories functioned for me and my students, I consider Catherine, a
student who was quiet in class yet talkative in interviews as she relied heavily upon her own stories to help her make claims about issues of justice. Nevertheless, Catherine also began to recognize the alternative ways of interpreting her experience and others that pushed against her conceptions of the “right” and the “wrong” of the world.

Playing with the Public Transcript

During my first interview with Catherine, it became apparent what role her educational history played in how she was participating in and understanding the class two months into the semester. I was highly curious about Catherine. Having just recently transferred to the university from a community college, Catherine came from an upper-class city in the Western U.S. and attended both private and public schools. She was quiet in class, sometimes speaking in her small groups, but rarely amongst the whole class. I chose her to be a case study student in part because she began to emerge as having a more “conservative” background than most of the students in the class. Indeed, she spoke up the first day in class for a national identity rooted in the English language and against gay teachers coming out in schools. I wondered about how her history impacted how she storied herself and the beliefs she held, as well as how she was taking in others’ stories. Through one of my initial questions, Catherine elaborates on her educational history and begins to make claims about the nature of educational inequity.

Julia: Um so what’s your experience been like in the class so far in general?/
Catherine: I mean/
Julia: And you can be very honest/it’s not/
Catherine: I mean I like it/ it’s just hard for me to contribute because I’m like kind of naïve in that area/
Julia: What do you mean?/
Catherine: Like naïve saying like ya know I’ve never really been in like a real crappy school/ and like don’t really know like the differences/ and like how Blacks or poor people are treated/
Julia: Hmm mmm/
Catherine: Um when I went to community college I was the minority so I kinda got a glimpse of it but it really wasn’t a crappy school/
Julia: Yeah/ so why were you the minority/? explain to me/
Catherine: Because in Santa Monica/ in LA/ it’s mostly just Black and Mexican people? /
Julia: Oh I see/ OK/
Catherine: And um all my friends were at Pepperdine/ I was at Pepperdine for a little bit and I didn’t like it/ and/ cause it was just like my high school/
Julia: OK/
Catherine: And I wanted to go to UC/ and that’s what you’d have to do to get into UCLA/
Julia: Hmm mmm.
Catherine: And um (4)/ I don’t know/ I just kind of got my first glimpse in/ I don’t really/I forget what the question was.
Julia: No that’s OK/ just how has this/ but it’s/ you don’t have to stick with the question/ wherever it goes it goes/
Catherine: Yeah.
Julia: So- so you got your first glimpse into?/
Catherine: Like kind of the diversity in/ I mean I’m from Malibu/ I don’t really see that much.
Julia: Right right/
Catherine: In my high school we had five Black kids/
Julia: OK/
Catherine: And one foreign exchange student/
Julia: Gotcha/ so you/ when you went to the community college you got your first glimpse into/ say more about that/
Catherine: Yeah um well it was really scary at first/
Julia: It was /
Catherine: Yeah/
Catherine: Umm just because there was nobody like I could relate to/ I didn’t really make any friends/
Julia: Hmm mmm/
Catherine: And umm I mean I sat on the floor my first like week/ cause there’s so many people trying to add/
Julia: In class?/
Catherine: Yeah/ and there’s so many foreign people/ and I kinda got a glimpse of like inequality on my/ on my part because the foreign exchange students and the people out of state got first priority/ and so I mean I couldn’t even add a class with my own tax dollars/
Julia: Hmmm/
Catherine: And I mean I was intro- introduced to all of that/ and like fighting for like a place in line/ a
Admittedly “naive” to issues of educational justice, Catherine makes a quick connection to her own personal story of growing up in a wealthy area and having not experienced much racial, ethnic or social class diversity. Yet, the story of her privileged upbringing operated as a springboard for her to relay to me what she perceived were inequitable educational experiences that she had at a nearby community college. Similar to some of her classmates’ discursive positioning moves during the conversation about the demands to assimilate, Catherine relies on a sort of “passive empathy” (Boler, 1999) where she claims to “know” the experience of educational inequity as she was the racial minority by number, not treated the same as other students- students that were likely of color- and not from her immediate community. At the same time, however, Catherine’s “narrative truth” (Bruner, 1990), her interpretation of her experiences is coupled with her fear with being in such a different environment (“It was really scary at first”). Like her small story of her own upbringing, it was a discursive move that positioned her as outside the stories of her new classmates and them as foreign Others of whom she was fearful.

This opening instance with Catherine illustrates what Scott (1990) terms a “public transcript” or the dominant storyline that, “reinforces and legitimizes the position of the dominant group” (p. 18) as she claims to have been slighted by an educational experience that was rightfully “hers”. The use of “public transcripts” such as these were common for Catherine who was deeply entrenched in her own stories and what they told her about those who are differently situated along lines of difference and issues of injustice. Indeed, her racial, class, and heterosexual privilege emerged through these stories and they came into direct contact with other narratives about the way the world ought to look. As we continued our interview, she recalled
the first day of class and how, in an activity called “Agree/Disagree” that required the students to move to one side of the room or the other taking a position on educational issues, she was “always on the opposite side of everyone else” including being “totally against...a teacher announcing their like sexual preference”. From the very beginning of the semester, Catherine was aware of the opposition she faced in this class and chose to remain quiet throughout most of the conversations when, in her words, we discussed more “difficult things”. This silence was, as in the case of Lisa, not simply one of a quiet student but of someone who was aware of how she may be positioned by her peers and myself because of her views. In addition, Catherine’s lack of experience with talking about the issues taken up in class suggests a reason for her silence but also an indication of the privilege she has to keep this silence.

Nevertheless, while Catherine was highly aware of how her views may conflict with those of her peers, she was also aware of the sense that her storytelling, even when it created a “public transcript” that reified her privilege and power, was a social practice that was tenuous in nature and subject to change in the face of alternative versions of experience. It was not merely that her stories helped to dictate her worldview but that Catherine’s reflections during our discussions helped these stories to become one version amongst other viable ones. Notably though, it was not simply the replacement of the storyline she was constructing with another, more justice oriented one. Rather, there was a “playing with” narratives and the claims that flowed from them. Our interview conversation about the Bristol Pride panel, one of the most controversial classes for Catherine due to her Catholic upbringing and exposure to her “homophobic dad”, highlights this process. The discussion began just a few days after the panel when I asked Catherine about how the class was going for her thus far.

Catherine: Ummm/ I know for me it’s been getting like more intense than before/

Julia: Hmm mmm/ OK/
Catherine: But I mean it’s like not a bad thing/ it’s like a good thing for me/ like uummm relating to the transgender ((says this with hesitation and a bit of a laugh)) panel/ that was a huge shock for me cause I’ve really never experienced anything like that/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Catherine: And I come from like a Christian home/ and I believe it’s wrong/ it was just/ I don’t know/ a huge shock/

Julia: Hmm/ so/ go ahead/

Catherine: Yeah I don’t know/

Julia: Can you talk through that a little bit more?/ What was it like during, after, before?/ That kind of thing/

Catherine: I mean I don’t want to like sound like/ I don’t know/ discriminatory or/

Julia: Say what you need to say/

Catherine: OK.

Julia: Yeah I’m not/

Catherine: Well since I come from a Christian home/ the whole time I was just like/ I don’t know/ praying for them/ like cause they to me seemed so lost and hurt/ and I don’t know I just/ I- I just couldn’t helped but be disgusted/ I hate to say that word but that’s how I felt/ and I like wanted to reach out to these people/

Julia: Hmmm/

Catherine: Umm/ and I like noticed that every single person had something like go wrong in their childhood that could have like caused something to like switch/ but I mean that’s my beliefs and ya know like how do we know like religion’s even right?/

Julia: Hmmm/

Catherine: So like/ I mean it’s hard to draw the line/ like what’s right and what’s wrong/ but I believe it’s right so/ but I can’t prove it to anybody just like ya know I can’t prove them wrong/

Catherine’s discomfort was clear as she nervously laughed while bringing up the “transgender panel”, a telling name for the panelists who were not all transgendered persons.

Indeed, her one turn during the in-class debrief on the panel suggested that she was especially shocked by Taryn. Her almost complete silence during this more public forum (as opposed to our one-on-one conversations) is one way Catherine demonstrated her understanding of how she may be positioned if she were to voice her beliefs about her encounter with Taryn’s stories. During
that one turn she stated, “I couldn’t help but stare because Taryn said too much sometimes/ so like I couldn’t- couldn’t like imagine what my face looked like”, revealing just a small amount of her shock to her classmates. Yet, this unease was accompanied by the acknowledgement that this was a “good thing” for her to have experienced- a good thing to have gone through the intensity of the panel and, presumably, for her to have experienced Taryn’s stories. She clearly made the connection between the religious stories that were a distinct part of her upbringing and the normative order that they dictated about identifying as part of LGBTQ community (“And I come from like a Christian home and I believe it’s wrong.”). I was struck by the strength and immediacy of this statement coupled with Catherine’s desire to not come off as discriminatory. In fact, she negotiated discrimination in the journal entry she submitted on this very same day, writing, “I know what I am saying is discriminatory, but this is my religion and my beliefs”. Just two sentences later, however, Catherine writes about those in the LGBTQ community writing, “I do not discriminate against them and do not believe they should be excused from jobs and normal life; it is just something I would never take part in or choose for my life.” While there is the desire on Catherine’s part to not come off as someone who is actively limiting the rights of those in the LGBTQ community, she also positions herself as rightfully discriminatory, for her religion and the stories they entail support this positioning.

Simultaneously disgusted and “wanting to reach out to these people”, Catherine continues to position the panelists as Others, particularly with her use of the pronoun “these” to describe the panelists whose stories she located outside of the normative order. She is not part of this community, and they need her help. Yet, in her next statement she shows keen awareness of the fact that she is speaking from a particular social location, one supported by religious stories, and starts to question the normative order that she has been relying upon. She asks, “how do we
know that religion is even right?” It is here where an “unexpected line of flight” (Davies and Gannon, 2009, p. 56) becomes apparent and Catherine steps into a new scene where “boundaries dissolve, where habitual repetitions can be interrupted, where borders between old territories shift and dissolve (p. 28). While Catherine uses the language of belief in relation to the dominant storylines that her religion dictates concerning the LGBTQ community, she also uses the conjunction “but” to signal a contrast that is unexpected in light of the first clause (“I mean it’s hard to draw the line/ like what’s right and what’s wrong/ but I believe it’s right so/ but I can’t prove it to anybody just like ya know I can’t prove them wrong”). In turn, Catherine’s discursive negotiation of “what’s right and what’s wrong” suggests a questioning of the stories, she has been told and the striated, categorical order that they have created.

Catherine’s negotiation of the “ought” around sexuality continued a few moments later in the interview as she brought up a notable “storied moment”, Austin’s coming out as both gay and Christian during a class discussion that concerned explicitly talking about LGBTQ issues in schools in light of the fact that some parents may object based upon religious principles. Catherine brought this brief moment up after I asked her if she could remember any of her peers’ stories from class and, if so, why they stuck with her.

Catherine: Ohh Austin/ going back to the um sexual orientation thing/ when he announced to the class that he was gay and that he was religious/ he’s Catholic right?/ 

Julia: He either said Catholic or Christian/

Catherine: Yeah/ I mean that kind of stirred up some like emotions in me because/

Julia: Talk about that/ yeah/

Catherine: Because I mean like if you’re following the Bible it’s wrong/

Julia: Hmm mmm?/

Catherine: And so it’s like how/ I don’t understand how you can call yourself two things/
Julia: Hmmm/

Catherine: When you can only choose one/

Julia: Yeah/ do you know what he said about that?/ I think that he explained it in-/ 

Catherine: Yeah/ he said that like he’s Catholic but he’s gay/ so I mean he sa-/ we’re all sinners and we all don’t follow the actual Bible/ we all do like other things like/

Julia: Right/

Catherine: So I mean/ I guess/ that’s true/ we all don’t follow it like word by word/

With the sentence, “I mean like if you’re following the Bible it’s wrong”, Catherine returns to language similar to that which she used to initially discuss the Bristol Pride panel. She then refers to Austin and what she perceives as the mutually exclusive positions he holds as both Catholic and gay (“I don’t understand how you can call yourself two things”). While she fails to understand that someone could be both gay and Catholic without contradiction, Catherine’s statement signals a dissatisfaction with moving outside of the “striated order” of what it means to locate oneself in either of these identities. Her world suggests that religious stories give guidance on how to live and who to love. Yet, in the very next moment, Catherine continues to “play” with these stories, stating that “we’re all sinners and we all don’t follow the actual Bible/ we all do like other things like… we all don’t follow it like word by word”. Here, she places herself in Austin’s position, suggesting that perhaps her own criteria does not apply to the way she lives. Now, Catherine is “calling herself two things”, having relied upon dominant and highly oppressive storylines that render those in the LGBTQ community as living the “wrong” life by not following biblical stories, but then also rendering herself as someone who does the same in other areas of her life. As Davies (2009) notes, “Even in the moment of flight, it is necessary to have ‘a small plot of land’, a place where the normative order keeps us safe (Deleuze and Guattari in Davies, 2009, p. 21). Catherine’s line of flight operated in just this way as she
strayed from positioning Austin as Other when she noted that perhaps everyone cannot possibly use the Bible in its entirety to guide action. Her “plot of land”, where dominant narratives tend to produce binaries (gay or Catholic) was invoked, however, through these turns (“he’s Catholic but he’s gay”), as well.

“Sometimes Your Emotions Can Get Mixed Up”

For Catherine, it was not merely the “what” of storytelling that allowed her to negotiate moral orders that were both “safe” and challenging to her sense of the way the world was and should be. What also emerged were questions around the “how” of storytelling, particularly in regards to the emotional quality of the stories told by her classmates, visitors, and the authors she read. In fact, the “feeling rules” that guided Catherine’s understanding of others throughout the semester paralleled the ones that Lisa perceived were a barrier to her own storytelling. Stories that were accompanied by heightened emotion, particularly anger, were often seen as tainting the classroom space of reason as was evidenced by Catherine’s journal entries concerning her reading of Lisa Delpit. Noting that emotions were coming up as important to Catherine and the way she was taking up stories in the classroom, I asked her in our first interview to comment on how she thought emotions were operating in the classroom.

Catherine: Uhhh yeah/ I think they’re valuable/ I mean like I just don’t know where we’d be if we didn’t have/ say any of our feelings ya know/ like those are really important/ and it’s sad like a lot of them go over/

Julia: Hmm/ umm do you think/ I mean I don’t know if you mentioned this before/ I’m trying to see/ umm do you think that they sometimes get in the way?/ or are they always productive?/

Catherine: I mean some of them I feel like get in the way/ like I’ll say with Lisa/ and like maybe she might feel a little um hatred/ like I feel like things like that/ like the major ones might get in the way/

Julia: Major/ major what?/

Catherine: Like major feelings and emotions/ but I mean they’re still valuable but they might/ they kind of interfere/

Julia: Hmm/ what makes them still valuable though/
Catherine: Umm that/ some feelings like that I know like there’s a larger picture behind it/ I know a lot of people probably feel like that/ cause I mean that was my whole school that I came from/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Catherine: And I mean I feel like it gets in the way of making like a conclusion or like a result/ because I feel like there’s always gonna be a tension no matter what/

Julia: So you’re saying it gets in the way of sort of becoming a bigger solution?/ Sometimes?/

Catherine: Yeah like it’s hard to get an end result/ like a thing that works.

Julia: Hmmm I see/ because of the tension/

Catherine: Yeah/

Catherine’s positioning of certain emotions, the “major ones”, as barriers to getting to a “result” relies on the emotion/reason dichotomy that requires “individuals [to] either manage or control undesirable emotions (anger or anxiety), or augment or acquire the desirable emotions (e.g. optimism and empathy)” (Boler, 1999, p. 63) in order to not contaminate the space of reason.

As we continued to talk about her experiences in the class throughout the semester, Catherine consistently invoked this binary as she reflected upon the various encounters she had with others’ narratives and the storylines that accompanied them. She not only deemed Lisa Delpit as “aggressive” and “fallacious” in class and within her journal entry, but also commented to me that she felt Delpit was “someone who was just venting on a piece of paper about an experience they had.” For Catherine, Delpit’s concern, among other scholars we read in the course, about the degree to which Black teachers were listened to by their White counterparts, was merely cathartic and not necessarily a series of narratives to take into account as evidence that there actually is a “culture of power” that privileges White people. Indeed, Catherine’s claims directly mirrored Lisa’s concerns that she would be positioned as “complaining” about her experience as a Black woman.

As we continued talking, I asked Catherine about the emotions that came up for her as she
read Delpit, for it was becoming clear to that she was viscerally affected by the textual encounter.

**Catherine**: The feelings? I was angry/

**Julia**: OK/

**Catherine**: I just/ I thought it was um/ ya know it was attacking/ it was rude/ And I f:: /I felt like umm there’s a lack of respect for/ cause I mean there are/ I mean there’s two sides to everything/ White people/ yeah I know they can be like self-absorbed/

**Julia**: Hmm mmm/

**Catherine**: But that can also be for Black people too/

**Julia**: OK/

**Catherine**: Ya know?/

**Julia**: What do you mean by self-absorbed/

**Catherine**: Self-absorbed/ like we know what’s right and like we um know what’s good for you/

**Julia**: Hmmm/ OK/

**Catherine**: And like self-righteous I guess you would say/

In claiming her right to be angry at Delpit, Catherine positions Delpit as without the right to story her experiences in what Catherine perceived was an “attacking” and “rude” manner.

While Catherine acknowledges the ways that White people can be “self-righteous”, knowing “what’s right” and “what’s good for” communities of color, she also deems Delpit and the larger Black community as capable of positioning White people in this same way. Her subsequent use of the cliché, *there’s two sides to everything*, places her own and Delpit’s claims on an equal plane, and ultimately signaled that Catherine does not consider that perhaps her “side”, or storyline, is informed by the “public transcript” that confers dominance upon her and other White individuals. In Catherine’s framing, the two storylines are equally problematic and divorced from the larger historical significance of the relationship between White communities and communities of color in this society.

Similarly, when I asked her about Lisa’s participation in the classroom, Catherine
Kantor commented that, “It’s like you [Lisa] don’t- you don’t know any better or something like that” and went on to connect this to the emotional tone of Lisa’s narratives.

**Catherine:** Like I know that her background is like/ ya know/ Black history/ and she feels strongly towards that/

**Julia:** Hmm mmm/

**Catherine:** But sometimes like with people like her/ and like the school I went to/ I’m like are you just resentful?/ Is there a lot of just hatred towards what happened?/ And I feel like sometimes your emotions can get mixed up/

**Julia:** Hmmm/

**Catherine:** So sometimes I think about that/

Catherine maintains an us/them dichotomy in referring to Lisa as “people like her”, a characterization she then extends to fellow students at the community college she previously attended. Positioning Lisa and other students of color as “resentful” and having “a lot of just hatred towards what happened”, Catherine deemed those emotions a contaminant of the space where students of color spoke to oppressive conditions faced by their ancestors. Catherine suggests that emotions worked to devalue Lisa’s narratives of personal experience rather than make them more salient to Catherine, as if emotions were elements Lisa could consciously add into and take out of an understanding of her experiences.

Additionally, Catherine assumes that Lisa is only speaking to the historical conditions of oppression, rather than those in the present that affect Lisa. In an attempt to place herself in Lisa’s position, Catherine says that, “I feel like if I was her I’d be a little resentful of how people treated like my ancestors”, lending authority to this assumed resentment. Yet, this statement also conveyed little understanding of how racism operates and certainly worked to ignore the everyday acts of oppression that Lisa experienced and that she spoke about at times in class. Indeed, Catherine’s response to Lisa is heavily supported by research examining White students’
stances towards multicultural education (e.g. Sleeter, 2001; Gay, 2009). Yet, the connection she made between emotions and the assumption that Lisa was dwelling on historical oppression adds complexity to how White students could potentially position their peers of color. Catherine saw Lisa’s anger and resentment of past circumstances as mutually reinforcing one another and viewed neither as viable options for classroom discourse. As such, Caroline reinforced these “feeling rules” that Lisa worked to negotiate throughout her time as a student in this class.

Catherine went on to apply these regulatory terms to Victor, the African-American man from the

*The Color of Fear*, as well.

**Catherine:** ((sighs)) I don’t know/ I talked about this before/ I feel like/ what was um the one guy’s name that was like yelling the whole time/

**Julia:** Victor/

**Catherine:** Victor was a little bit too emotional/

**Julia:** Hmm mmm/

**Catherine:** And focused more on like what had happened in the past rather than in the present/ which I mean it’s important to like understand the past and/ by looking and understanding the past/ but I mean how can we ever like move from racism if we keep going backwards/ and that’s like a big thing like I feel like in our class like we always talk about things in the past/ this happened and this happened/ and that’s like/ I guess like not how I work/ like the past is the past and we just learn from that and keep going/ I don’t like to like step backwards er/

**Julia:** Hmm/ do you see from anyone in our class or just in general/ do you see the value in looking back to see what has occurred/ and how things sort of have been constructed?/

**Catherine:** Well yeah/ I mean I don’t like wanna say names/ or I can’t really think of names right now/ but just like I mean I see the value in looking backwards and understanding it/ but I wouldn't dwell on it/

**Julia:** Hmmm/

**Catherine:** And like keep/ like hold a grudge almost/

The “grudge” over the past that Victor holds in the film is intimately connected to what Catherine perceives as his overly emotional state. In turn, Victor’s emotional state is tied to what Catherine would never do, “step backwards”, an action she previously attributed to Lisa and one
that signals a regulation on the type of conversations she is willing to engage in throughout this class. Additionally, there is the sense that Catherine is not listening to Victor’s (and Lisa’s) stories for the way historical conditions have impacted them in the present. Such selective hearing positions Victor as the one perpetuating racism through his “anger” and “dwelling” on the oppressive conditions he has faced. Her comments during the end of semester focus group position Victor in a similar way, more directly invoking the emotion/reason dichotomy.

**Catherine:** When I saw Victor/ he::/ he was really angry and really emotional and that made me feel like/ I don’t know/ his point wasn’t like valid/ with emotion and facts/ I just get a little like/ I don’t know/ I just take them to be like less serious/ cause I feel like in a debate everyone should be like calm and the more serious you are the more like/

Positioning “emotions and facts” in binary terms, Catherine privileges the “calm” as a way to ensure the neutrality necessary for a “serious” debate to occur. Otherwise, emotions, particularly anger, render what should have been rational claims about the world invalid and unworthy of serious consideration.

Yet, as Catherine positioned Delpit, Lisa and Victor as storytellers governed by emotional regulation, she provided more space for one of her other classmates to outwardly show emotion. During the students’ discussion of Moving Voice’s performance, Rosie, a Latina student, told a parallel story to the skit that revolved around the maid comment directed at a Black professor. Initially holding back tears, but eventually letting them come through, Rosie told us of her mother, a principal at a school, who was mistaken for a janitor. Catherine remembered this moment distinctly as we spoke, noting that while she thought Dani, the Black student who reacted to the racist maid comment, was “too sensitive”, Rosie’s case made more of an impact on her.
Catherine: I mean that’s upsetting/ the stereotypes that go along with it/ I mean I/ I get stereotyped but they’re not bad/

Julia: Hmmm/ they’re valued differently right?/

Catherine: Yeah/

Julia: So how/ yeah so what was it like to hear/ yeah it’s very different coming from two people we don’t know/ like a group we don’t know/ we don’t know those people and then someone in our class tells a story that completely backs/ it’s a real life situation/ what was it like to hear that?/

Catherine: Umm/ I mean it was really sad/ like her mom’s like an educated woman/ and she’s a principal and runs a school and she/ in a second automatically gets thrown to the bottom of the ( ) as the janitor after like years of work/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Catherine: And I mean that’s really sad/ and if someone said that to like my mom or my dad I’d/ I’d be upset/

In the moment, I assumed that Catherine’s different reactions towards Dani and Rosie were due to the differences in Catherine’s familiarity with the two students. It certainly may be the case that familiarity with someone tends to produce a higher degree of empathy and connection to their story. Yet, Catherine’s response to Rosie (which, importantly, acknowledged her different social location as a White person- “I get stereotyped but they’re not bad”) took on emotion in nuanced ways. She witnessed Rosie cry in class, an outward display of emotion that was not perceived as anger but, rather, as sadness. Perhaps it was this difference in emotional tone that allowed Catherine to empathize more readily with Rosie, validate her emotions (“And if someone said that to like my mom or my dad I’d- I’d be upset”), and consider this personal story worthy of consideration. In any case, Catherine’s response to Rosie complicated the emotional rules of the classroom. Whereas Catherine discursively rendered anger (and its accompanying,
perceived reactions- aggression, sensitivity, etc.) as capable of diminishing the quality of an argument and, therefore, rendered the attending narrative less “valid”, sadness seemed to bolster the degree to which Catherine took up Rosie’s story. I would argue that this was partially because of the fact that Rosie told a “family story” that Catherine could imagine for her own mom and dad but also that there are dominant storylines around sadness that Catherine tapped into. Sadness can be seen as a more acceptable emotion, particularly in public spaces and when emanating from females. Sadness, as opposed to anger, typically calls for comfort rather than to solve ongoing problems. In this case, Catherine’s reaction to Rosie suggests a tapping into this feeling rule. Catherine’s interaction with Victor, Delpit, and Lisa’s perceived anger, on the other hand, required her to think more deeply about her social location as a White, upper-class woman and, likely, developed resistance.

“The Whole Fairness Thing”

Just moments after our discussion about Rosie’s story, Catherine reveals that her family has a maid, Cecilia, with whom she is fairly close. As I write this, I am struck anew by the series of narratives that have just been told concerning women of color being perceived as or actually being employed as “help”. As our interview conversation turned to immigration, Catherine revealed the stark lines she drew concerning this policy issue, but considered erasing, in light of the personal connection she had with Cecilia, who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico. In the following excerpt, Catherine continues to dichotomize us and them, using the pronouns “they” in reference to immigrants and “our” referring to U.S born individuals.

Catherine: It’s hard/ but it’s like/ it is a problem/ but also I can see how people don’t want to pay extra taxes because they’re just gonna go to a different country/

Julia: Ok/ so you sort of see that as analogous to/
Catherine: I think it would be different if ya know we knew like our money was going to our kids and our schools/

Julia: Right/

Catherine: I feel like as a taxpayer I would like that/

Julia: Hmmm Hmmm/

Catherine: Cause I mean we’re kinda supporting two countries/

Julia: Even if they’re/

Catherine: When we really need it at home/

Julia: Even/even if they’re residents of the country/

Catherine: Well I mean yeah if they’re born here yes but I mean that’s not the case most of the time/ and it’s going back to that fairness thing cause its like I’ll admit we do have a maid and she’s not from here/

Julia: Hmmm so yeah I mean how do you/

Catherine: ((chuckles)) And like I like her so much cause I talk to her and have conversations with her/ and I value her as a person but like ya know it’s like I don’t know where to draw the line/

Julia: Yeah I mean where/ where/ that’s interesting cause you have a very personal connection to/ is she from Mexico? I’m assuming/

Catherine: Yeah yeah/

Julia: To someone that is not from here and so how does that cause it sounds like there is a lot of tension in there/

Catherine: It is a struggle it’s just like cause I like firmly believe that I mean that it’s a problem with our borders and that we have to do something and the California system because I was fir- first witness to it/

Julia: Hmm mmm/
Catherine: As like overcrowded/ like nowhere to sit/ um textbooks are becoming limited/ our calc/ all of our systems are shutting down/ and um/ but it’s also like I do have these connections with people like in our house or surrounding environment or/ it’s hard/

Julia: Yeah/ what is it like to/ to have that personal connection with your maid/ What’s her name?/

Catherine: Cecilia/

Julia: Cecilia/ I mean what’s - what is- what kind of tension does that bring up for you?/

Catherine: ((sighs))

Julia: That you have these beliefs about Mexicans or whatever/

Catherine: I mean it’s a struggle because I mean the whole fairness thing/

Julia: Cause what would you want for her/ I mean/

Catherine: I would want her to stay/ I wouldn’t want her to go back/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Catherine: But it’s also like if she stays then what about everybody else/

Julia: Hmm/

Catherine: Ya know/

Julia: Yeah/ so that gets back to the issue of/ what is the value of/ cause you know her/ you know her personally/ you know her story/ ya know/ ya know what I mean?/

Catherine: Yeah/

Julia: What is the value of knowing someone’s story?/ What does that do for how we/ how we shift in thinking/ And/

Catherine: And yeah/ I mean it’s just like/ it’s just like you hear someone lost or someone was shot on the news/ You’re like oh that sucks but you don’t have any emotion behind it/

Julia: Hmm mmm/
Catherine: And then you/ one of your friends gets shot and then it’s totally different/ and then it hits home/ it’s kind of like that/ it’s just/ I know her and I know her struggle and I know a bunch of other people are in the same situation/ but I wouldn’t want to see her go back/

Julia: Hmmm/

Catherine: And it’s just kind of using her as a whole/

Julia: Hmmm/ to sort of represent/

Catherine: Yeah.

Julia: Yeah.

Catherine: And like/ I mean she tells me stories about like Mexico and how horrible it is/ and so like I understand why they are like fleeing from there/ but I’m a poly sci major and a Republican/ we can’t support all these people/

It was a moment where I felt compelled to engage Catherine in explicitly considering the function of stories for understanding others- or in this case, an Other’s- experience. Once again, Catherine used the conjunction “but” to signal a contrast in how she was at once positioning Cecilia as this Other, but also someone she deeply cared about (“but it’s also like I do have these connections with people like in our house or surrounding environment… but it’s also like if she stays then what about everybody else… I know her and I know her struggle and I know a bunch of other people are in the same situation/ but I wouldn’t want to see her go back… but I’m a poly sci major and a Republican/ we can’t support all these people”). With such vacillation, the rights she afforded Cecilia also shifted. On the one hand, Cecilia did not deserve to be in the United States because she was perceived as depleting the public school system. On the other, Cecilia was a friend to Catherine whom she “wouldn’t want to see go back”. With a return to discourse that explicitly connects emotion and personal stories, Catherine appeals to the emotional when considering how Cecilia’s personal story impacted what she thought ought to occur in terms of
her rights as an immigrant. Now, the emotional was part and parcel of personal stories, stories that provided Catherine with at least some understanding of Cecilia’s need and desire to live and work in United States, albeit through the distinctly problematic positioning of Mexico as a “horrible” place. Nevertheless, Catherine also reverted back to normative claims that suggested “we cannot support all these people”, storylines that she connected to her major and political party, as if these groups would never allow for positions that would expand support for immigrants.

Digging Out of a Deep Hole

The ideas of fairness that motivated Catherine’s vacillation between entrenched, dominant narratives influenced by both her upbringing and educational history, and the new ones she considered in light of personal stories like Cecilia’s, stayed with Catherine as we moved into the last weeks of the course. Sitting down for our last interview together, Catherine seemed refreshingly upbeat for a student who was moving into finals time and was likely very busy. We talked for a bit about her final project for the class, which happened to be an exploration of the non-profit Digital Underground Story Telling for Youth (D.U.S.T.Y.) out of Berkeley, California. She was excited about sharing the details of the organization with the class and seemed more willing to consider issues of justice in the name of fairness. After asking Catherine about the most salient class moments for her, Catherine pointed to the Bristol Pride panel.

Catherine: I mean going back to the whole like fairness thing/ like the whole transgender thing/ I mean that was a huge impact on me/

Julia: Hmmm/

Catherine: ((chuckles a bit)) Shocking too/
Julia: Hmm mmm/

Catherine: And so I mean/ just going back to the equality thing like/ I mean we should/ before I was like totally like against it/ and now I’m like thinking/ like oh maybe we should be fair to these people/ especially ( ) going to like/ I mean kids in really horrible schools too/ but it’s hard to think about cause like what can we do/ it’s kind of just like a deep hole/

The concepts of fairness and equality, while available to Catherine prior to the class, now resonated more deeply as she constructed new versions of the stories she told about “these people”. These were people in the GLBTQ community and kids in “really horrible” schools. While her words certainly positioned these groups in a deficit-oriented way, they also suggested at least a degree of movement away from the narratives Catherine adhered to that rendered certain groups undeserving of justice. Her use of “we” suggests a collective responsibility for those who are marginalized, even as she questioned the degree to which working towards justice would be effective. This final conversation, I would argue, was safe for Catherine, a move back onto her “small plot of land” towards a new striated order that rendered equality as just too difficult to make happen. Nevertheless, in the final moments of our last conversation, when I mentioned the focus group she would be attending with the other students the following week, Catherine pondered questions she would want to ask Lisa and Austin, questions that to her, were quite risky.

Catherine: Like Lisa/ I would probably wanna ask her/ like if she never knew about like slavery or like African-American discrimination/ if she would have such a negative outlook at like White people/ and if she/ her views would be the same/ or like Austin um being gay and religion/ and was like/ if he thinks he truly was born with it/

Knowing both Lisa and Austin, I knew the answers to these questions. But for Catherine, she still wondered about Lisa and Austin’s stories and how these stories impacted their views on the world. I told Catherine I hoped she would ask these questions and she exclaimed, “I’m
frightened!” and laughed nervously. She continued:

**Catherine:** Cause I’ve never asked someone that and that’s what I feel and whenever like we talk about those serious questions I’m like oh well she just thinks this because this I mean it’s bigger picture too like if we don’t ask these questions nothing’s going to happen.

With these final words, Catherine, revealed how she typically takes up someone else’s stories and their attendant claims (“And whenever like we talk about those serious questions I’m like oh well she just thinks this because this”). To move outside of the safety of this way of thinking about someone else’s claims, even within a small-scale classroom environment is, according to Catherine, to work towards something bigger. While Catherine never did ask Lisa or Austin the questions she wondered about, her awareness of the value of such risky questioning was notable and perhaps even gave her the sense that a new, more justice-oriented version of herself was possible.

Indeed, throughout the semester, Catherine played with different versions of herself by reflecting upon the ways that the stories she grew up with could be altered to produce new ways of seeing issues of justice. Amongst her peers’ and authors’ stories, emotions played a particularly important role in enabling these shifts. In the case of anger emerging from people of color, Catherine largely remained on her plot of land, safe with the dominant storylines that legitimized her position in the world. Alternatively, sadness as it was tied to stories of oppression seemingly opened Catherine up to lines of flight, if only through the arguably problematic sense of “feeling bad” for an Other. I would argue that Catherine’s portrayal of her maid, Cecilia, also operated the same way. Yet, Catherine’s ability to both stray from and cultivate her plot of land, a space where she felt safe, was indicative of a more complex way of seeing “the privileged”, both in the way they discursively story and maintain this privilege but
also the momentary ways where they can begin to step into “the flows beneath social codes”

(Deleuze in Davies and Gannon, 2009, p. 12).
Chapter 8
“Caught Out in My Unknowing”: Coming to Know Through Narrative Encounter

Austin

First see how [the social formation] is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are;
then descend from the strata to a deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the
assemblage...to reveal connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.

(Deleuze and Guattari in Davies and Gannon, 2009, p. 73)

Austin: Ya know I thought back to first grade/ uumm/ when I went to school in McConnell and so I had
um/ it was/ I think the demographic/ like minorities at that school are like less than five percent/ is really
small/ and it was like my neighborhood school and so um/ but ya know and first graders don’t see that/
you don’t think about that as a first grader and um my mom enrolled me/ she was really excited cause it
was known as a good school/ and um/ she/ ya know a lot of this is what I have to remember through her
eyes cause I don’t remember too much from it/

Julia: Right/

Austin: She came to school one day/ and um she saw that the teacher had all like the minorities on one
table in the very back of the room next to her desk and everyone ((laughs)) like obviously clumped
together/ and my mom would um come to observe/ and so um/ yeah and my mom told me that like one
day that like I came home and said that like I didn’t like ya know my skin color/ and that like I wanted a
ya know lighter skin color/ and so/ and I remember that/ and so she ya know thought this was ridiculous/
she complained about it to the principal/ one day she just came in on a Saturday and complained about it/
and he didn’t ya know take her seriously/ and then she told him ya know like her title and she wasn’t like/
ya know what she was doing/ and I think at that/ ummm in those years she was like an area director in a
DIST/ and so he was kinda like intimidated by her because he knew she was educated/ and she wasn’t just
a/ like dumb/ like dumb person and so then he treated her completely differently/ and then he said oh I’m
gonna look into this and so she said ya know what?/ don’t/ she’s like I’m not gonna deal with this/ she’s
like/ I’m gonna put him in a Danville school because they ya know it’s/ they still have a better education
than this/ and she’s like I don’t want him to stay here just ya know cause they have a nicer playground
and for him to have to deal with it/ cause this/ this is gonna hurt him when he’s older/ just like if he grows
up thinking like that/ so the next year I went to um/ for second grade I went to the/ cause um the magnet
schools in Danville don’t start till fourth grade/ and so for second grade I went to this school/ ummm it was her/ her good friend was a principal at it so she knew she could look after me/

**Julia:** Hmm mmm/

**Austin:** And um it was probably like (1) I would say above ninety percent Hispanic population/ and I went there and umm I had a really fantastic teacher/ umm and I was so/ I was so lucky cause my mom always like/ she wasn’t just going to put me anywhere/ she made sure she knew people there. She knew/ yeah I think the teacher was like the teacher of the year the last year/ she’s like a fantastic teacher/ really turned me onto learning/

It wasn’t long before I realized that Austin was a storyteller. Unlike the other case study students, our conversations outside of class were more often characterized by Austin telling me narratives from his life as if to say, “let me show you an example of what I’m talking about”. At times (like the one above), these were ‘big stories’ or what Ochs and Capps (2001) define as, “A coherent temporal progression of events... that is typically located in some past time and place. A plotline that encompasses a beginning, a middle, and an end, conveys a particular perspective and is designed for a particular audience who apprehend and shape its meaning” (p. 57). At other points, Austin embedded smaller life history stories into our conversation. No matter the form, however, Austin seemed to enjoy storying his life in my company, at one point spontaneously bringing out his phone to show me pictures of his best friends from high school in order to augment a story about the racial diversity he experienced growing up. I also enjoyed Austin’s storytelling and came to expect it throughout our conversations.

Austin’s narratives were often evidence of the ways he was positioned as Hispanic (the term he used for his racial identity) in both school and within the larger society. Following my question about the way his educational autobiography was functioning for him, Austin launched into the story above, prompted to consider his past in light of educational injustice. Proud of his mother’s advocacy in the face of presumed racist classroom practices that he experienced as a
young boy, Austin’s extended narrative was also the first instance during our interview that he spoke about his awareness of the importance of skin color in his schooling and the positioning it failed to afford him as a student of color in a primarily White school. Austin was already negotiating the positions available to him early on in his life as someone with darker skin in a society that privileges Whiteness. As Austin continued this story for me later on in the semester, he noted the pain it caused him to reconsider how he continued to want to be White, even after his mother moved him to a primarily Hispanic school. Unlike the previous one, the story I share below seemed difficult for Austin to tell. His first story of wanting to be White was seemingly “finished” and neatly tied up. In the second, his affect preceded his words and created a new pedagogical encounter between the two of us. Usually a fast talker, the initial pauses, sighs and “ums” slowed down Austin’s speech as he continued his story of wanting to be White and his mother’s role in helping to push against this storyline.

**Austin:** Umm/ (1) it was (1.5)/ it was kind of hard cause it was like something my mom like (.)/ when like there was like a little bit of pain there cause like when my mom like (.)/ um when I was younger she would um/ ya know was concerned when I first like ya know made that comment/ like when I first said that I wanted to be White/ but like as like as I grew older like she like kind of like of like (2) haaahh ((sighs)))/ was frus- grew frustrated with how/ that I felt that way and like kind of like (1)/ was never mean but like kinda said ya know you need to stop feeling that way cause like they’re so many Hispanics that have like ya know done that/ and she’s like/ I guess she took it like as (.)/ ummm (.)/ a threat because she was very well educated an- and she was like really into like being Hispanic/ like she was like (.)/ the/ I think when / like she used to be like the president of like the administrative association of Dallas/ like all of the Hispanics administrators/ and like ya know she was like really like into like ya know (1) umm (.)/ political/ she/ she used to be/ she’s not as much anymore/ cause ya know she’s gotten older and she (.)/ she does less stuff/ but um she used to be like always like marching and stuff and doing that kind of stuff/ so she wa-/ so it was kinda like insulting that her son like wanted to be White/  

**Julia:** Hmmm/  

**Austin:** Cause like ya know?/
Julia: Hmm mmm/

Austin: Yeah/

Julia: How did you work through that with her/ with him/

Austin: Umm it was hard cause once I like started to like grow up and like not be ashamed she still thought I was/ like so even like when like/ like I had friends that like were Hispanic and like I wanted to speak more Spanish and like wasn’t ashamed to like speak it/ cause like I remember like she would get mad at me/ like we’d go/ go see family and like I didn’t want to speak Spanish/ she was like ya know Spanish/ like why are you/ she was like why are you so ashamed to be who you are/ she’s like that/ she’s making me feel bad for being ashamed/ and she’d be like you need to speak Spanish because that’s what you speak and she’s like you know two languages and you should be really proud/ and so like when like I became more proud it kinda took her like a lot/ like a while to realize/ was he just kidding? Or is he really/ he really is umm/ has changed/ he doesn’t like/

This story was certainly messier than the first story as Austin used smaller, embedded stories throughout the larger narrative concerning his continued desire to “want to be White”. For instance, he includes the small stories of his mom’s concern over his desire to be White, his mom’s close connection to the Hispanic community, and his own resistance to speaking Spanish amongst family. Even though I had not heard these particular stories before, there was something still very “expected” about my encounter with Austin’s narrative. This is not to say I was not moved or interested by the way he negotiated the storylines available to him and the role his mother played throughout this process, but the elements of his story seemed to fit quite neatly into the category I had pre-constructed for how a person of color in my classroom ought to narrate their experiences. Just as my students constantly negotiated their own and other’s stories to establish claims about the world, I had stories of them that led to my own claims contributing to the normative order of the classroom. This is how I expected it to go: Austin would relay to me how he had been positioned as Other and reveal the ways he resisted such
positioning. In these moments, I would feel satisfied that his difference was being “managed” in a productive way and that stories were helping him to do this work. Even my own assignment, the educational autobiography, would give him the space to narrate in this particular way. Stories were seemingly “working” in just the way I hoped and expected, allowing Austin to negotiate the various positionings made available to him. Because of this expectation, Lisa’s story of her time in the course was more “comfortable” for me. Yet, as I spent time with Austin’s stories and how they were narrated through our conversations, these “striated spaces which produced particular, limited movements and relations between bodies”—those narrative workings that maintained Austin’s difference as contained and predictable — were often smoothed out in conversation with Austin, allowing for the unpredictable to happen and “lines of flight” to become available (Davies, 2009, p. 20). In other words, one of my analytic tasks became reading Austin’s stories in a way that helped me to deconstruct my own expectations and assumptions about how his stories fit into the broader storylines of race, class, gender, and justice we encountered in the course. I see this sort of “self-study as self-critique” as a way of examining the impact and presence of stories in a classroom focused on such storylines through more than students’ words. The teacher is also charged with examining their own complicity in how they may be maintaining “technologies of power” (Foucault, 1995, p. 131) through categorical thinking.

**Shifting the Boundaries of the Familiar**

As Austin continues to story his relationship with his mother, the narrative shifted and challenged what I assumed I knew about Austin’s story, as well as that of his mother’s. It was in this moment that the boundaries I wanted to place around Austin and his mother emerged and were challenged.
Austin: But she’s still like/ I don’t know/ like to this day she’s like/ like I was talking to Lisa the other day/ and like Lisa was like ya know most of my friends are Black and I was like that’s so weird because like ya know most of my friends are/ are like ya know different races but even/ even so my mom’s always been like well your best friends have always been White and she’s/ and even/ or like Indian or something/ she’s like you don’t have a lot/ a lot of Hispanic friends/ I’m like yeah/ I/ I said I have a few/ and she kind of like (2) ((sighs with a bit of despair))/ she told me like that once like that like/ like I have some friends that are Hispanic/ like a few that are like (. ) what you would classify as like the stereotype and like/ and she like/ and like/ I have/ but I have a lot of fun like hanging out with them/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Austin: But she like one time told me that (1) I only like hanging out with people like that because I like to differentiate myself from them and I like to think that I’m better than them and that I like to like go see what it’s like on their side of the tracks for a day (. )/ and then like come back and know that I’m be-/ and then I completely didn’t agree with that/ we- we didn’t fight over that but like she s::aid I think you only like to have friends like that to feel better about yourself/

Julia: So where do you think that’s coming from with her?/

Austin: Ummm (1)/ I’m not like (1)/ my mom is jus::t set in her ways/ like people that are older are set in their ways ya know and she like ya know (1) grew up like in a place where like there was only Hispanic and White/ it was in like South Texas/like there’s only like Hispanic or White/there’s like no other races/

Affect, according to Gannon (2009), is “crucial in mobilizing response in pedagogical encounters” (p. 73-74). Admittedly, the turn that Austin’s story took towards the visceral as he narrated for me how his mother perceived his relationship with other Hispanics caught me off guard. Not only were Austin’s emotions outwardly available to feel the weight of the story he was telling but, all of a sudden, his mother was more complicated than the advocate Austin had painted her as moments earlier. The stark contrast that had been built between Austin/his mother and those that implicitly demanded Austin be White (e.g., the teacher who segregated her students of color in Austin’s first grade classroom) was now blurred for me as categorizations based upon social class emerged and Austin was positioned as the discriminatory one. These
categorizations stemmed from Austin’s mother discursive positioning of those Hispanics “on the other side of the tracks”, presumably from poor families. In invoking this distinction, Austin’s mother positioned *him* as someone who would consider “those” Hispanics as “less than” because of their social class status. In doing so, Austin stories his mother as aligning herself with these families through her recognition that perhaps Austin can easily “cross over” and then go home to his more economically privileged life, invoking a sort of “gaze at the Other”. While this is an instance was notable for the way it engaged the intersections of race and class, it was also a moment where I was caught off guard by how this complicated matters. I realized I was invested in the character of Austin’s mother as someone who would support him at all costs and not doubt his commitment to *all* Hispanics. Additionally, there was something to the intersectionality of it all that pulled me away from the neat categories of race and class that, frankly, is easier to “wrap my head around”, particularly as someone who occupies a significant number of dominant positions. Just as Mark and his peers struggled to “wrap their heads around” Taryn who resisted neat categories of sex, sexuality and gender, I struggled in a similar way with Austin and his mother when the categories themselves were called into question.

The fact that Austin, in his final turn, eventually came back to his mother’s story to justify her positioning of him suggests that he is concerned about how he storied her in my presence. Hesitating at the beginning of this turn (“Ummm (1) I’m not like (1)”), Austin carefully presents a new narrative of his mother that provides additional context into what came out of her growing up amongst “only Hispanic and White”. According to Austin’s discursive framing, his mother is caught in a dichotomous understanding of her racial context within which she positions Aldo as potentially “acting White” and living out class privilege, likely similar to what she observed growing up. Aldo repositions himself as younger and, therefore, more open-minded and that,
perhaps, he can claim his Hispanic identity without necessarily taking on the “acting White” label that is mother attributed to him. Indeed, the messiness of it all shifted the “boundaries of the familiar” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 7), as I had begun to construct who Austin and his mother were but was challenged to see them anew. As Ahmed notes, “both surprise and conflict” (p. 6) characterized this embodied encounter and started to unravel the very narratives that had contained Austin so neatly for me. In what follows, I trace some of those unravelings and return to another manifestation of the “acting White” position.

**Negotiating “Acting White”**

Having attended a racially and ethnically diverse arts magnet school that was endowed with a fifty-five million dollar private donation in his sophomore year, Austin grew up educationally privileged. As he had relayed to me, his mother’s knowledge of and ability to navigate a system, which she saw early on would discriminate against her child, provided Austin with substantial ground on which to stand in terms of being a successful student. Yet, being positioned as racially Other was still a matter of negotiation for Austin. Again, whiteness, and what was indexed by it as a category, was salient for Austin. As was the case with “wanting to be White”, the storyline that equated Whiteness and intelligence was problematic for Austin. In the following exchange, Austin explicitly brings up “acting White” and how he and his best friends were often positioned this way.

**Austin:** And like the only thing about/ people say like ya know acting White or acting Mexican or like/ I hate that like that’s/

**Julia:** Talk/ talk more about that/

**Austin:** The one thing. Ummm like my— like my best friend and I— like she’s Black and I’m Hispanic and like we um went to such great high schools— so diverse but like— and like it was like the most opening community and stuff but like when we were outside of like the community and like we had some
friends who were not from a school like that who just ya know— from like a regular high school. And they like would always tell— tell us that we act White.

**Julia:** Hmm.

**Austin:** And because ya know she acts really intelligent and I am, too and I’m like ya know why do you equate intelligence with being White I said. And why do you equate like acting like ghetto or acting anything else like with like minorities and so—

**Julia:** Or any person of color.

**Austin:** Or like yeah! And so I guess I’ve always— I’ve always disliked that and soo—

**Julia:** Hmmm.

**Austin:** And she— and I’ve talked to her a little bit about it and— my— my best friend— and she— because she doesn’t like it either because like she ya know like people in her family like ya know will say— tell her sometimes that she acts a little bit White but it— and umm I think my mom like told her that once and like I just— I—I don’t like that saying. It’s one thing that I don’t like.

Quickly moving into a narrative about himself and his friend, Austin acknowledges how they have been positioned as individuals of color who were seen as intelligent. Austin’s use of “White” in this context points to the construction of the category whiteness. As such, a particular meaning of whiteness takes hold in his language, as it is rendered inextricable from perceptions of intelligence and school success and becomes the privileged term in the White/non-White binary. Austin’s awareness and questioning of this category maintenance work, performed by those outside of his community and, indeed, his own mother, was consistent with who I took Austin to be at this point early on in our conversations. He was justice oriented and fit neatly into the category I had begun to construct for him around issues of racial equity. This category contained him as a person of color that, necessarily, was aware of racial injustice and could articulate its effects from an almost omniscient place. At times like these he, along with Lisa and a few other students, became the voices of counternarratives amongst the more dominant storylines based on unexamined White privilege. For instance, when Austin told his three small stories of how he anticipated experiencing racial discrimination while traveling in the
South, his own state, or overseas. I anticipated a “calling out” of dominant storylines and counternarratives from students like Austin and particularly appreciated these counternarratives that he would tell in class and within our interviews. These were stories and their attendant claims about the world that held weight within my own goals for the course and, thus, I initially let them rest comfortably within my own assumptions of what ought to occur in my classroom focused on critically analyzing structures of power and privilege. Yet, as Gannon (2009) notes, our pedagogical encounters, whether they take place in an official classroom or a busy coffee shop are “leaky organisms” where the unexpected occurs and new opportunities for becoming emerge (p. 86). Our conversation continued, with Austin speaking more quickly and with different purpose, as if wanting to close the conversation.

Julia: Huh/ well that’s really interesting/ so that is sort of how you trace through that feeling of not wanting to perpetuate stereotype/ that for example/

Austin: Yeah/ an-/ yeah and I’ve never been/ like that was outside of our high school/ like I’ve never really been in a community where like/ ya know/ people ya know said oh ya know oh you’re trying to act White or something/ Like I was never in that kind of community but just like the/ ya know we knew people who would tell us that like and not negatively/ just like silly/ ya know just/ yeah./

Julia: Right right/ but silly also has/ it’s sort of/ like it carries some weight/

Austin: It carries a little bit of weight yeah/

In the moment, I was taken aback by Austin’s removing himself from the seriousness that characterized the conversation moments earlier. Positioning those who deemed him to be “acting White” as merely “silly” and not meaning it in a negative way was a far cry from the importance he placed upon examining how this categorization was detrimental to both he and his friend. Additionally, Austin’s tone became lighter, even flippant, seemingly attempting to remove the tension that was created earlier and end the conversation on a positive note. I felt challenged to accept the encounter as one I could no longer control, for Austin’s response
seemed to contradict the weight he had just placed upon examining “acting White” as a limiting and false category. Nevertheless, I attempted to bring it back to the more bounded space where I could feel comfortable with a conversation that continued to question dominant storylines.

Indeed, Austin met me on the fringes of that place, echoing, but downscaling my characterization of “silly” as still significant, saying “[silly] carries a little bit of weight”. For a brief moment, our encounter felt comfortable for me again as Austin was again more knowable and consistent in his stance towards “acting White”. But, of course, our last exchange in the excerpt can be read as his attempt to end that part of our conversation in a space more comfortable for me. In revisiting the transcript I could see his discomfort with his original narration of the “acting White” storyline as one motivation for his revised version of the story, a story I then tried to prompt him to revise.

In attempting to pull Austin back to a questioning place, I moved away from the “smooth space” where lines of flight became more available, where “becoming another” for both Austin and myself was possible. The striated space of “knowing” what social justice oriented dialogue ought to look like and who my students were within this orientation was within reach and I went for it, pulling Austin back to a discourse which was familiar and comfortable. The opportunity was there, however, to come to know Austin differently- to acknowledge the very real experiences he had with feeling both angered and seemingly unaffected by accusations that he “acted White”. Critically, this was also a moment to understand why, in a conversation with your White teacher, it might feel necessary to layer the silly onto the serious in that story. My racial positioning may have contributed to Austin’s down-playing of this story that stems directly from the way whiteness operates to maintain its privileged status. The ambiguity of it all, as well as the apparent inconsistency, caught me in my unknowing.
But still, I wonder about the ways in which the boundaries I created—the talk around social justice that continued to question that which seemed overly simplified—was an ethical necessity. Indeed, “part of the work of a teacher is establishing her classroom as a space that oscillates between smoothness and striations, a space that is both new and replete with possibilities, and tightly controlled” (Gannon, 2009, p. 78). The possibility for me to see Austin as more complicated, for him to perhaps not discuss his story in the way that I had hoped, was available for both of us. Yet, the pull to give Austin more than one way of looking at “acting White”, to question the possibility of seeing this phrase that may have come off as silly, but as still quite loaded, was there and, I would argue, an ethical responsibility that I held. At the same time, it was an ethical responsibility to examine the range of motivations Austin could have had for revising his original story in the ways he did. He may have feared, for instance, that I would misread the characters in his story—his community members and his mother—as holding more malice than he intended to convey or would not want an audience to take away. Just as it was important for Catherine to be given the space to restory her own experiences in ways that helped her challenge highly entrenched storylines, Austin also deserved such leeway in light of the claims he was making about what it was to be both Hispanic and economically privileged.

**Compassion for the Passionate**

Austin came out as gay and Catholic to his peers the class after the Bristol Pride panel. We had just finished watching *It’s Elementary*, a documentary about the possibilities and promises of having conversations about sexual orientation with all ages of students. The discussion moved to religion and the students began to discuss the case of parents who, because of their religion, saw being gay as a sin. Some argued that, for this reason, sexuality should not be discussed in schools and even themselves named being gay as a sin during our discussion. Others used the
lens of heteronormativity to suggest that those who were in the LGBTQ community deserved to be “on the table” in terms of curricular design despite religious objections. Preceding Austin coming out as both gay and Catholic, the case for mutual exclusivity between religion (Catholicism in particular) and acceptance of LGBTQ communities was made. The audio recorder did not pick up his statement (I believe it was in a small group on the other side of the room), but my research notes suggest that his statement was not directly taken up or responded to. Many students started packing up their belongings quickly after Austin spoke. I pondered this moment and wondered how Austin felt about coming out as both gay and Catholic, two groups that were actively vilified during that discussion. I asked him about this in-class moment during our last interview and was, again, challenged by the direction he took with his answer.

**Austin:** I/ Yeah I remember/ and I remember I made that comment to like/ and saying that I was like gay and Catholic and like I found a way to like (.) um (.)/ yeah (2) I’ve always ((hesitating here, speech slows)) (. ) had a ( . ) hard time with that because I had/ you have to respect people but (1) / that hate it because ya know (2) you could/ you could kind of argue that like/ ya know how could you ya know say that ( .) murderers are good people because some people believe/ truly believe that ya know that that’s a sin and that that’s an absolute ya know most horrible thing/ I mean there’s people like umm (1)/that West Baptist church/ it’s always protesting people/ like they ya know/ they truly believe that homosexuality’s a sin/ and they tru- / like they ( .) ya know no matter if they’re brain washed or if they ya know believe that from the get go/ like that’s ya know something they feel passionate about/ passionate enough to ya know like travel across the country and like protest and/ I think (lately) they’re gonna go protest at a graduation in ( . )/ I heard on the news the other day/ so:: it/

**Julia:** A graduation?/

**Austin:** Yeah/ this kid in umm (.)/ like in the Deacon area wrote a column in his high school newspaper against the Westboro-boro Baptist Church (.)/ and like now they’re gonna/ now they’re gonna go picket his graduation ((laughs with a sigh)).

**Julia:** Now they’re gonna go ( .)/ that’s:: a good choice ((sarcastically))/

**Austin:** Hmm mmm/ yeah/ but I mean I would/ I was always taught that like ya know the people that are
on opposition (. ) like ya know even though they’re protesting you should still respect them cause they’re ya know exercising their First Amendment and ya know at least they’re doing something about their pass- / something they’re passionate about/

Our storying process, and the claims we make “do not involve particular pre-fitted solutions ‘taken up’; rather, they contain or enable the genuine possibility of experimentation by the members, to ‘internally generate and direct their own projects (Guattari in Houle, 2005, p. 93). Similar to the way that Austin had made his own way- developed his own project- throughout our discussion of “acting White”, he took his own path as he reflected on what it was like to come out to the class as both gay and Catholic. As he started to speak, Austin seemed to be moving towards a direct explanation of how he reconciled being both gay and a devout Catholic (Austin was a member of a church that he attended regularly back in his hometown) with his words, “and saying that I was like gay and Catholic and like I found a way to like/”. He stopped short, though, and moved into a narrative format that was highly characteristic of Austin. Presenting a hypothetical scenario where murderers were seen as “good people” and implying the absurdity of this sentence (“ya know how could you ya know say that (. ) murderers are good people”), Austin acknowledges that how he is about to position the Westboro Baptist Church, one of our nation’s most outspoken anti-gay organizations, may not come across as acceptable to his me, his audience. With this framing in place, Austin positions the Westboro Baptist Church as deserving of respect for their passion towards issues in which they believe, even if “they’re brain washed or if they ya know believe that from the get go”.

My sarcasm following Austin’s story about their next protest established my position. I was not forgiving towards an organization that actively hates the LGBTQ community and held significant contempt towards a group that was now going to protest what is arguably the most
highly anticipated and celebrated moment in a high school student’s life. In his next turn, Austin gave a slight nod towards my position (“Hmm mmm/ yeah”), but presented a counternarrative to the one I wanted to construct with him, one that would continue to question Westboro Baptist Church’s homophobic practices. Notably, this counternarrative was not simply the “opposite” of my own and, therefore, wholly accepting of the Church’s claims on the world. In a move similar to Lisa’s negotiation of dominant and counter storylines, Austin manages to not completely vilify the Church (though he certainly does not agree as illustrated by his statement, “even though they’re protesting”), but reframe this narrative as something to be respected if only for its driving passion. To discursively construct this reframing, Austin also appeals to the First Amendment rights that the Church members exercise, a move that taps into larger narratives around the right to free speech in this nation even if it considered hate speech. Additionally, Austin also uses the authority of the storyline concerned with individuals “at least doing something about their passion”, to resist fully vilifying the Church members. Their free speech and activism is something that Austin could consider in complicating who they were to him even as he was the target of their protests.

As I sat there in conversation with Austin, it occurred to me that considering the Westboro Baptist Church’s actions as free speech and as illustrative of citizens acting on their passions was not part of my repertoire of stories I had created about this group. I saw this free speech as hate speech and, therefore, unwelcome, and rendered their passions detrimental to a society that should celebrate and provide the same opportunities to everyone. This meeting of storylines, storylines that were not wholly inconsistent with one another but certainly caught me off guard, was nonetheless challenging me to consider how I had wanted to hear Austin speak to LGBTQ issues, as well as what I had wanted to hear. This movement away from the “implicit standard”
(Patton in Houle, 2005, p. 93) towards “a third thing altogether, a singularity, a plane of consistency, a residuum not ‘contained’ in the prior series” (Houle, p. 93), suggested respect alongside critique, and likely a more open ear towards “differences, however they may be expressed” (Gannon, 2009, p. 78).

Yet, given the need for pedagogical spaces through which “lines of flight can open up to the art of becoming”, where both teacher and student can “become undone” (Gannon, 2009, p. 70), I am left with more questions than answers in considering the narrative encounters I had with Austin over the course of the semester. As Austin narrated both his ethnicity and sexual orientation outside of the bounds of stories I had preconstructed for him, I was challenged to accept and spend time with these alternative versions. A return to his in-class participation also invites in this lens. His question to his four White peers during the second narrative event, “Is that being/ like identifying as a White male in America/ is that like (. ) kind of hard for like (. ) you?”, incites a similar reaction in me as it seemed to continue to center these students’ experiences in a class that was meant to decenter dominant experiences. Yet, this question, as my analysis indicates, was also one driven by what I would argue are more justice-oriented rules around storytelling. Austin modeled a process of wondering about someone else’s story, even if it was to continue a conversation that had quickly moved away from explicit naming of power and privilege.

And still, the question arises concerning the process of opening up to new storylines that challenge one’s own, particularly as teachers in social justice oriented classrooms. What does Austin’s negotiation of his own story in light of issues of difference and injustice, even as it “caught [me] out in my unknowing”, require of me as his teacher? Is the ethical response one that would ask Austin to consider the contingency of his own narratives? And is it one that would
require me to locate my own social position in light of how I am interpreting his stories and give him space to story in the way he did? The story of the Westboro Baptist Church is especially challenging for me in relation to these questions, for Austin’s softness and respect towards a group that actively hates him, explicitly states the world would be better off without him, seems at once beautiful and something that should be questioned. It is in these dualities that I remain, continuing to consider the ways that both my students and I take up stories when they can feel so jarring, unexpected, and contrary to how we think someone should story themselves.
Chapter 9

Negotiating the Head and the Heart Through Stories

Mark

Mark: I mean obviously hearing other people’s stories like (1) helps give you/ give you an idea/ (2) and like helps to break down some of the/ some of the unknowns and the confusions but like (3) there’s the whole just like you’ll never really understand/ like and I tr-/ I feel like I::/ compared to a lot of like twenty-year old dudes that are in the like not systemically oppressed category/ as far as like me compared to all of them/ like I feel like I’ve put a lot of energy into trying to understand these things/ cause like I (3) my sisters have like kinda asked me kind of broke down type prompt like questions like you do/ to try and help me understand all this stuff/ cause it seems like it makes perfect sense to them/ but I mean (2) it’s::/ it’s hard when you just haven’t (2) felt it/ and I’m sure you can/ you can make/ like you can make progress towards understanding it/ but you can’t really/ I feel like it’s hard to really wrap your head around if you/

Julia: Yeah/ so/ um/ is it/ I mean/ it sounds frustrating that you can’t understand it/ or/

Mark: It’s like I really/ there’s/ it takes so much energy to hate someone/ and I really don’t/ like I ((chuckles))/ I rea-/ when it really comes down to it like I’m totally like/ want everyone to get along and all like whoop-dee-do/ cumbaya/ but like (4) there’s a lot of like fear and discomfort in::: misunderstanding and (2) I would love to be the person that like hasn’t been like just kind of like rottened by stereotypes and like ya know succumb to all these little things that I’m supposed to see past/ and I f:::eel like I’m a lot further along that path than a lot of people but I’m not quite there/ ((chuckles))/ and I/ the logic is there/ and like the/ the/ the morals are there/ but the whole/ what/ what goes on in here ((points to his chest)) / I don’t really have control over/ and/ or I/ not too much control over/ and I haven’t/ I wou-/ I think it’s safe to say I haven’t broken down all the (2) all of the learned negative things over time/

As Mark located his heart, both physically and discursively, as the place where more justice-oriented ways of knowing and being could be cultivated, my own heart felt at once heavy and buoyant. It was our third interview together, and Mark, who I had thought of as the “thoughtful class clown”, invoked emotion in a way I had not yet seen from him. His direct
reference to the place where many would locate our emotional center and, indeed, the necessity of this center, was in contrast to much of the emotional regulation that occurred during class discussions and within my one-on-one conversations with case study students. I appreciated the vulnerability that Mark displayed as he acknowledged the need to feel differently in order to understand differently.

Nevertheless, this moment also reminds me of the deep complexity of understanding o/Others in light of the stories we tell about ourselves and, perhaps, where we bump up against this understanding. As Mark acknowledged the importance of stories in breaking down “some of the unknowns and the confusions”, he also deems stories as not sufficient for understanding, as if they were not enough for him to yet call into question all of those “learned negative things” that reside deep within. Iris Marion Young’s (1997) ideal of narrative in the communicative democratic space, one that “fosters understanding across difference” (p. 72) is complicated in Mark’s talk. Although Mark understands, in this instance, that he can never step into the shoes of another, he also speaks to a particular discomfort with where this leaves him as a White, economically privileged, heterosexual male. Indeed, throughout our conversations over the course of the semester, I felt this discomfort come from Mark as he negotiated his story amongst those of marginalized others as he both strayed from and stayed committed to oppressive storylines.

In what follows, I explore Mark’s negotiation of these various stories and storylines, with a particular emphasis on the interaction between his own storytelling processes, the question of understanding and, ultimately, the possibility of justice-oriented action. Importantly, Mark’s case calls into question the ideal of storytelling and to what extent stories can challenge “subjective commitment to implicit story lines” (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 5). Or perhaps, as
Mark suggests, the heart needs to be engaged another way.

**Opening Stories**

Mark’s story in this class begins with the way he storied his educational history both orally and through writing. In the following excerpt from his written educational autobiography, Mark’s start in the Waldorf system reveals both his humor and early experience with stories:

*My schooling began when I was four or five at a Waldorf preschool. We had more dress up than a child could ever need, were constantly inspired to play imagination games, and simply lived in a dream world. We went on nature walks, were told stories of garden gnomes and fairies, and were constantly reminded of how special, brave, loving and noble we were in this large, beautiful world filled with love, magic, and lots of garden gnomes...The things we would learn about were not even at the level of excitement and unpredictability the real world has to offer; in our world there was even more: fairies and gnomes inhabiting our gardens, the sand man sprinkling sand in our eyes before we woke up, tooth fairies. You name it. Through story, they walked us through magical lands packed with mythical creatures. Our understanding of the world was that it was fair, humane, full of unicorns and dragons, and that a good deed pays off 100% of the time with a jewel or a wooden sword or what have you (Mark, Educational Autobiography, 2011).*

As I read this opening, I was certainly amused by Mark’s depiction of his early school days. The “thoughtful class clown” personae was present throughout Mark’s writing, as well as within the classroom. Yet, I was also struck by the ways in which Mark presented his days in his Waldorf preschool as laden with stories to promote particular versions of the world. Of course, these were fantastical at times, but they translated into storylines and moral orders that promoted love, fairness, and humanity. Indeed, the stories Mark told me about his family and larger community often invoked these values. In our opening interview, he noted that thinking in terms of justice and diversity “is what I’ve grown up with and what my family believes in and what all
my friends believe in and pretty much the schools’ like models are just like based off of (1) like the hard core like peace love”. I quickly learned that his older sisters were a large part of this mentality, as they would often have conversations with Mark about LGBTQ issues, in particular, pressing him to consider more equitable points of view.

Due to these experiences with family, community and school, Mark felt “further along” than most of his friends concerning issues of equity and social justice. He also described he and his friends in college as “close minded and open minded at the same time as far as like (2) like having like our points of view pretty strong but being willing to like actually listen to other points of view”. Mark’s use of “close-minded” was important, as he seemed to employ the term as not wholly negative, but simply part of the process of negotiation in coming in contact with new ways of seeing the world amongst friends. When I asked him about these “strong” points of view, Mark noted that:

As far as feeling strongly goes like/ (1) I’ve always like/ like I guess like felt pretty strongly about just like why like be hateful towards someone else for just like doin’ their thing/

There was a consistency to the words Mark used to position himself around justice-oriented issues- the discourse of his Waldorf school was seemingly influential to the ways he questioned and spoke out against hate towards marginalized groups. Furthermore, Mark’s discursive constructions of the dominant positions he occupied mediated the understanding that he had of his own responsibility for promoting more just ways of being in the world. For instance, he described conversations he and his friends would have in their dorm rooms concerning “gay people” and the way he would “call em’ out”.

Mark: Yeah like I’ve met/ I grew up surrounded by a bunch of gay people and like no gay bashers/ now all of sudden it’s people that are just like nope like don’t talk to them/ can’t have it like/ (.) like it’s not how it’s supposed to be/ I’m just like (.)/ like just like hateful like/ and then like (.) even though it’s my
friends like (2)/ their points of view like/ when I call em out on it/

**Julia:** Friends here/

M: Yeah/ a lot of them will like/ like I’ll call ‘em out on it and like it’s like not really a cool thing to say or/ and they’ll like be like ((in “friends’ voices)) no I think/ I was just joking like/ like ya know I have a Black friend or like ya know like I’m not like that or/ but it’s like (1) yeah you- you/ like yeah/ (3) like (.) a lot of peoples’ like traits come out/

These stories were ones that, again, flowed nicely from how he narrated his education growing up and reflected the influence his sisters had on him to be kind and accepting of others. However, right after telling me about those discussions, Mark mitigated their importance, invoking a new set of social rules around talk about “politics...justice and rights” amongst his college friends.

**Martin:** But (.) at the same time like (2) I don’t feel like I’m like that furiously in like/ like politics and like (2) justice and rights as far as like needing to like make a scene every time like something happens and like/

**Julia:** Hmmm/

**Martin:** We almost have just like had the conversations about everything a million times and like agree to disagree is like the conclusion every time/ and so it’s like ya know someone like gets drunk and says something stupid about/ that’s not really a cool thing to say/

**Julia:** Hmmm mmm/

**Martin:** It’s almost just- I like I- I do not even feel like going there now/ like I’m gonna enjoy myself

His use of the phrase “but at the same time” is a turn away from his previous position on justice-oriented conversations towards a stance that suggests he can opt out of them under certain conditions. In doing so, Mark simultaneously taps into an implicit set of emotional rules that he feels ought to regulate the conversational space. For instance, his use of “make a scene”, one that is driven by outrage or disgust at a friend’s racist, sexist, or homophobic remark, suggests that there are times and spaces when opting out is not just possible, but also preferable. In these moments, Mark would like to take the conversation back to a neutral, if not positive place and
“enjoy himself”. Indeed, the social boundaries he discursively constructs tap into larger storylines around emotions, particularly those that are perceived as more intense. Mark’s words indicate emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), or ways he regulated his own emotions, in terms of talk around “justice and rights” even in the private space that he and his friends inhabit, not just the classroom. This momentary shift from one position to another suggests that Mark could choose how justice-oriented conversations were to go with his friends with the possibility of ending them altogether. Despite his interest and said commitment to issues of justice, Mark’s ability to remove himself from more heated conversations is illustrative of the storylines available to him as a member of a number of dominant groups. At the same time, the fact that he was voicing this ability to opt out of such critical conversations after explaining his commitment to having them suggests he was also aware of how questionable this choice could be. Certainly, Mark was cognizant of what it meant for him, at the intersection of multiple dominant social positions, to be part of such conversations.

“This whole thing of seeing…”

The awareness Mark had of his own story, the privilege associated with it and the limits it placed on his ability to understand others became more salient as the semester went on. While he storied himself to me as highly aware and “liberal”, the ease he had with the curriculum started to slip away as he acknowledged the limits to his own understanding and, in particular, his discomfort considering the LGBTQ community and his own homophobia. Indeed, I saw a noticeable shift in Mark as we met for our second interview a few days after the Bristol Pride panel. He shifted more in his chair, and his speech contained long pauses and uncomfortable laughter as he considered the fact that he grew up, in his words, “in a very, very, very gay place” but admitted that, “I’m not like hateful or whatever...it’s just uncomfortable”. This discomfort
was spurred on by the panel, particularly Taryn, who Mark described as “weird” as he struggled to understand her choice to take hormones in order to develop physical female characteristics.

**Mark:** Yeah/ like (3) whenever I try and think about like (.)/ try and like (1) have like an out of body experience and like try and like actually/ like it would be/ what it would be like to be in their shoes like (4) it’s/ it’s you can’t really go all the way/

**Julia:** Hmmm/ why not/

**Mark:** Until/ it just doesn’t/ it just stops making se-/like (2) like being a dude like I’m in a/ I’m in a dude’s body?/ and I’m like/

**Julia:** Right/ like the gender/ the gender that was assigned to you (                   ) what you’re fine with/

**Mark:** Like that’s just kinda like what I know (((laughs uncomfortably)))/ yeah/ and like I feel like that’s so commonly the case/ and it’s like it’s not like/ like there’s plenty of girls out there that like are totally tom boys/ like I’m totally/ I’m friends with so many of little like tom boy girls that like/ totally not girly like/ I’m/ I’m used to all that but like/ like changing y-y-your body/ like I was sitting two feet away from this guy talking about all his little surgeries and stuff and like (     )/ I was (.) just like/

**Julia:** What/ well let’s talk about that more/

**Mark:** It’s weird!/ he’s injecting hormones into himself/

Mark’s visceral reaction to Taryn was palpable and, admittedly, surprising to me given whom I perceived Mark to be up until this point. There was even a condescending quality to Mark’s voice as he described the “little tomboy girls” and all of Taryn’s “little surgeries and stuff”, as if there was something trivial about disrupting the gender binary and sex reassignment. The physical proximity of Taryn to Mark is also telling, as this embodied, vivid story from an Other, was seemingly not enough to “mobilize response” (Gannon, 2009, p.73) from Mark in order to produce an encounter that would open him up to new possibilities of being amongst LGBTQ individuals. In fact, Taryn’s in-person story seemed to shut down these possibilities.

**Julia:** So what was it like to hear that story?/

**Mark:** I mean it’s not like I haven’t (. ) read the story before/ it’s not like I hadn’t/ it’s not that I didn’t know it happened/ but it’s just like (3)/ it’s just this whole thing of seeing (((laughs uncomfortably)))
**Julia:** It what?

**Mark:** It’s just this entirely ne::w/ (4) it’s just/ (1) ((laughs uncomfortably))/ I don’t even know how to explain it/

**Julia:** Its okay/ you don’t need to/

**Mark:** It’s just/ I’m trying to think of a better vocabulary word than weird/

**Julia:** That’s okay/ yeah/

**Mark:** But it’s just kinda like/ (3) I almost feel like (. the class yesterday like promoted the stereotype of like (1) gay people and transgender people being just kinda like (1) out there/

**Julia:** Even though/ so/ talk about that some more/

**Mark:** Like they/ they kept on saying like (1)/ oh ((sighs))/

**Julia:** (With) Charlotte or Taryn?/

**Mark:** Yeah/ (. the:::y (8)/ I just can’t wrap my head around/ head around like (2)/ I- I’ve always just dealt with stuff/ like it’s just like man do whatever you want and try to not/ like I don’t really wanna be around it all incredibly much/ and like/ I’m not gonna actively (. hate you/

**Julia:** Hmm mmmm/

**Mark:** And I’m not gonna:::/ like/ but just really (8)/ you just kinda like have your own little like sense of the way things are ((laughs))/ (2) and like there is like the/ the whole like don’t you want more than just chocolate and vanilla/

**Julia:** Hmm mmmm?/

**Mark:** And it’s like/ (1) sure ((with hesitation, laughs))/ but/

**Julia:** Well sure but what?/

**Mark:** Sure ((laughs nervously)) but/ (2) but what are you like doing to your s-/ what like/ I mean/

**Julia:** Who?/ can you talk about ( )/

**Mark:** (2) I don’t know/ I guess I- I can’t call other people’s feelings invalid but I just can’t wrap my head around them/

Notably, the genre and form of the story mattered to Mark. “This whole thing of seeing” Taryn produced a different response in Mark than did written stories presumably about transgender individuals. It was the physical proximity of Taryn, only two feet away from Mark in the large circle we had created that day, that prompted his disgust at the body so close to him. This body was in the process of being changed from it’s original “male” form, a form that Mark
identifies with, and one that caused a disruption in the way Mark understood himself. The pauses in his speech increased as we spoke about Taryn, with Mark struggling to find the words to convey his disgust for this “dude’s body”. This disgust, conveyed through incomplete questions directed at Taryn like, “what are you doing to your s-“, with the cut off “s” sound presumably meant to be “self”, suggests Mark’s discomfort bumped up against his sense of himself as accepting of more than just “chocolate and vanilla” (the third panelist, Irene, used this metaphor to refer to the way gender and sexuality are usually taken up, through binary terms) and as not an actively hateful person. Indeed, Mark previously positioned “tomboys” as acceptable in their gender performances (albeit with some degree of condescension) and was the “liberal” guy amongst his friends. Yet, it was in considering Taryn in her bodily form, with her large biceps and obvious breasts, that forced Mark to confront how he had positioned himself in prior conversations. The “dorm room liberal”, able to “call out” other “dudes” who likely identified in similar ways, could no longer be performed in the same way.

In not being able to “wrap his head around” Taryn, Mark suggests that perhaps she would have been more “knowable” had her story been in a written form. He went on to explain this requirement in more detail.

**Mark:** I mean (2) there’s- there’s like authors out there that can (1) make the most unrelatable things (1) at least somewhat relatable with just like the perfect use of just like ya know adjectives and just like description of the like/ like I’ve definitely read some very powerful like tear jerkin’ stuff where you’re like man that’s really how it is out there or whatever/

**Julia:** Hmm mmm/

**Mark:** But it’s like ya know (1) with Taryn just like ya know casually ((in “Taryn’s voice”)) like yeah and like the hormones and like it’s sick/ it’s like no man that’s not sick like that’s (1) why?/

**Julia:** Hmm mmm

**Mark:** I mean and even if he was like a world-renowned author and wrote some book about it like who knows if that/ and who/ that was like very descriptive of the feelings

**Julia:** Hmmmmmmm mmmm
Mark: As I mean/ who knows if I would be understanding or even if I would want to read the book/

Julia: So perhaps the way the story is told makes a difference/

Mark: Yeah I mean totally/ but- but at the same time like there’s (3) I don’t know I really (.)/ I try to/ I’m from such an open minded place and have been trained to (1) to/ there’s just some things that it’s just like man/ it’s ju- sighs/ I don’t know/ it’s: (.) it’s interesting/

Positioning Taryn as too “casual” in her description of the medical ways she transformed her body, Mark renders her stories as less worthy of consideration than those of an author who could put together words in a more formal, distanced, and, thus, desired way. Mark positioned these storytellers, ones that produce “tear jerkin’ stuff”, as potentially having greater impact on him to come know what it is to be a transgendered individual. He uses this moment to reaffirm his disgust at Taryn’s embodied form asking, “why?”, concerning her choice to use hormones to develop female sex characteristics. Words on a page, as opposed to Taryn’s presence, are safer for Martin who is, once again confronting the view he has of himself as an accepting person from “such an open-minded” place. Yet, Mark also questions whether he would actually have more understanding from this author and if he would even read the book. While this suggests an awareness of how his interests may prevent him from engaging with anything that stories the transgender experience, it also indicates the ease with which he can simply pick up or put down such stories. Taryn’s story, on the other hand was raw, “in your face” and something that he could not get away from at the time.

This vacillation was becoming more and more common for Mark throughout our interviews, as the story he held about himself being “open-minded” and even “trained” to hold certain views about those who are Othered put his positioning of Taryn into question.

Importantly, Young’s (1997) ideal of storytelling was only met to a certain extent. While Mark was able to “maintain a distance” between him and Taryn, seemingly “knowing that there is always more to be told”, her story did not hold “equal value in the communicative situation”
Rather, Mark’s judgment of Taryn as “weird” and, therefore, abnormal was reaffirmed as she storied her experience.

**The Judicious Spectator or Voyeuristic Spectator?**

Martha Nussbaum’s (1995) ideal of storytelling begins with the “judicious spectator”, a term pulled from Adam Smith to refer to one who can mentally enter the plight of another person through story, necessarily evoking an empathetic response (p. 73). Given Mark’s discomfort with accepting Taryn for who she is- a discomfort that is without even a passive empathetic response- I would argue that Nussbaum’s ideal is too simplified. As he negotiated his own view of himself and the limits of this perspective in encountering Taryn, Mark reverted back to what is a version of voyeurism or what Boler (1999) terms “spectating” (p. 183). Described as a sort of “cinematic diversion” spectating enables “oneself to inhabit a position of distance and separation, to remain in the ‘anonymous’ spectating crowd and abdicate any possible responsibility” (p. 184). For instance, Mark casually described for me how he and Catherine looked up Taryn’s YouTube comedy videos, describing them as “interesting”, with a heavy dose of sarcasm. Coupled with his positioning of Taryn as “weird”, I was uneasy in the entertainment value he was getting out of Taryn’s experiences, many of which she used to provide material for her comedic routines. Mark’s spectating, however, went beyond Boler’s version. He received entertainment value out of her experience, enabling him to continue to position her as Other, but also deems Taryn as *worthy* of his scorn and disgust because of her comedy routines. In this instance, these activities give Martin the right to position Taryn as undeserving of greater respect. If only she were a “normal” transgendered person, telling her moving story on the page, he might be more willing to challenge his positioning of her. His spectating not only allowed him to absolve himself of responsibility of Taryn, but to justify it, as well. While he could link
his inability to understand Taryn to his social location as a heterosexual male and the fact that he could not feel oppression like Taryn, the promise of stories that Young (1997) promotes, he did not take further responsibility for Taryn. In further conversations, Mark could eventually render Taryn’s experiences valid, yet her stories did not function to give Mark a heightened sense of action against the discrimination that she and other members of the LGBTQ community faced on a daily basis.

Mark: (2) I don’t know/ I guess I- I can’t call other people’s feelings invalid but I just can’t wrap my head around them/

Julia: That’s fair/

Martin: With the/ with the gay straight thing I tr-/ I feel like the way that I make it/ make the most sense to me (1) is if I::/ I imagine that I/ like I: still like/ like I’m still myself/ but if I was just born into a world where like know/ like anatomically worked this way too/ just like they were two dudes just like raising this kids/ and like two women raising/ like that’s just how it was/ and then a-/ and like that was kinda the norm and everyone hated straight people/ and then all of sudden I would grow up and be like man/ girls are kinda hot/ like this is kinda weird/ like I’m/ I’m a freak but like (1)/ and then like hook up with a dude and be like man this sucks/ like I’m not really down/ huh/ try to be normal like/ I can imagine that being super shitty/

Julia: Hmm mmm/

Martin: So:/ (2) on that basis I kind of just assumed that other peoples’ valid like opinions are/ feelings are valid/ just the way my feelings are valid/ it’s like/

Julia: It’s parallel/

Martin: Yeah like I wouldn’t want someone saying my feelings weren’t valid so/

Julia: Right/ right/

Martin: So/ so do your thing but/ but then like whenever I’m/ whenever I’m actually like hanging out with someone who’s just totally out there/ ((chuckles a bit)) it’s just like/

Julia: There’s something there/

Martin: It’s like I’m willing to hear your story/ like I’m not/ I don’t have anything wrong with you necessarily but I really just/ like it’s not like I’m gonna hang out with you/

Julia: Hmmm/

Martin: Me and Taryn weren’t gonna like go and grab a couple beers after like class/ like it wasn’t really gonna happen/
Imagine an alternative world where being straight was outside of the norm helped Mark to come to terms with Taryn’s experiences. He weaves a story in order to imagine this alternate world where two dads and two moms were the norm and he, as a straight male, was the abnormal one who was being asked to “try to be normal”. Yet, this imagination stopped short of enabling Mark to fully break down the normal/abnormal dichotomy and see Taryn as someone who he could actually treat as normal. Her embodied story, though it pushed Mark to critically consider the categories he created for her—“weird”, “out there”—did not move him towards a new responsibility for Taryn, one that was simply about hanging out with her as he would his college friends, contact that would bring her body into proximity with his own. In fact, when I had asked the panel what it meant for others to be straight allies they responded by saying that they just wanted to be treated normally and to “hang out” with those who were straight. Even after hearing this response, Mark could only validate Taryn’s feelings and stories but stopped short of becoming an ally to her in the way she would have wanted.

Mark’s response to Taryn’s stories calls into question both Young and Nussbaum’s ideals of storytelling. While both call on stories as potential tools to mediate the space between those who are positioned differently in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and other markers of social difference, Mark’s case suggests a more complex picture. As he considered who he was supposed to be as a “good liberal” from a community that valued diversity, Mark negotiated the contact he made with Taryn’s stories and, ultimately, could not move to a place of action, where he could imagine being an ally on the terms the panelists had wanted. While the process he went through with me during his interviews was important as it enabled him to connect his positioning of Taryn with his social location as a heterosexual male comfortably on one side of the gender binary, the oppressive storylines he carried with him were difficult to shake even in the presence
of Taryn’s story. Indeed, his earlier comment about not being hateful towards others was at odds with how he discursively positioned Taryn as disgusting. Yet, Mark also knew that he had not yet “broken down all of the learned negative things over time”. His heart—the place where he wanted to cultivate a different seeing and a different way of being around those who were positioned as Other-needed more than a panel of stories to do this work.

The Bristol Pride panel, itself, risks becoming a sort of spectator’s activity with the class uncritically consuming the panelists’ stories without any examination of why they were seeing and listening in the way that they were. To some extent, this is certainly what happened with Mark as he listened to Taryn and the other panelists. In retrospect, my decision to invite the panel in was due to my belief in the potential of stories to encourage greater understanding of those from marginalized communities. Yet, the panel also becomes a sort of “stage” that, as Mark noted, risks reinscribing “the stereotype of…gay people and transgender people being just kinda like out there”. As the third narrative event shows, the debrief two days after the panel was helpful in unpacking these perceptions. Nevertheless, Mark’s case makes me wonder about all the students that I did not hear talk through the various storylines they could have positioned the panelists within. If they left the class with similar thoughts as Mark and did not get a chance to talk through these thoughts, was it worth having the panel? The answer to this question, it seems, can never be a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. It may be more of a question of what this panel looks like and, importantly, how it engages with the other stories present and circulating throughout the room. Just as Mark wrestled with his positioning of Taryn as “weird”, Sara expressed how she felt positioned as “one who would not understand” by the panelists. It is here, in this space where we can at once feel how we are positioned by others and interrogate our own positioning where a pedagogy of storytelling becomes promising.
Chapter 10
Stories in the Classroom: From Stasis to Assemblage
Theoretical, Methodological, and Pedagogical Implications

*Now ask me what I am, I'll tell you all of the above and none of what they've ever listed. I will say I have never cared to be nearly as much as I cared to become.*

- Andrea Gibson, “The Jewelry Store”

For a short four months, thirty-one students and I negotiated who we were and what we stood for through primarily small stories, creating pedagogical spaces of becoming. My seven case study students, three of whose stories have yet to be told, were afforded additional spaces that provided a deeper, more personal look into the function of storytelling in the social justice focused classroom. As such, this project theorizes stories as dynamic linguistic devices that elude just one, perhaps canonical, definition and both enable and constrain “self-making” and “world-making” (Bruner, 1991).

Yet, to see stories in such a way was not immediately obvious to me. Prior to beginning the analysis stage of this project, I had always thought of and spoken about the notion of “stories meeting” in a classroom. I even had a visual picture of these stories as lines coming from myself and each student, meeting in the middle of the classroom. Each of us had just one, static line emerging from our being, and the picture was complete- one coherent story emerging from each individual ready to interact with those of other students. While this picture perhaps speaks to the notion that everyone’s story is always “at play” in a classroom, as it operates as part of the lens through which we see the world, I now find this mental picture an impoverished way of seeing stories. This project suggests the “living” nature of stories, a mental picture that must
now include a non-linear arrangement of their shifts throughout space and time in the classroom, as well as the contingencies that accompany their tellings and non-tellings.

Indeed, this re-imagining seeks to expand methods for looking into stories in the social justice focused classroom. This work often takes autobiographies, in particular (e.g. Florio-Ruane, 1994; Gay, 2000), as curricular and pedagogical strategies primarily designed to “help White preservice teachers work through their defenses by engaging them in reflection about connections between concepts and their own experience and beliefs” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 567). While this work is certainly valuable and it has informed my own teaching, viewing storytelling practices as something to simply add on to existing curricular structures, misses the more complex and ongoing nature of all students’ storytelling practices in classrooms. Thus, small stories research understands storytelling as part and parcel of the “everyday” moments occurring throughout the classroom and within talk about the classroom. While work with big, more canonical narratives certainly has its place in research, I would argue that a shift towards small stories is particularly helpful for classroom research around social justice issues. Through examining narratives in interaction—often fragmented and incomplete—and their capacity to subtly invoke dominant storylines in one moment and then counter ones in the next, “we should be able to make headway in designing alternative strategies to public, institutionalized power relations, resulting in more egalitarian reciprocity” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 353). By examining how students wove their small stories of themselves and others into their classroom talk, dominant storylines about how the world ought to look filtered their way into this talk. Notably, there were also versions of more global dominant storylines where, for example, the “American Dream” took on the complexity of Mark’s personal experience. The local and the global were constantly at play
with one another. Thus, a focus on small stories lended significant nuance to the question of what stories are *doing* in the classroom and how students continually practiced and tested out who they were “in the face of different discursive pulls” (Bamberg and Georegakopoulou, 2008, p. 380). In this way, small stories research lends itself particularly well to feminist postructural work that focuses on the way that these discursive pulls both constrain and open up possibilities for becoming.

Furthermore, this examination of the “play of subjectivities” and their attendant storylines suggests that narratives cannot be separated from the argumentative discourse genre as some scholars suggests (Bamberg, 2004, Nussbaum, 1997, Young, 1997). It is this reliance on narrative *versus* the argumentative (often connected to the “intellectual”) that can “enable reason and masculine intellectual mastery to appear as the winner in the contest for truth” (Boler, 1999, p. xiii). On the broadest level, this project disrupts this binary to suggest narrative ways of knowing not simply be privileged *alongside* argument but to suggest that narrative ways of knowing are not separate from that of the “intellect”. I find this disruption of the supposed narrative/argument dichotomy particularly important for the social justice focused classroom for it is, itself, rooted in notions of power and privilege. Not only is this division linked to conceptions of gender as Boler noted, but is also rooted in larger storylines around race, ethnicity, and class.

**The Classroom as Assemblage**

Deleuze’s concept of “assemblage” is helpful to accompany this new way of seeing stories in the classroom. An assemblage “deals with the play of contingency and structure, organization and change” and, critically, “it is not *the arrangement* or *organization* but *the process* of
arranging, organizing, fitting together (Wise, 2005, p. 77). To see the classroom as an assemblage moves it into the realm of that which is *becoming*, rather than something that *is*. What assemblages *do*, therefore, becomes as important a question as what they look like.

Assemblages create *territories*. Assemblages are more than just spaces; they have a stake, a claim, they express (my house, their ranch, his bench, her friends)...Territories are not fixed for all time, but are always being made and unmade, reterritorializing and deterritorializing (Wise, 2005, p. 78).

I would add “our classroom” to this list. As the conversations between students and between students and I have shown, territories were consistently being “made and unmade” as students stories of experience both invoked and challenged (often at the same time) dominant storylines concerning educational injustice and difference. In this way, stories as part of the classroom assemblage aids in this project of territorialization where normative orders- ways of being, doing and telling around such issues- were made and unmade. I argue that both small narratives of a variety of forms- personal, family, hypothetical, future- are particularly important to this process of enabling new storylines to emerge and new conditions of possibility to arise around issues of inequity and difference. As Bamberg (2004) notes, “the fashioning of self...is open to a certain fluidity...improvisation...and to the design of alternatives” critical to addressing issues of power and privilege in school settings (p. 354). When we can start to story ourselves differently, there are newly available resources for understanding the world and others. For instance, Catherine considered the family stories that informed her claims about educational and immigration issues and whether a new conception of fairness could alter these prevailing
narratives. These newly available resources can also alter narrative conceptions of oneself as in the case of my interaction with the unexpected ways that Austin storied himself. Just as Mark did when he encountered Taryn’s stories and questioned the story of himself as a “liberal due”, I approached the “edges” of my own story as “social justice educator” who resisted the more nuanced ways that Austin expressed his own and took up others stories.

Importantly, however, it was through the contact and interplay of student stories in the classroom and within interviews that enabled these new ways of being to emerge but also to close down certain possibilities. While Catherine reconsidered the story she told about her maid, Cecelia, she struggled to integrate Lisa and Lisa Delpit’s stories into her growing repertoire of ways of thinking about issues of power. Similarly, though Mark’s reflection on Taryn’s narrative suggested an awareness of what it meant for him to be a heterosexual male listener, the embodied nature of her story closed down the possibility of certain forms of action for Mark. It was these storytelling rules that emerged as particularly salient and suggests new considerations for the classroom that privileges narratives of personal experience.

**Narrative technologies: Negotiating the rules of storytelling.** This regulation of classroom narratives gives way to considering what I have termed *narrative technologies*, or the ways in which narratives both regulate and are regulated within the space of the classroom. As Foucault (1988) notes, these rules “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (p. 18). Seeing the classroom (or any pedagogical encounter, such as those that happened more informally with my case study students) as an assemblage- a space of constant becoming- begs the question of what role narrative technologies play in the discursive
enactment of these spaces. In other words, if stories are a distinct part of the means through which we *negotiate* our sense of ourselves, others and claims about the world, then we must pay attention to where and how the narrative rules of the space can direct this negotiation in particular ways to continue to discursively construct power. Who can narrate the personal and, ultimately, the political? And, as this project showed more closely, *how* must they narrate and what should response to these narratives be?

Importantly, my students’ discursive construction of the narrative rules tended to both tap into the larger storylines concerning personal narratives that address power and privilege and stray from those storylines, as well. For instance, the passive empathetic approach taken by Mark, Adam and Daniel during the class discussion on *The Color of Fear* can be considered one way these rules governed the space, collapsing the very real material differences between their experiences as White individuals and the experiences of people of color suggested by the film. Catherine also invoked this rule of listening and responding with her depiction of her experience being the “minority” at the community college she previously attended. Yet, passive empathy did not always accompany student responses to stories of personal experience. These were moments where students moved beyond “I feel that, too” towards an discursive struggle with how they were socially positioned in light of the stories they were hearing that did not allow them to fully identify with others. Mark’s experience with Taryn is one such example of this as well as Catherine’s questioning of whether her commitment to religion may be affecting how she saw the LGBTQ community. On the one hand, this distance was valuable, for these students tapped into the multiple stories that could be told about lived experiences. Particularly in Mark’s case, however, this distance was also maintained in order to *keep up* the dominant
storyline of Taryn as “weird”.

One of the more salient ways that narrative technologies governed the classroom was through feeling rules. These “affective technologies” (Zembylas, 2007b) worked to render certain “negative” emotions, particularly anger, as invalidating of the stories told through these emotions. It was through this rule that Lisa and Catherine’s cases became so intertwined. As Lisa was highly aware of the potential for her to be considered the “angry woman of color”, positioning her stories and the claims that flowed from them as “invalid”, Catherine confirmed this fear as she rendered Lisa, as well as other stories from individuals of color, as not worthy of consideration. This link from feeling rule to larger storyline around the right to silence certain racial groups with certain emotions suggests ways that power is discursively enacted. Yet, with discursive enactment of power also comes the opportunity for resistance or the rupture of these storytelling rules that may very well make new ways of being, thinking and doing around issues of social justice available to students. While Catherine never explicitly suggested that perhaps there was value and meaning behind anger concerning oppressive circumstances, she did begin to wonder about Lisa’s family history of oppression and whether this was the reason why she made the claims she did. Certainly, this is not sufficient but, I would argue, another way of seeing Lisa and a slight change in how Catherine operated under the feeling rules of the space. This points towards the need to see both students and teachers working explicitly with issues of power and privilege as “in process” as opposed to asking questions about whether they are “there yet”. It is to this issue that I now turn in considering the pedagogical implications of this project.

A Pedagogy of Reflexive Storytelling

This theoretical shift away from viewing classroom stories as curricular add-ons or
peripheral by-products to seeing them as both regulated and regulatory forces suggests a mediating quality of stories throughout what Davies et al. (2009) have termed “pedagogical encounters”. Drawing from Deleuze, these spaces provoke “an aspiration towards new thought that is more like an opening towards an unpredictable line of flight than an auditable product or outcome” (p. 145). I find this consideration of teaching and learning particularly beneficial for the social justice focused classroom for it not only focuses on process over product, but hints at seeing the classroom as a tenuous space where becoming “justice-oriented” takes on a variety of unknown forms. Even Freire’s (1970) notion of “critical consciousness” suggests something to achieve rather than a process that is often fraught with inconsistencies and a “trying on” of different ways of being around issues of power and privilege.

Indeed, my individual time with Lisa, Catherine, Austin and Mark provided greater insight into this process where their own and others’ stories were negotiated in light of issues of difference, privilege and power. I started to see these informal times together when we met up in various coffee shops across town as more than simply interviews to provide me “data” for this project. They were, themselves, pedagogical encounters where I was at once teacher and researcher, engaged in the negotiation with my students concerning what theirs and others’ stories meant in our class. I initially saw this process as an “intervention” of sorts, where I was ethically obligated to, for example, suggest to Mark and Catherine new ways of seeing the world given the privileged nature of many of their personal stories. Yet, in retrospect, these moments pointed to the pedagogical or ways of setting up learning experiences to encourage a narrative reflexivity that will enable students to see their stories as alterable in the face of new storylines.

I would argue that what was happening in these meetings was unlike that which occurred
in the classroom- Lisa, Catherine, Mark and Austin were given the space to begin to *explicitly* connect their stories to the claims they made about their classmates and, in some cases, re-story. While all students were provided space to reconsider their stories in light of class themes through their written educational autobiographies, the one-on-one time I had with these four students was particularly effective for generating new versions of oneself. First, our conversations paid explicit attention to the way stories were operating throughout class. This gave these four students a chance to step back and consider what it meant to be “them” given their historically and socially in-process subjectivities in this particular class. Additionally, there was a vulnerability present throughout our meetings that prompted emotional responses that I would characterize as “heavier” than those that entered the formal classroom space. Of course, a one-on-one informal meeting, as opposed to a classroom of thirty students and one teacher, likely lends itself to more vulnerability on the part of students. Yet, I contend that the space Lisa, Catherine, Mark, Austin and I created when we sat down together prompted a vulnerability that may have emerged because of the close relationships and dialogue we built over time purposefully centered on stories as contingent, partial and rule-driven. The pedagogy of storytelling I am proposing then moves beyond students and teachers learning from their stories, or even critically reflecting on how their stories are guided by larger storylines as has been suggested by a number of narrative theorists and practitioners (e.g. Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Coulter et al., 2007) but also to how their own stories are constantly in interaction amongst one another. The case studies in particular showed how students could start to engage in what it meant for their stories to be “at play” amongst those of others’. Lisa and Catherine’s stories interacted and diverged, Austin’s narratives came into contact with my own story of what it
meant to be an educator for social justice, and Mark had to negotiate Taryn’s stories in light of his own versions of himself.

Nevertheless these pedagogical encounters were not “clean”, utopian spaces where both myself and students could use stories to progress towards the final, most socially just version of ourselves. Rather, it was messy and moved, often seemlessly, from the “smooth spaces” of becoming anew back to the “striated order” (Davies et al, 2009) where there was more comfort in positions that afforded some students a sense of being an “us” as opposed to a “them”. The discomfort created when storylines were questioned and personal narratives put under erasure suggests serious consideration of the role of testimony and critical witnessing (Dutro, 2009, 2011) where certain stories, particularly those considered “weighty” in classrooms, are allowed to be told and, therefore, demand witnessing by others. Dutro (in press) argues that for this witnessing to become critical and move away from “passive empathy” we must make two simultaneous moves.

First, of drawing in another’s testimony, with a heart-piercing embrace, allowing her story to speak to what we sense, but cannot fully name, in our own; second, and simultaneously, holding that story at arm’s length and seeing and acting on the material differences that situate stories and those living and telling them (p. 22).

In some ways, students became critical witnesses to their peers and to the stories they read in class texts and from the Bristol Pride panelists. In other ways, they struggled to comprehend what it meant for their own stories of themselves to now be so intertwined with those of o/Others that it put their own conception of themselves under the microscope and in question. As such, I wonder what it would have been like to include these notions of testimony and critical witnessing in this “pedagogy of reflexive storytelling” where the telling and reflection upon one’s
own stories was always linked to the listening we are obligated to do amongst o/Others. Critically, this also means that coming to know the “incomprehensible”—what Adam felt he should understand but never could about Victor’s experience in The Color of Fear or what Mark could not grasp about Taryn’s “little surgeries”—must be further taken into account. As Dutro argues, this “pedagogy of the incomprehensible” enables us to “dwell in the unfathomable”, as well as to accept that “there should be an inherent anxiety and uncertainty that accompanies attending to” (p. 28) stories that not only take up the material realities of marginalized communities, but also those that implicate oneself in maintaining these conditions. And yet, this anxiety must also be accompanied with what Cruz (2012) calls “a tremendous libidinal response, one of loving” (p. 468). It is here, in this space of loving all who testify and all who witness, where we can travel with one another on a journey where social justice work can move forward.

As Lugones (1987) contends about this traveling with love:

> We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated, we are lacking. So traveling to each other’s worlds would enable us to be through loving each other (p. 8).

Given this project, Lugones’ words resonate deeply and I feel obligated to consider what it would mean to invoke this loving, embodied stance towards all students and travel together as we come to know ourselves and others differently. This feels at once challenging and as if there is no other viable option when we consider the ways that narratives are embedded in the ways that we talk with one another as well as the stakes involved when differently situated individuals come together to talk across difference.
Future Research

Considering personal stories as embedded within such pedagogical encounters suggests future research with entire classrooms that purposefully organize themselves around the interrogation of these storytelling practices. My case study student interviews often created such pedagogical encounters, but the class itself was not purposefully structured around this goal (though my students sometimes took on the role of “narrotologist” without prompting). Yet, there is work to be done with classrooms, at both the K-12 level and within post-secondary education, critically interrogating storytelling practices and the rules that govern them. As Austin’s case illustrated, this work is not merely for students, but also teachers whose stories are, whether spoken or not, involved in pedagogical encounters governed by particular narrative rules.

A second consideration is to use video to capture embodied storytelling practices. Capturing Mark’s hand as he placed it to his heart during our last conversation, as well as his proximity to Taryn during the Speaking Out panel, would have likely lent nuance to the bodily enactment of his own storytelling practices. Such research would likely deepen our understanding of the way stories function in classrooms as they, in their embodiment, both enable new understandings but also have the potential to close them down. As Cruz (2012) argues, “It is something that we teachers and researchers have yet to talk about, to involve the body present and the recognition that to be a faithful witness to a story of trauma or oppression, there is a responsibility we owe to the speaker” (p. 268).

Finally, following students over time, particularly those that are going into teaching, would enable us to interpret how students like Lisa, Catherine, Austin and Mark “took up” the larger
class storylines around power and privilege. Additionally, following students over time would allow reflection on the impact of centering a curriculum on personal narratives, particularly those that remain “incomprehensible” to some students and “the everyday” for others.

A brief encounter with Mark in a campus building hallway just a month ago enables me to see where such a project could go. It was almost a literal “running into” one another, as we both shuffled our way through a very crowded hallway of students exiting a large lecture hall. Because of this constant flow of students we could not stay and talk with each for long though we committed to having coffee sometime soon. As we walked away from each other, Mark said to me, “I’m a whole different person now”, invoking a sense of becoming anew since our class two years ago. I am inspired by what Mark’s statement would mean for following students after they have been in narrative-focused classrooms in terms of how they both story themselves and others, as well as the claims they make about social justice oriented issues. Although Mark and I have not yet set up a time to meet, this project suggests a critical examination of the expectations I hold for the “new Mark” so that I can also continue to “dwell” in that which may be incomprehensible, entirely comfortable, or somewhere in between, thus, allowing both Mark and myself to continue to become other than we are.
References


APPENDIX A

Student Interview Protocol
December 2010

Interview Format and Overview:
PURPOSES FOR INTERVIEW:

The primary purpose of this interview is to hear about your experience with telling and hearing others’ educational stories in School and Society. I am interested in how you perceive these stories—the ones that are elicited by myself and others and also the more spontaneous ones that emerge in class discussions. Lastly, I’d like to understand more about how these stories function as you came to know more about educational inequity and issues of diversity.

The interview should take about an hour and if it’s OK with you I’d like to tape it.

The information you provide today will be used in the research but your identity will be kept confidential. I will use a pseudonym or a false name.

Questions
1. Tell me about why you decided to take School and Society?
   a. Are you in the teacher education program or plan on applying in the future?
   b. If so, why do you want to be a teacher?
   c. If not, why are you taking School and Society?

2. What has your experience been like in School and Society thus far?
   a. Is this similar or different than other college classes you have taken? How so?
   b. Do you feel comfortable talking in class? During what circumstances?

3. Tell me about your experience writing the educational autobiography?
   a. Have you ever written about your educational history before?
   b. How did expanding the autobiography help you to reconsider and revise your own story?
3. What has been your experience listening to other class members’ stories in class, including my own?
   a. Do they help you see other perspectives on education?
   b. If so, what were these? Do these new perspectives challenge your own? Or support them?

4. I remember you shared __________ story in the small group/large group, how was that?
   a. What was the purpose for you in telling this story?
   b. What were other classmates’ reactions/responses to your stories?