

THESIS

MATERIALITY AND DISCOURSE: TOWARD A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF
MARGINALIZING ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE IVORY TOWER

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ABSTRACT

MATERIALITY AND DISCOURSE: TOWARD A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARGINALIZING ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE IVORY TOWER

Using epistemological and ontological lenses, this communicative study interrogates the experiences of the graduate community within the communication studies discipline. Specifically, and building on feminist methodologies and intersectional approaches, I seek to identify experiences of graduate students of color that call out and illuminate everyday discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, and disciplining. Additionally, I hope to identify not only these discourses, but also the ways in which corporeality and materiality become alongside these. One goal of this work is to encourage increased critical discussion around discursive theoretical and methodological approaches to scholarship within and beyond communication studies. A second, broader goal is to problematize and expand understanding(s) regarding how fragmented Western epistemological and ontological conceptual frameworks might actually “emulsify” and “curdle” (Lugones, 2003, p. 122) to constitute complex somatic-semiotic matrices of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000) and emancipation within the academy.

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Chapter One: Corporealizing the Discussion

“The caged bird does not sing because it has answers, it sings because it has a song.”
-Maya Angelou

“An education is one of the only things in this life that no one can take away from you once you have it, so work hard because you have all the opportunity in the world to make it yours.”¹ Growing up, I understood the promise of educational enfranchisement as the resounding and foundational D/discourse² of my intersectional identity formation. Epistemologically, this understanding of discourse and of these discourses in particular helped me make sense of an androcentric/Eurocentric ontology in which people could try to take away my sense of belonging and even my sense of safety, but not the hope and empowerment learning brought me. My fervent belief in the endless possibility that learning holds, or the idea that “education as the practice of freedom” is a transformative space where scholars gain the tools to work toward a more just world (hooks, 1994, p. 207), is what led me to pursue graduate education. This transformative space holds the opportunities and tools I need to understand and become accountable for the systemic matrices marginalized students must engage, the issues of voice and agency they face, and my own role as an intersectional activist and scholar in the West. As a graduate student, I recognize with gratitude that I am not the same person I was

¹ Although I learned to internalize these words due to the countless times I heard them at home from my parents, they are not endemic and hold a reverberatory effect for many scholars, and especially scholars of typically marginalized intersectionality (hooks, 1994).

² Lower case “discourse” refers to the study of language, talk, text and symbolic social interaction; more specifically, this is the “doing” of discourse (Fairhurst, 2007; Gee, 1990). The concept of upper case “Discourse” refers to how we formulate ideas in relation to history, culture, and time as well as how we transmit ideas in the process of lower case “discourse.” In this study, I focus on lower case discourse and, in some ways, I challenge the idea of upper case Discourse.

when I began my educational journey. I also acknowledge, perhaps with more restraint, that without the interpolating D/discourse of educational enfranchisement laden in the master narrative of the “American Dream,” my story might be a different one. Explicitly, my life might be more representative of the many working-class, Latin@ youth, of immigrant decent that find their dreams and corporealities³ cannibalized by material and discursive matrices that evade their material and discursive construction. My positionality as a Western communication scholar affords me agency over both the material and discursive intersecting dominations that imbue life outside academe, yet, the academic institution still represents an epistemological and ontological palimpsest. Unfortunately, this aspect of the educational experience is not an isolated or anomalous phenomenon for people of typically marginalized intersectional positionalities in the West.

Epistemology and ontology are two identifying concepts that refer to the metaphysics within which we, as semiotic-material actors, are positioned and move. Because these concepts constitute the guiding lenses through which I undertake this study, I define them briefly here. Epistemology, the former lens, demands a focus on questions of knowledge, its anatomy, origins, limitations, incarnations, and possibilities. Ontology, the latter, highlights questions of what is assumed to exist in the world and the relationships of extant bodies. Respectively, these conceptualizations of epistemology and ontology act as references to the referents of knowledge and the world within which that knowledge operates, but these are not finite concepts in academic language or in the world that they serve to signify.

Here, Lugones’ images of “emulsification” and “curdling” (2003, p. 122) are helpful to understanding the nuanced relationship of epistemology and ontology. As Lugones articulates it,

³ Corporeality, in the context of this study, is a type of materiality that relates to the body.

emulsification is the tenuous coming together of seemingly disparate substances where curdling, or separation, is sometimes the result (2003, p. 122). According to Lugones, while the objects of emulsification may curdle, this “separation” is less emblematic of each corpus’ purity than of complex gradations of coalescence (2003, p. 122). Juxtaposed with the relationship of epistemology and ontology, this means that while the former and latter frameworks represent two lenses with distinct features, when they come together, as they do in this project, neither is separate from the other because both are symbiotically extant within volatile and nuanced relations of power. The lenses, in this sense, have the capacity to both “emulsify” and “curdle” (Lugones, 2003, p. 122) in inextricable, tenuous, and *contextually bound* ways. Thus, epistemology and ontology have the capacity to come together and form multifaceted onto-epistemological exigencies that materialize the complex “matrices of domination” (Hill-Collins, 2000) and emancipation that are the subject of this project.⁴

Specifically, my locus of study is the academic institution. In the year 2016 education remains the practice of freedom for a select few. For others, education has emancipatory potential while it simultaneously acts as a butchering apparatus where the bodies of typically marginalized persons are laid on the slab of colonizing onto-epistemological exigencies (Smith, 2005, pp. 109-117; Smith, 1999, pp. 42-57). To be sure, the academic institution has and continues to make strides toward the goal of inclusive educational enfranchisement. Nevertheless, we, as Western scholars, still have a long way to go in taking responsibility for how we have learned to see (Haraway, 1988) onto-epistemologically and the discursive and material ways in which this gaze operates to marginalize and colonize certain bodies and minds

⁴ At its core, this conceptualization of the onto-epistemological relationship rejects epistemic fragmentation as its starting point (Chávez & Griffin, 2012, p. 8); See also Lugones, 2013, pp. 121-148).

in the academy. This project is designed as just such an exercise in responsibility and accountability.

Introduction

Brown v. Board, a 1954 landmark Supreme Court ruling for education, marked the de jure end of the “separate but equal” doctrine in classrooms across the United States. In the West, we see gains since this ruling as so effective that recently filed Supreme Court cases are aimed at ending affirmative action in university admissions (Cleveland, 2009; see also *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Fisher v. Texas*, 2013). Reasoning that these programs constitute “reverse discrimination” against white students mirrors the popular sentiment that race-based discrimination is a thing of the past. Indeed, with the election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, many U.S. Americans believe that the advent of a post-racial era has arrived. It is true that today, sixty years after *Brown*, people of color have rights under the law that have made our lives exponentially better from that of our parents and grandparents in all walks of life. Yet, we, as Western communication scholars,⁵ still have a lot of work to do on the road to education as emancipatory practice (hooks, 1994) and this is especially so for issues surrounding the experiences of typically marginalized students.

De jure educational discrimination ended more than half a century ago, even so, de facto discrimination persists across social contexts. Unsurprisingly, this disparity plagues the post-secondary classroom as well. Based on U.S. Census data we know that equitable representation of university students of color in relation to white students should be characterized by a 40 percent gap (Ryu, 2009). Instead, we see a disheartening 67 percent gap at the BA and MA

⁵ I specify that this project is formulated from a communicative perspective because there are other important perspectives that the reader should also consider to understand this nuanced and multifaceted issue.

levels and a 75 percent gap at the PhD level (Ryu, 2009). Moreover, when compared to international students, there is a consistent pattern showing that as numbers of domestic students of color decrease, the international student population increases. Specifically, at the BA level domestic students of color make up the majority of racial diversity and by the PhD level the international student population is double that of domestic students of color (Ryu, 2009).⁶ These inequities represent opportunities to recognize, raise-consciousness, and act upon marginalizing agencies in the academy.

Using epistemological and ontological lenses, this communicative study contributes to such emancipatory work by interrogating the experiences of the graduate community within the communication studies discipline. Specifically, and building on feminist methodologies and intersectional approaches, I seek to identify experiences of graduate students of color that call out and illuminate everyday discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, and disciplining. Additionally, I hope to identify not only these discourses, but also the ways in which corporeality and materiality become alongside these. One goal of this work is to encourage increased critical discussion around discursive theoretical and methodological approaches to scholarship within and beyond communication studies. A second, broader goal is to problematize and expand understanding(s) regarding how Western epistemology and ontology “emulsify” and/or “curdle” (Lugones, 2003, p. 122) to constitute complex somatic-semiotic matrices of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000) and emancipation within the academy.⁷

⁶ To be clear, I do not highlight this latter data as a tacit proposal that academic institutions take the prejudiced action of limiting admissions to international students in favor of domestic students of color, especially as this data is a possible indicator of a similarly marginalizing exoticization (Said, 1979) of international students.

⁷ See Appendix A for a visual representation of how the lenses, methodological approaches, stances for inquiry, and research questions work together.

“Interlocking Oppressions”: Defined and Explored

How does corporeality weigh on the onto-epistemological constitutive power of discourse? How does materiality, or objects/artifacts, sites, and bodies (Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren, 2009), bloom alongside dialogue? What do these discursive and material relations tell us about how, as Western communication scholars, we can work to dismantle the white supremacist, capitalist, heteronormative patriarchy (hooks, 1981) that dominates the academy? Questions such as these require an understanding of the scope of the issue under study and its situating context within communication studies research.

The academy is discursively constructed as an emancipating space that promises scholars a place for intersectional teaching and research (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999) as decolonizing practice. These discourses can be very powerful as constitutive agents. Still, decolonizing ends can be elusive within the Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that often characterize the academic experience. The power behind these discourses is often linked to the privileged experience of androcentric whiteness in the academy more than it is to the experience of being differently in the ivory tower (Lockwood-Harris, 2013). The next section of this paper defines epistemology and ontology as the guiding lenses of this study. Additionally, I explain the “emulsifying” and “curdling” (Lugones, 2003, p. 122) relationship of the lenses using examples specific to the context of inquiry.

Academe: Epistemology

“Who can be a knower?” “What can be known?” “How do we come to know?” “What is the substance of knowledge?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). These are crucial epistemological questions that deeply influence the understandings, methodologies, and methods a researcher mobilizes in her studies (Guba and

Lincoln, 1998; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). They constitute “a theory of knowledge” (Harding, 1987, p. 3) that situates every step of the research process. However, despite their importance, as Western academics we often remain silent on epistemological questions that come to bear on our scholarship.

Too often, a voyeuristic and omnipresent understanding of our vision in the West keeps us from interrogating our operant and profoundly consequential epistemes (Harding, 2006). When we encounter this disembodied, interpolating, and imperialistic exigence intra-discursively, inter-discursively, corporeally, and materially, we are usually meeting with the Western epistemic insistence on “objectivity.” Although an “objective,” intellectually “pure,” epistemological stance in the research process, or one that necessitates the erasure of the researcher’s subject positionality, is one that is said to have its merits, it is also a stance that is highly questionable and problematic. This “natural” stance is one that we, as Western scholars, must problematize. Thus, from an epistemological standpoint, this project is focused on identifying “objective” vantage points that, rather than producing “valuable” research and scholarship, actually engender a disembodied voyeurism, a voyeurism that is perpetually *unaccountable* for how it works to marginalize difference. Beyond this identification, moreover, is a centering goal of this undertaking: to understand how discourse and materiality meet to normalize these marginalizing, oppressive, and disenfranchising epistemic moves on the minds and bodies of students of color.

To corporealize the epistemic erasure people of color experience while living in the academy, I proceed by way of an example specific to pedagogic content in communication studies, the site of inquiry. First, I position the content in the broader context of the humanities. I follow with a discussion of how this pedagogic content is sometimes characterized within

communication studies. Finally, I explain why this content, understood in this way, becomes problematic for bodies of color in the academy.

Postmodernism has become a canonical lens in which scholars throughout the humanities receive instruction. Consequently, it is one that communication researchers often visibly (and invisibly) mobilize in their research whether of their volition or encouraged by academic bureaucracies. As an epistemic framework, postmodernism is concerned with indiscriminate skepticism of any ontological unity or determinism. Although this brand of postmodernism trusts situated experiences over abstract, universalistic propositions, it does so guided by an understanding that the nature of ontology is constituted by permanently imperfect, D/discursive interpretations. In short, as method it takes its material from contextually bound and precariously positioned experiences while as methodology it tacitly rejects the material validity of such experience to the margins of an abstract and D/discursive epistemological standpoint. Postmodern thought, a form of knowing, often concerns itself solely with discourse as that which can be known and this often makes for a singular way of knowing.⁸

In communication studies, Foucault's postmodern theorization of Discourse is crucial because it catalyzed the "linguistic turn"⁹ and the subsequent "critical turn." Within the

⁸ This is not to say, however, that as Western communication scholars we should seek to know in dualistic ways either. A dualistic epistemology might be a way of knowing in which materiality *or* discourse takes precedence (e.g., scholarship that takes an "idealist" view or scholarship that takes a "realist" view). Hence, postmodern thinkers that concern themselves only with D/discourse as that which can be known might represent a singular ontology and scholars that see a materiality or discourse split between what can be known might represent a dualistic ontology. An imbricated view, then, would be one that does not singularly take discourse as that which can be known (linguistic postmodernism) or that dualistically picks between materiality or discourse ("idealism" or "realism") as that which can be known but that takes materiality-discourse as that which can be known inductively and relationally.

⁹ This is sometimes also referred to as the "ideological" (Cloud, 1994) or the "discursive turn." Also related to the constitute view of language is the "interpretive turn" (Barad, 2003).

linguistic turn, scholars focus on engaging semiotics to understand how D/discourse mediates the constitution of reality. Scholarship that has its roots in this epistemological shift interrogates not simply how discourse facilitates interaction but how it ontologically constitutes interaction, its actors, and the organizations and institutions that actors inhabit (Charland, 1987; Foucault, 1969; McGee, 1980; McKerrow, 1989; Wander, 1983). This key moment in our discipline is foundational to much of the current “critical turn” work that dominates the most prominent journals and social justice focused philosophical research in our field (Dyers and Wankah, 2012; Flores, 1996; Foss & Foss, 2011; Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Lassen, Horsbol, Bonnen, & Pedersen, 2011; Lucas, 2007; Nakayama & Kriezek, 1995; Ott & Aoki, 2002). Critical communication studies based in postmodernism deconstruct communicative aspects of social phenomena in an effort to produce discursive interventions to discursive-material issues (e.g. Baxter, 1994; Bordo, 1992; Butler, 1990; Foss & Foss, 2011; Lucas, 2007; Ott & Aoki, 2002). Projects such as these presume that a communicative epistemological lens has the power to understand ontology as well as construct it through discourse.

Pedagogically, this conceptualization of communication’s function, disconnected from materiality, can validate discourse as crucial to all aspects of a fragmented onto-epistemology (read epistemology and ontology). This epistemology-first framework, where discourse predominates, benefits the field and empowers its constituents; however, it can also lay a foundation to a misleading ideal that privileges certain discourses and bodies while it erases others situated within complex relations of power. Explicitly, not all agents have *carte blanche* to command language to equally constitutive ends within shifting “interlocking oppressions”

(Combahee River Collective 1978/1986).¹⁰ Further, this methodological framework fails to invite different ways of knowing and being. When students of color in the discipline receive instruction on postmodernism from a Eurocentric standpoint, egregious epistemic erasures that obscure their corporeal-material experiences arise. This is because raced experiences are not simply constituted by fragmented and D/discursive postmodern interpretations, with solely D/discursive consequences, addressed by purely D/discursive interventions. The experience of being “imbricated” (Aakhus et al., 2011) in difference is both communicatively and materially enmeshed, it has both discursive and material effects, and we, as Western communication scholars, must address, even if with respect to particular disciplinary bounds, the issues that arise on discursive-material terms in our teaching, research and service. Communication scholars must begin to assess and address how *communication* feeds into *parts* of material issues in terms of how we *know* them and, perhaps also, in terms of how communication is what “stitches” together sociomaterial practice (Aakhus et al., 2011). We must take into account materiality (in its various formulations) as a serious concern—although communication scholars cannot understand or address materiality on its own, as an economist or biologist might, we can say *something* about the ways communication supports, challenges, assists in dismantling, and/or becomes alongside materiality.

Academe: Ontology

What is the nature of being? What is assumed to exist? What persons benefit from commitments to certain ontological conceptualizations? These questions, which focus on the ideas and relations that can exist for an agent or a populace of agents, are ontological in nature. In the present community of inquiry, a major focus is on colorblind ontologies where epistemes

¹⁰ See more on the concept of “interlocking oppressions” in the following chapter of this thesis.

of disembodiment run doubly rampant on the bodies of both the oppressor and oppressed.¹¹ Colorblind conceptualizations assert that race is a declining social issue for raced groups of people and that race-neutral approaches to research and teaching can produce “structural solutions” to “universal” problems (Wise, 2010). At one end of the spectrum, this ontology assumes that race is a non-issue in the ivory tower and that, as a discursive issue, it has been eradicated. At the other end, it assumes that although race may be a D/discursive issue, due to its fragmentation it has little material bearing on the lives of people of color. When it does have a significant effect, the causes and interventions, of issues framed in structural terms, are identified in purely D/discursive terms. Not only do these latter formulations of the “issue” eschew different, important ways of understanding and intervening in this field of inquiry, they also present an epistemological inconsistency within a communicative framework. This is because when “structure” is framed as the problem, the cause and intervention cannot also be Discourse as structural monolith or even discourse as situated. This is for two reasons. First, discourse is not a monolith and, thus, discourse is not structural. Discourse is situated, impermanent, and in constant flux. It is persons that understand discourse as ontologizing when, in fact, this is not the nature of discourse. Discourse is not ontological in a Marxist sense. Thus, scholars cannot, in logically consistent ways, posit “Discourse” as a cause and solution to issues they frame as structural or material in a Marxist sense.¹² Second, when communication scholars formulate the “problem” as structural, discourse as situated is not muscular enough to battle, as cause or

¹¹ My use of the “oppressor/oppressed” discursive dichotomy is not meant to vilify or decontextualize bodies/minds colonized by whiteness. I make this linguistic choice to signify the impact rather than intent of marginalizing ontologies.

¹² This is not to say that structural issues do not exist. It is also not to say that discourse cannot help scholars work through issues of how “structure” can be known. It is to say that discourse may not be, as method or methodology, best suited to intervene in this formulation of the “problem.”

intervention, with structure in a Marxist sense. Thus, the Marxist, materiality-first, structural paradigm has difficulties meeting within a context bound communicative paradigm for knowing. Further, the communicative, discourse-first, “big D” (read structural) and “little d” (read local) discursive split becomes a tautological conceptual issue of sorts wherein discourse is understood as situated, impermanent, and in constant flux.

Although well intentioned, colorblind ontologies of the varieties I have mentioned here obscure the ways in which Eurocentric discourse becomes alongside the corporeally and materially situated lives of graduate students of color, thereby erasing already marginalized community onto-epistemologies. When they attend to material features of this embodied experience, the causes and interventions are predicated on a logically inconsistent, from a communicative standpoint, formulation of the problem(s) and of discourse as “structure.” Hence, colorblind approaches torpidly conflate discourse and materiality through a forcefully imposed, double bound (oppressor/oppressed) discursive disembodiment.¹³ Here, disembodiment happens when persons understand themselves as untouched by materiality, in this case race and its adjacent sociomaterial affordances, as well as when they understand the communicative object of study as material or discursive structure rather than as situated and fluctuating discursive-material becomings.

An example of this double disembodiment and conflation is in the often-uttered/heard statement, “I don’t see the color of your skin, I see you!” Within this post-racial ontology, race is rendered invisible, incomprehensible, and inconsequential. As stated earlier, epistemology and ontology are conceptual frameworks that refer to the metaphysics within which we, as

¹³ Varied clusters of ontological possibilities arose in the course of research. This is a preliminary unpacking of the lens and its implications for this project.

sociomaterial actors, are imbricated (Aakhus et al., 2011). As frameworks that “emulsify” and “curdle” (Lugones, 2003, p. 121-148; See also Chavéz & Griffin, 2012) in inseparable and contextually bound ways, I unpack the discourse-first epistemology at work in this instance as I present the materially decoupled ontology that the example intimates.

Epistemically, the rhetor of a statement such as, “I don’t see the color of your skin, I see you,” forcefully projects the invisibility and fragmentation of his/her own body in an essentialist manner to knowing the Other. Put another way, because the speaker is unconscious of her/his own corporeality as materially imbricated and consequential alongside discourse, s/he is unable to comprehend the import of the Other’s body in terms of the flattened discourse-materiality relationship. This simultaneous discursive fragmentation of the Eurocentric body and projected essentialization of the body of color as equally fragmented comes without regard to the sociomaterial nature and consequentiality of race and racialization for people of color in the West.

While any person can “learn to see” (Haraway, 1988) and project her/his body in this way, the endemic onto-epistemological invisibility and fragmentation of whiteness in the United States (Nakayama & Kriezek, 1995) propagates the colorblind discourse-first paradigm under which such marginalizing conceptualizations of the discursive fail to meet the material. In these spaces, bodies of color become comprehensible only when understood as a mirror to Eurocentric, disembodied, and discourse-first understandings of whiteness. Hence, the rhetor’s disembodiment is rendered invisible in his/her projection of a colorless, and thus similarly disembodied and “negligible,” corporeality/materiality on bodies of color. Such a Eurocentric ontological conceptualization, committed to using the body of color as a palimpsest for Eurocentric discourse-first approaches, takes for granted the gravitas of race at the meeting of

material and discursive becomings. It conceptualizes the agency of materiality as discursively “variable and relative” (Foucault, 1969/2013, pp. 25-26) without considering that, perhaps, discourse-materiality exist in a relationship of curdling, emulsification (Lugones, 2003), and imbrication (Aakhus et al., 2011). The effects of this ontology, traceable in the discourse-first epistemology of such colorblind statements, are injurious for bodies of color because they oversimplify and minimize questions of what is assumed to exist, what can exist in a white-supremacist, capitalist, heteronormative patriarchy (hooks, 1981), and what persons benefit from certain ontological commitments to discourse at the exclusion of materiality. What can exist in this conceptualization of the world is a raceless, androcentric, able-bodied form and embodiment, through the decoupling of discourse and materiality, can be known in separation from situated difference.

Of course, there are also marginalizing ontologies that cause bodies of color harm through hardened, stereotype specific conceptualizations. These essentialized assumptions of “what can exist” in the world are not colorblind in nature, but they share a common link in “benevolent” racist epistemologies. Ontological leaps like these take place, for example, when bodies of color are consciously and/or unconsciously presumed out of place, or incompetent, within the academic milieu (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores-Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). Undergraduate student evaluations of instructors and professors of color offer concrete examples of marginalizing ontologies where unconscious, race-based “compliments” such as, “very articulate,” signal aversive racism (Anderson & Smith, 2005) harvested from disembodied “D/d” discursive splits that unilaterally frame the diction, articulation patterns, and even the paralinguistics of persons of color as non-normative and therefore deficient in a Eurocentric ontology.

Underlying this disembodied and fragmented conceptualization of “what bodies can exist” within academe is an overwhelmingly pejorative and D/discursive epistemology with little regard for multiply positioned and burgeoning discourses-materialities. Persons committed to such an ontology understand the self as an “embodied” individual, irreducible to universalizing discourses, while they understand the “Other” as disembodied in discursive fragmentation that at once operates as a marginalizing monolith. Effectually, within this ontological and epistemological paradigm, both agents are disembodied, one by his/her inability to take sociomaterial responsibility for how s/he has learned to understand, imagine, and interact in the world (self-disembodiment) and the other by hegemonic, pejorative “Discourses” that conflate discourse with the situated agent (imposed disembodiment of the Othered body). Although the oppressor remains epistemically disembodied, irresponsible for how s/he has learned to see, his/her belief that s/he is otherwise in comparison to the ontologized Other is key to justifying his/her unsupported conflation of situated discursive-material (Ahmed, 2000) relations.

While a variety of marginalizing ontologies and epistemologies are possible, this study focuses on colorblind and color-bound conceptions that ignore important problematics as they relate to multiply positioned and interacting materialities and discourses. The end goal is to identify and understand how ontological and epistemological beliefs frame the experiences of persons of color in the West in order to better understand the various and contextually becoming material-discursive relations.

Marginalizing Effects

The aforementioned ontologies and epistemologies are exclusory of people of color in a variety of ways, and the discourse-materiality relationships that play important roles in their blooming too often proliferate in contexts where few mitigating resources are available (Truong

& Museus, 2012; Kennebrew, 2002; Myers, 2002; Williams, 2002). As a result, enrollment rates, retention, and completion levels at the graduate level are dismal (Aragon & Perez, 2006; Johnson, 1996; Ryu, 2009). In the professorate, the consequentiality of Eurocentric onto-epistemologies manifests in aversive racism in student evaluations (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Vargas, 2002), prohibitive “blind peer” review practices in publication (Orbe, Smith, Groscurth, & Crawley, 2010; Orbe & Wright, 1998; Starosta, 2010) and an overload in diversity focused service (Houston, 1994), just to name a few issues.

Communication Studies as a Vantage Point

In the portion that follows, I discuss four areas of opportunity within communication studies representative of gaps in the literature my work targets. I begin by considering the state of scholarship with a focus on the community of inquiry, graduate students of color. Then, in an adjacent argument, I briefly consider the dearth of intersectional scholarship across communication studies and its sub-branches. Following this, I provide a critique of the parochial consideration given to discursive-material questions within the discipline. I finish by incorporating issues of materiality and discourse within communication studies as well as how these relate to race. This point is articulated in detail due to its key role to the guiding questions of this research.

What can we, as Western communication scholars, do to critically interrogate theoretical and methodological understanding and mobilization of discursive, not read dualistic D/discursive, approaches to research interested in difference? Currently, communication scholarship focused on the experiences of people of color in Western academic settings is limited (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999; Martin, Trego, Nakayama, 2010; Flores, 1996; Hendrix, 2005; Orbe, Smith, Groscurth, & Crawley, 2010; Orbe & Wright, 1998; Starosta, 2010). Even more

problematic to research based praxis, interrogations of the experiences of students of color situated at the graduate level (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, & Thomas, 2009; Bañuelos, 2006; Gay, 2004; Hurtado, 1994a; Johnson, 1996; Kennebrew, 2007; Myers, 2002; Truong & Museus, 2012; Williams, 2002) are much less commonplace than at the undergraduate level across disciplines (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 1994b; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Levin, Van Larr, & Sidanius, 2003; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Martin, Trego, Nakayama, 2010; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005; Rankin, & Reason, 2005; Sáenz, Nagi, & Hurtado, 2007; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

When it comes to research across communication studies, the dearth of intersectional work is no secret (Allen, 2004; Allen, 2007; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Chávez & Griffin, 2012; Houston, 2002), and this epistemological erasure plays a significant role in the previously mentioned gap in the literature. Investigation in this area centers mostly on the difficulties inherent in publishing race-related research (Hendrix, 2005; Orbe, Smith, Groscurth, & Crawley, 2010; Orbe & Wright, 1998; Simpson, 2010; Starosta, 2010), the erasure of race in the canons of the discipline (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003), and discursive conceptualizations of race as well as its import for undergraduate students (Martin, Trego, & Nakayama, 2010). Although inquiries such as these begin elucidating the ways race situates certain bodies in the academy and constitute a necessary field of study, they do not fill the critical gap in theorization,

methodological critique, research, or emancipatory praxis necessary for change in the ivory tower where material-discursive experiences of marginalization are commonplace.

Another area of opportunity in the field that stems from a dearth of intersectional scholarship is the sometimes myopic focus of communication scholars on questions of “Who can speak?” (Feuer, 2008; Mactavish, Mahon, & Lutfiyya, 2000; Roof, 1995; for further discussion, see also Ahmed, 2000) and in what rhetorical syntax (Cloud, 1996; Meisenbach, Remke, Buzzanell, & Liu, 2008; Ott & Aoki, 2002; Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Exclusively discursive approaches can be fruitful in terms of social justice driven scholarship (Tretheway, 2007); however, these vantage points become problematic when they miss crucial epistemic questions for the community of inquiry such as “Who can know?” (Ahmed, 2000) as well as questions of what things, material and discursive, are becoming in various precariously positioned moments. That is, questions of epistemology cannot be asked divorced from questions of ontology. The danger in these erasures lies in resulting disembodied propositions that tacitly treat oppression and possible interventions as wholly D/discursive on dualistic and fragmented ontological/epistemological Eurocentric terms. These approaches are ultimately concatenated to fragmented ontologies and epistemologies because, within a solely and dualistic “big Discourse”/“little discourse” framework, the machinery of marginalization in the academy as well as its oppressive effects on the *materially-discursively* situated lives of students of color are rendered incomprehensible and inconsequential within, and to, the Eurocentric ontological/epistemological paradigm within which it flourishes variously. Therefore, where we, as Western communication scholars, ignore the onto-epistemological and material-discursive elements of oppression for persons of color in the academy, “D/discourse” as a conceptual framework dissembles as a cause and “solution” to an oversimplified problem. Put another way,

to make headway we need to ask ourselves more than just whether people of color have a voice in the academy and in what ways they can worry about rendering their experiences comprehensible to the rest of “us.” We must also ask ourselves in whose image this “us” is made up. Under what discursive-material circumstances can difference be “heard” (Spivak, 1988) while maintaining a “stitched” integrity?¹⁴ What sociomaterial relations bloom in a precariously positioned paradigm such as this flattened one and what can communication scholars say about such instances of becoming while maintaining logical consistency with communicative forms of knowing?

Related to the gravitas of interrogating Eurocentric epistemological and ontological relations of production is the exigency of problematizing disciplinary understandings regarding the relationship between materiality, discourse, “Discourse,” and the constitution of reality. This is an integral pursuit to research, both within and beyond communication studies, because it lays the groundwork for the careful discernment and use of discursive theoretical and methodological approaches to scholarship. Because the communication discipline is the vantage point of this study, I unpack disciplinary understandings of materiality, discourse, “Discourse,” and the constitution of reality from this locus as an area of opportunity.

Materiality, D/discourse, and the constitution of reality in social justice focused communication scholarship often navigate between theories of the “discursivity of the material” (materialist) and the “materiality of discourse” (idealist) (Alaimo, 2008; Asen, 2010; Bost & Greene, 2011; Botero, 2011; Brisco and DeOliver, 2012; Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, & Taylor, 2008; Bullis, 1997; Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Cloud, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2001a,

¹⁴ Here, “integrity” does not signify a monolithic understanding of difference. Instead, it is a call to heed the self-determination (Foss & Griffin, 1995) of precariously and multiply positioned persons and agencies.

2001b, 2001c, 2004, 2006; Dicochea, 2004; Dyers and Wankah, 2012; Engnell, 1998; Foss & Foss, 2011; Fuller, 2012; Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Goldzwig, 1998; Greene, 2009; Gunn & Cloud, 2010; Hanan, 2011; Heckman, 2010; Hundley, 2012; Lassen, Horsbol, Bonnen, and Pedersen, 2011; Lucas, 2007; Lundberg, 2012; Martinez-Guillem, 2012; Martinez-Guillem, 2013; Meisenbach & Bonewits Feldner, 2011; Revell, 2012; Rogers, 1998; Swartz, 2006; Wander, 1996; Zappettin, 2012). Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren (2009) describe these as ontological and epistemological¹⁵ paradigms in which the:

[M]aterialists [typically] grant priority to technical, economic, institutional, and physical factors driving organizational identities and purposes. In contrast, idealism [discursive framework] typically refers to the symbolic sphere, and idealists privilege the influence of such human factors as language, cognition, images, metaphors, desires, and norms on the production of organizational reality. (p. 16)

Thus, academics who privilege the material see materiality as equally (or more) consequential to the constitution of reality (Alaimo, 2008; Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Cloud, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2004, 2006; Cooren, 2006; Gunn & Cloud, 2012; Hanan, 2012; Heckman, 2010; Martinez-Guillem, 2012, 2013; Rogers, 1998; Spivak, 1988, 1990, 1993a, 1993b, 2006) while those who privilege the D/discursive, or the ideational, privilege a fractured conceptualization of structural Discourse and everyday discourse as constitutive (Brisco and DeOliver, 2012; Dyers and Wankah, 2012; Fuller, 2012; Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Lassen, Horsbol, Bonnen, and Pedersen, 2011; Lucas, 2007; McGee, 1980; McKerrow, 1989; Ott & Aoki, 2002; Zappettin, 2012). In other words, one

¹⁵ I use “ontological and epistemological” here and not “onto-epistemological” because the formulation of the materiality-discourse relationship described here is not “flat” (read onto-epistemological), it is hierarchical and dualistic (read ontological and epistemological).

“camp” (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009) leans toward the ideational, which includes the D/discursive as mentioned in the block quote above, while the other leans toward the material as agentic to (re)constructing the reality within which persons in the West speak and act. This conceptualization, so clearly summarized and articulated by Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren, often guides communication scholars’ understanding of the possibilities that can emerge from material-discursive relationships. However, this conceptualization, predicated on the dualistic and Eurocentric logics of the Enlightenment, in many ways represents a non-relationship. That is, from this perspective, materiality and discourse exist in a zero sum relationship where one must be privileged over the other and where, hence, truly respectful, read invitational (Foss & Griffin, 1995), interdisciplinary theories, methodologies, and methods for studying the possible relationships between difference and domination and materiality-discourse cannot exist. Instead of this approach, we, as Western communication scholars, must approach the methodological task through an epistemology of invitation (Foss & Griffin, 1995) by enmeshing materiality and discourse while mobilizing a gradated scale to fit the research conversation to the issue and its context.¹⁶

Dana Cloud, a leading philosopher of communication on materiality and discourse, writes that academics continuously navigate the treacherous waters “between the Scylla of idealism and the Charybdis of ‘vulgar’ economism or simpleminded orthodoxies [materialism]” (1994, p. 141). The “Scylla of idealism” (1994, p. 141) lies on one side of the passageway en-route to emancipatory scholarship; it is a transmuting sea nymph that devours communication scholars

¹⁶ I am not suggesting here that materiality and discourse as lenses to study the relationships between difference and domination should become conflated. I am suggesting that materiality and discourse should be understood as part of a system of relations, an onto-epistemological metaphysics where a “constellation” of materiality-discourse becomes, that must be understood and studied interdisciplinarily with respect to logical consistency within and across disciplines.

with its seductive promise of materiality's servitude to discourse, or the idea that communication constructs reality. On the other side of this dangerous strait is the "Charybdis" (1994, p. 141) of economic Marxism. This paradigm incapacitates communication scholars in its opposing currents by sucking them into deep, dark chasms where discourse can do nothing more than hobble after materiality, leaving their work forever indentured to a Eurocentric, universalized, and ontologized patriarchy. Cloud's articulation of these relations is of import to this project because it highlights that falling prey to the dualistic conceptualization of the "Scylla" of ideation or the "Charybdis" of materialism places scholars in danger of being consumed by limiting Cartesian logics. In response to this limitation, what I propose is seeking a more nuanced and symbiotic understanding of the discourse-materiality relationship in order to interrogate, problematize, de/re/construct, and transform now epistemologies and ontologies into flattened onto-epistemologies that help us, as communication scholars, think through theories and methodologies that contribute to marginalization within the ivory tower. In this study, I start from a communicative field and I do not conduct an interdisciplinary project. However, it is my goal to practice an epistemology of invitation¹⁷ as I conduct this communicative work in order to invite different forms of knowing the multi-faceted phenomenon that I treat here.

Finally, and as Allen states, communication scholarship "rarely refers to the racial paradox which characterizes the 'both/and' nature of race" (Allen, 2007, p. 260; Flores & Moon, 2002).¹⁸ Here, Allen is referring to a "paradox" (2007, p. 260) wherein race manifests and has consequentiality on both discursive and material terms, as discussed earlier. Thus, in the context

¹⁷ Invitation as epistemology is a prominent piece of my methodological approach here.

¹⁸Allen conceives of race "as an artificial, dynamic, political construction based on white supremacy, with material consequences such as privilege and discrimination (Flores & Moon, 2002)" (2007, p. 260). Although I agree with Allen's argument that race has a strong discursive component, I extend her argument here to include its material becomings as well.

of emancipatory research, race cannot only represent an arbitrary and fluctuating dualistic D/discursive construction (Allen, 2007); it must incorporate the significance of a reality with material affordances and implications. Nevertheless, a disembodied vantage point is the institutional home to much communication scholarship on race and this postmodern fiction permeates methodologies that serve to simply “add difference” to Eurocentric D/discursive paradigms “and stir” (Spitzack, 1987). Difference is exactly that, it is *different*. Difference requires more than a homogenous group of scholars who, acting from an indolent and singular methodological perspective, work in siloes to understand it in the world. Nevertheless, this is what happens within and outside of communication studies. Predictably, these limited stances infrequently consider the imbricated relations of power within which race is precariously positioned (Allen, 2007, p. 260) materially-discursively and, thus, withing a flattened onto-epistemology.

As such, this project is intended to target the aforementioned gaps through the following guiding research questions:

RQ1: What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about how everyday discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, and disciplining marginalize difference within the academic institution?

RQ2: What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about the ways in which material agencies bloom alongside everyday discursive agencies to marginalize difference within the academic institution?

RQ3: What do the becomings of precariously positioned materialities and discourses tell us about how Cartesian Western epistemes, disconnected from ontology, work as conceptual webs of domination within the academy?

Existing communication research does little to theorize a flattened sociomaterial relationality that does not set the agentic knowing subject before the passive external world. In other words, communication scholars must do more to theorize material-discursive relations that become on the conceptual plane of the onto-epistemological rather than solely focus on discursive and/or Discursive relations that happen exclusively on the epistemological metaphysical plane. Hence, this communicative project identifies, from a feminist methodology and an intersectional approach, the discourses and materialities that become alongside one another in instances of marginalization within the academic institution. Once identified, I theorize the situated relationship of discourse-materiality given the phenomenon under study. As stated previously, one broad goal of this work is to encourage critical discussion on discursive theoretical and methodological approaches to scholarship within and beyond communication studies. A second goal is to problematize and expand understandings of how epistemology and ontology “emulsify” and/or “curdle” (Lugones, 2003, p. 122) to constitute complex sociomaterial matrices of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000) within the academy.

Chapter Two: Methodology

This chapter proceeds in three sections. First, I begin with a conversation about, and overview of, the methodological approaches that situate this project. This is a means of contextualizing the communicative methods I intend to mobilize when examining the material-discursive relationships that situate the phenomenon of inquiry. Second, I discuss my stance as a researcher. The chapter ends with a restatement of the guiding research questions as well as an outline of the methods that will help me answer them.

Methodology

Feminist and intersectional methodological approaches guide this research. They also situate the methods that I use to critically interrogate discourse. Because discussion of the relationship between methodology and method are scant in communication studies, this is where I begin. From this view, methods are not simply “objective” tools the researcher uses to gather neutral data. Rather, they are tools the investigator mobilizes according to her methodological commitments. This speaks to a specific link and simultaneous distinction between methodology and method where methodology precedes method by constituting the focus through which data is gathered (Geiger, 1990). As stated by Harding, methodology is "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (Harding, 1987, pp. 2-3). Method, then, emerges from methodology where methods represent the various techniques for gathering evidence, but they do not dictate how the gathering of evidence will proceed. In this vein, Peplau & Conrad assert that, “no method comes with a feminist guarantee” (1989, p. 380). This is to say that there is no approach to data collection that, in and of itself, can be said to inherently engage in emancipatory scholarship and activism. The emancipatory potential of a method is borne from the ways in

which the researcher mobilizes it, and this deployment happens according to the overarching objectives with which data is gathered, or the methodology. Therefore, it is imperative for scholars to judiciously understand, choose, employ, and demystify through the writing process the methodologies that guide contextually bound research and its commitments.

The possible knee-jerk suspicion that the nature of my connection and distinction between methodology and method may engender does not escape me, and before expanding on my own feminist and intersectional approaches I will address it. This methodologically candid stance has been, and to this day remains, one of the main targets for claims that feminist and intersectional methods are incapable of coming to useful, or “objective,” interventions on the systemic (Chafetz, 1999). In response to these arguments, I enthusiastically proclaim my appreciation and embrace of suspicion toward any epistemic production. However, I also assert the potential for this type of essentializing misgiving to slide into exactly the kind of indolent conflation of epistemology, methodology, and method that tends to obscure the crucial relations of power within which all research, qualitative and quantitative, is conducted (Ahmed, 2000). Specifically, monolithic counterarguments about the methodology with which I approach this project may be problematic because they emerge from Eurocentric epistemes that expect dualistic, “objective,” and concrete answers to issues that can never, and perhaps never should, be “solved.” This is not to say that all questions seeking “concrete” answers are examples of intellectual laziness, but it *is* to say that there is no single, “right,” or permanent way to do anything, much less answer any question of import to emancipation and the destabilization of hegemony. Furthermore, any “objective” epistemological stance is suspect wherein, as Levins-Morales states, “failing to take a side when someone is being hurt is immoral” (1997, p. 8). This does not mean that as Western scholars we have free reign to fabricate data according to our

commitments or to ignore contradiction. It means that being a thorough researcher is not synonymous with being “objective” (Levins-Morales, 1997, p. 8) but rather it is better cognized as an exercise in being accountable and responsible to our readership for how research proceeds within the complex relations of power where our community of inquiry and we move.¹⁹

Feminist Methodology

A feminist methodology positions the current project. Particularly, this project is situated in what Levins-Morales calls the “curative” approach (1997). Here, the role of the scholar committed to social justice is “not so much to document...as to restore the [marginalized] a sense of...possibility” (Levins-Morales, 1997, p.1).²⁰ The curative approach, unlike many others, is “explicit, openly naming our partisanship, our intent to influence how people think” (Levins-Morales, 1997, p. 1). This is fitting for a feminist approach when considering that all research, quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive, is conducted within crucial relations of power that normative research methodologies, methods, and writing practices obscure. As a curative endeavor, this project is focused on understanding situating “matrices of domination” (Hill-

¹⁹ The view of methods as “tools” that the researcher can use first as a knower of an external, passive reality and then as a scholar on the epistemic plane of that reality methodologically fragments in some ways the flattened onto-epistemological (Barad, 2003) view that I proposed in the first chapter of this thesis because it, in some ways, separates the knower from the known. Although the methods and reporting practices I engage here do not allow for a “becoming” in the strict performative sense (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008), I engage the mixed modern-postmodern methods of this project with the hope of doing philosophical work that might have a higher potential of leading to practically applicable interventions. Hence, because interventions in some senses require the pre-formation of an ontological plane within which one may intervene, I undertake a methodology and methods that allow for the move to such practically applicable work even as I do so with a high degree of apprehension for such a conceptualization of an ontology fragmented from epistemology. In large part, I take this interventionist, “curandera” approach (Levins-Morales, 1997) not out of some God like sense of self but out of an awareness that different conceptualizations of knowledge and reality are required given different ends, and this is the case here because these include both scholarship *and* activism.

²⁰ The original quote reads, “to restore the dehistoricized a sense of identity and possibility” (Levins-Morales, 1997, p. 1). This project is less focused on identity.

Collins, 2000) and typically marginalized bodies for the end goal of restoring a sense of agency through demystification. In this emancipating space the goals of my feminist methodology are five: 1) engage study from embodied and contextual vantage points (Geiger, 1990), 2) render invisible relations of power visible, 3) raise consciousness, 4) open possibilities for engaged praxis through research, and 5) “embrace [complexity,] ambiguity and contradiction” (Levins-Morales, 1997, p. 9). I address the implications of these approaches with a discussion of the former two goals and follow with the latter three.

The first goal, engaged scholarship from embodied and contextual realities (Geiger, 1990), emerges from the material-discursive becomings that situate the context of analysis and research questions. This means that although I do work that may be considered “representational” rather than the “more than representation” approach that a flattened onto-epistemology requires, I do so with special attention to the contextually bound discursive-material experiences of participants as I represent the phenomenon with which I engage rather than with an “eye” for painting a static picture of ontologized persons or universalizing circumstances. Additionally, my commitment to show my positionality as a communication researcher in my work rather than maintain a “dignified,” voyeuristic stance is part of this tenet for research (Levins-Morales, 1997). This does mean that I engage in autobiography for its own sake. Instead, I discuss how my ways of knowing and being as a scholar emulsify and curl (Lugones, 2003) with my intersectional positionality in the field of communication research. My second principle, rendering invisible relations of power visible, is also borne from a commitment to bringing embodied intersectional work to communication studies. Particularly, this intersectional work is concerned with rendering emergent material-discursive relations of power

visible within the academic milieu as well as within oppressive understandings of materiality-discourse in our disciplinary methodologies and methods.

Consciousness-raising, another foremost goal of feminist methodologies, further situates this project and consists of two foci. The first is making the readership acutely aware of issues that arise from sociomaterial engagements in the academy. The second and related foci is creating a discursive space through which the context bound sociomaterial becomings I write about may engender embodied²¹ and relational understandings of the problematics people of color face. Embodiment here means that persons seek to understand the everyday consequence of material-discursive relations on their own terms rather than on the terms of, for example, a Western-centric understanding of reality. A relational understanding is one that is bounded by multiple lines of material-discursive flight and interaction rather than by any singular discursive agentic provenance. Embodiment and relationality in these senses are intended to facilitate in the research process solidarities that border-cross (Levins-Morales, 1997).

Using research to open possibilities for engaged praxis, a fourth positioning approach and one related to consciousness-raising, is a commitment to use my positionality in the academy to continuously contribute conceptual tools for decolonization and, through these heuristic contributions, for cautious practically applicable intervention. Lastly, through my situating feminist methodology, I commit to Levins-Morales' "embrace of [complexity,] ambiguity and contradiction" (Levis-Morales, 1997). As such, my goal is to understand rather than control (Geiger, 1990) and to problematize rather than definitively "solve" any issues of import to social

²¹ See also "theory in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23).

justice. Hence, interventions I propose should not be understood as authoritative guides but rather as situated suggestions that are open to repurposing and refashioning given context bound sociomaterial relations.

Intersectional Methodology

Intersectionality is situated by material-discursive meetings. Intersectional methodologies are closely related to feminist methodologies, but until recently essentializing conceptualizations of “women” and “feminism” kept them conceptually categorized within fragmented, “pop-bead” epistemologies (Chávez & Griffin, 2012, pp. 7–8). Pop-bead frameworks conceptualize of intersectionality in terms of easy to categorize identity traits that neatly and episodically manifest in isolation from one another. In opposition to this understanding, and in the context of this project, intersectionality is concerned with methodologies that elucidate “interlocking oppressions” (Combahee River Collective 1978/1986), “emulsification” and “curdling” as opposed to separation (Lugones, 2003, p. 121–148),²² and “theory in the flesh” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23).²³

The notion of interlocking oppressions, which is closely related to “curdling,” posits that social matrices of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009) exist and that these present particular conditions where agencies emerge in overlapping and interconnected ways that contextually bear upon lives (Combahee River Collective 1978/1986). This approach is well suited for practically applicable, feminist research within a flattened onto-epistemology because it rejects dichotomous, “pop-bead” epistemes (Chávez & Griffin, 2012, pp. 7–8) by presenting a truer to life, nuanced, fluid, and problematized ontology.

²² See page 5 for more on “emulsification” and “curdling” (Lugones, 2003, p. 121–148).

²³ See also Chávez and Griffin (2012) for more on these areas of focus in intersectional work.

The aforementioned ideas of “emulsification” and “curdling” as opposed to simple separation further this approach by refusing fragmentation as an epistemic starting point (Chávez & Griffin, 2012; Lugones, 2013, pp. 121–148). This notion locates methods in spaces where researchers must understand the ways historicized as well as phenomenological forms move toward one another and intermesh. Juxtaposed with attempts to understand intersectionality by neatly separating and categorizing, this methodology allows scholars to, as Levins-Morales writes, “show complexity and embrace ambiguity and contradiction (1997, p. 9).

Moraga and Anzaldúa’s “theory in the flesh” (1981, p. 23) moves the concepts of interlocking matrices and curdling into the corporeal. Corporeality is a type of materiality that is particular to the body. Chávez and Griffin write, “theory in the flesh [necessitates] that scholars identify, and give voice to, the interconnected nature of being silenced, in multiple ways, and the lived manifestations of those silencings” (2012, p.7). As a methodology, this approach guides methods that seek to understand the range of ways bodies move through the world, their becomings alongside multiple discursive-material agencies, and how these phenomenological and historicized processes meet contextually. This intersectional approach aligns well with feminist methodologies because it locates methods in the study from embodied, interconnected, and contextual realities (Geiger, 1990). Particularly, “theory in the flesh” challenges epistemic voyeurism by urging both the scholar and readership to become embodied and connected to the Other in the process of research. Through an attention to corporeality as well as interlocking ontological and epistemic “emulsification”/“curdling” (Chávez & Griffin, 2012; Lugones, 2013, pp. 121–148), both the scholar and readership are urged to identify and name colonization as it blooms between and betwixt. This results in stronger border-crossing solidarities (Levins-Morales, 1997). Moreover, by tearing down the D/discursive hegemony that separates and

categorizes bodies and by adding a focus on corporeality, or “the flesh,” the researcher encourages a bonded and co-implicated consciousness among both human and non-human actors on a flattened onto-epistemological plane.

Interdependent feminist and intersectional methodologies drive the current study and the methods with which I engage. In this space, methods cannot be solely held accountable or responsible for how scholars engage alongside them or the ways in which researchers have learned to see (Geiger, 1990; Haraway, 1988); scholars and the readership, through decolonizing and continuous interrogation, must do this. Still, methods have, as non-human agents within a flattened onto-epistemology, a form and substance that blooms alongside the researcher to queer knowledge production in contextually bound ways. Thus, neither human or non-human agencies dominate on this methodological plane but rather they bloom alongside.

The feminist goals of engaging study from embodied and contextual realities (Geiger, 1990), rendering invisible relations of power visible, raising consciousness, opening possibilities for engaged praxis through research, and embracing complexity, ambiguity and contradiction (Levins-Morales, 1997), all through an epistemology of invitation (Foss & Griffin, 1995), constitute the methodology of this project. Additionally, the intersectional commitments to interlocking agencies (Combahee River Collective 1978/1986), “emulsification” and “curdling” as opposed to separation (Lugones, 2003, p. 121–148), and “theory in the flesh” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23) also drive this study. In the next section, I discuss my positioning as a researcher to conclude the conversation on my methodological stance.

Stance as a Researcher

My commitment to understanding discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, disciplining, and the emergent becomings of materiality-discourse as it pertains to such questions

is informed by my own experience as a scholar of color in the academy. I have discussed the state of the communication field of research as it pertains to such questions and below I discuss the nature of my scholarly commitment and relation to this work in order to remain embodied and accountable to my community of inquiry and readership in a different and more localized way. First, I briefly discuss the academic experiences that situate my consciousness as it relates to discourse-materiality. Then, I explain how corporeality, epistemology and ontology as heuristics come to bear on my situated experience and understanding of materiality-discourse's agentic relationship.

From a working-class, immigrant home, the rhetoric of self-sufficiency and hard work as the crucial ingredients for catalyzing any dream into reality, or the D/discursive understanding of the "American Dream," resounded through my consciousness formation during my high-school and undergraduate years. As a student of color, in a low-income and predominantly Latin@/black neighborhood, these material-discursive experiences positioned the consciousness with which I entered the academic institution as a graduate student. I began my graduate career with a Eurocentric belief that D/discourse(s), such as those enveloping the "American Dream" master narrative, had *the* power to "constitute" reality. "Materiality" was open, fragmented, and the consequence of D/discursive constitution. I did not understand materiality's relational power alongside discourse where the range of my experience was concerned. Despite this dualistic conceptualization, once within academe self-talk and hard work did not situate me in what I, and others around me, had discursively "constructed" as a hospitable and utopic environment. In the particularity of this unfolding situation, Karl Marx may have been (slightly more) right when he wrote, "It is not the consciousness of men [*sic*] that determines their existence, but their existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1859, p. 2).

Situated corporeally and materially as a queer woman of color from a working-class and immigrant upbringing, I swiftly understood that although discourse has agentic force in the emergence of reality, this phenomenon does not include, for example, my discourse in the same ways it includes discourse aligned with masculinist, heteronormative, able-bodied, whiteness. Hence, I came to understand that it is not discourse alone that matters in a social constructionist sense but it is *also* matter that matters (Barad, 2003). This is not to say that only white, able-bodied, straight, men have the power to constitute reality through discourse. This would be a deterministic and overly simplistic conceptualization of how “matter comes to matter” (Barad, 2003). What I mean here is that materiality-discourse become in precariously positioned ways and that these entanglements cannot be easily separated to birth a “pure” communicative way of knowing without obscuring the crucial affordances of situated materialities and their intermingling with discourse. Due to my intersectional positionality as a scholar, I came to understand, at least in this blooming moment, that discourse’s agentic power as primary source lies within a fragmented Western consciousness where epistemology precedes ontology, or where the knowing subject is separate from and before that which can be known. Most disconcerting was the realization that discourse within this conceptual framework often serves to further silence and erase those materialities-discourses that already circulate and meet as “unspeakable things unspoken” (Morrison, 1988). In other words, normalizing, Eurocentric understandings of “D”discourse as a primary constitutive power render invisible material-discursive entanglements within a flattened onto-epistemology that invites different ways of knowing, being, and becoming.

Guiding Questions and Methods

I began this conversation with an overview of my situating feminist and intersectional methodological approaches. I have also discussed my positionality as a communication researcher as well as the state of the field in terms of material-discursive thought. My position as a researcher as well as the theoretical and methodological issues I have outlined inform the following guiding research questions:

RQ1: What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about how everyday discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, and disciplining marginalize difference within the academic institution?

RQ2: What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about the ways in which material agencies bloom alongside everyday discursive agencies to marginalize difference within the academic institution?

RQ3: What do the becomings of precariously positioned materialities and discourses tell us about how Cartesian Western epistemes, disconnected from ontology, work as conceptual webs of domination within the academy?

Below, I outline the methods I engaged through the course of this pilot study. I begin with a description of the community of inquiry. Second, I review the interview procedures as method. Finally, I discuss how the analysis of data proceeds.

Participants

Participants included two MA and three PhD students of color with graduate experience at universities in various regions of the United States including the West, Midwest, Mountain West, South West, Northeast and South. Specifically, four were female and one was male where

informants self-identified as African-American, black, biracial, Chican@/Mexican-American, and Latin@. Respondents ranged from 24–30 years of age and they had a mean age of 27. On average, participants had four years of experience at the graduate level and a combined total of 20 years of experience. This included a total of 11 years of experience at the MA level and nine years of experience at the PhD level.

A portion of the interview included questions regarding the socioeconomic status of participants and this yielded that four of five informants were first-generation students and that most had working class upbringings. In particular, four participants reported that growing up their living standard was much better than that of their parents when they were the same age. Still, they reported that this was in part due to student loans furnishing this different standard of living. Additionally, four participants indicated that, growing up, their parents did not have stocks or bonds, four indicated that their parents did not have stable work, four indicated that their parents did not have stocks, bonds, or other investments, and three indicated that, growing up, they had lived in apartment housing. All participants attended public graduate programs and all indicated funding their education through combinations of assistantships, fellowships, student loans, and additional work.²⁴

Through purposive and snowball sampling, I recruited and selected respondents who were student members of the communication studies community and who simultaneously self-identified as people of color. Specifically, I recruited respondents through a posted announcement regarding the project on the Communication Research and Theory Network (CRTNET). This is a disciplinary news service/listserv sponsored by the National Communication Association with a reach of 11,000 members in the field (Appendix B). I also

²⁴ For more about the participant population, please see chapter three.

recruited participants by identifying graduate programs in communication studies across the country, determining the names and contact information of their respective graduate studies directors, and approaching each via e-mail regarding the study and its possible dissemination to graduate students (Appendix C). Additionally, at the conclusion of each interview three of five participants inquired about forwarding the call for participants and through this I engaged in snowball sampling.

I focused on respondents in the field of communication as a subset of the larger academic population because I am particularly interested in what a fragmented understanding of epistemology first and ontology second means for material-discursive becomings in this academic setting. Because discursive methodologies and methods follow similar tracks in fields of research adjacent to that of communication, this approach to research and my findings may provide a preliminary reference point for future cross and interdisciplinary theorization and praxis.

Interview Procedures

As stated above, in the course of this project I interviewed five participants. After identifying participants through the various recruitment strategies above, I contacted each via e-mail (Appendix D/E) with an informed consent document detailing the study, its aims, and instructions for setting up an interview date, time, and medium for communication. All participants chose to meet over the telephone. In the interest of participant confidentiality, I did not collect signed informed consent documents. Scheduling the interview constituted an agreement to participate in the project.

To safeguard the confidentiality of participants, I asked each participant to provide a pseudonym at the end of the interview for identification purposes. Additionally, in the interest of

privacy, I logged identifying information in a document separate from primary demographic and interview data collected.

Interviews required digital recording for accuracy and coding. For the protection of interview participants, once all interviews were complete, recordings were transcribed and destroyed. In the case of all participants, identifying information was not used in any transcription work or reports. Moreover, all data was kept in a password-protected laptop for the duration of the study as well as an external hard drive that remained in a locked space.

Interview Protocol

Participants responded to a series of narrative questions (Appendix F) and a demographic form (Appendix G) administered by the researcher. These spanned a total of about seven hours and forty minutes of interview time with a total of 127 pages of transcription from the narrative portion and 49 pages from the demographic portion of the interview.

Eight questions, which can be found in Appendix F, made up the narrative portion of the interview. Throughout these questions, which can be thought of as four question sets comprised of two inquiries each, I asked participants' about their motivations for pursuing a graduate education in the first set, their experiences of sameness and difference in the academy in the second set, their experiences of empowerment and disempowerment in the third set, and their experiences of being present and absent in academic settings in the second set. These question sets regarding motivations for pursuing graduate education, sameness-difference, empowerment-disempowerment, and absence-presence were modeled from literature on the experiences of persons of color in the academy that details such entanglements (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999; Martin, Trego, Nakayama, 2010; Flores, 1996; Hendrix, 2005; Orbe, Smith, Groscurth, & Crawley, 2010; Orbe & Wright, 1998; Starosta, 2010). They were intended to invite a

conversation with participants about their graduate experience as well as to explore the material-discursive dynamics of their experiences of empowerment and constraint in the academic milieu. Although the interview targeted the conceptual frameworks under study, it did so loosely in order to remain open to a wide range of material-discursive experiences respondents may have wished to represent through narrative.

Participants were asked to complete demographic items after the primary narrative portion of the interview. This timeline was designed to control for affinity-seeking behaviors stemming from stereotypes that demographic questions might have triggered if presented prior to the narrative portion.²⁵ Participants were asked demographic questions loosely mirroring the 2010 United States Census aligning to population categories such as age, gender, sex, race/ethnicity, and familial as well as personal socioeconomic status. Participants also provided information about years of experience within the academy and roles in their range of experience (e.g., graduate student MA, graduate student PhD, graduate teaching assistant, etc.). Finally, respondents were asked to provide demographic data regarding their institutional affiliation and funding circumstances. This group of questions is based on classifications used by the Chronicle of Higher Education (2013). Students had the choice to opt out of any aforementioned questions.

As a whole, the interview and demographic portions of the study took an average of 1–2 hours. Although interview and narrative representation were not the ideal methods for apprehending a flattened onto-epistemology of continuous material-discursive becomings, this approach served particular scholar-activist ends. Performance ethnography, for example, may

²⁵ Examples of influential social stereotypes include those built around gender, sex, race, level of education, and other intersectional positionalities that influence communication practices within/between interlocutors.

have been better suited if the aims of this project were exclusively philosophical. However, due to the practically applicable and interventionist currents that inform my work alongside new materialist theory, I chose the interview and narrative methods of inquiry because they align with a (somewhat) pre-formed ontology that allows for interventionist work even where I undertake this work with skepticism and contextually bound restraint.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using a feminist and intersectional methodology aligned with the previously discussed positioning lenses and stances. My analysis of the narrative portion of data involved five steps, including: 1) coding each narrative for identifiable discursive moments, 2) coding each narrative for key material-discursive entanglements, 3) identifying and articulating the ways in which silencing and/or disciplining emerged in each of these formations, 4) identifying and articulating the ways in which empowerment and agency emerged within these formations, and 5) developing themes and identifying patterns from the analysis. This approach helped me work with what I discovered to be very slippery concepts (materiality, corporeality, and discourse, for example), which did not always present themselves as clear or distinct moments in my interviewees' responses.

On the micro level of analysis, although I focused on the content of participants' narratives more than their structure or diction, as is typical of thematic analysis (Riessman, 2007, pp. 53–54), I did not treat narrative methods as mutually exclusive in my analysis and I met narrative experiences with appropriate methods even where these were outside of thematic analysis. Where, for example, participants' narrative structure seemed incongruent with Eurocentric standards of language, I did not discard data as unusable but instead I sought to understand how language had been rendered unusable for the speaker and language use may

have represented “adaptive responsiveness” rather than “lack of linguistic skill” (Devault, 1990, p. 229). In addition, and in opposition to a disembodied focus on narrative content to the exclusion of local imbricated contexts, I occasionally used both narrative and demographic information shared by participants to locate their experiences within the material-discursive academic context.

Organization of Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis includes a justification for research and a review of the conceptual frameworks under study from a communicative standpoint for research. The second chapter explicates my stance as a researcher as well as my guiding methodologies and methods. The third chapter presents the data gathered during interviews. By grouping my eight questions into four question sets, I organize the responses into the following categories: motivations for entering graduate school, differences and similarities from and among peers, moments of empowerment and disempowerment, situations in which presence and absence were significant, and creating a home in higher education. In chapter four, by way of answering my three research questions, I suggest several themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. I then turn to presenting some of the limitations of this research project and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Chapter Three: Presentation and Analysis of Data

I begin this chapter by describing, in aggregate fashion, the participant population in terms of demographic and socioeconomic status. I caution the reader strongly, however, that I discuss demographic information in the aggregate not in order to make any universalizing statement about the community of inquiry but rather to: 1) give a particular type of outlet at the outset of this chapter and 2) to confirm that the population with which I engaged in the interview process matched that which I identified in my methods chapter. Following this, I briefly describe each participant's educational background and upbringing in terms more nuanced than those collective demographics with which I begin. Then, I present the interview data guided by themes and patterns that arose across four groupings of the 8 interview questions. Across this discussion of themes and patterns, I also discuss methodological issues that may have interacted with participant responses. I include this conversation here rather than solely as an afterthought in a concluding limitations section because, within a flattened onto-epistemological view, methods, as non-human actors, have significant consequences in human-non-human entanglements. I end the chapter by summarizing overarching themes and patterns across question groups that are guided by the positioning heuristics of this project. These act as the basis for answering the research questions in the next chapter.

Population

According to the population specifications in chapter two, the participants of this pilot study included five graduate student members of the communication studies community who ranged between the ages of 24 and 30 and self-identified as persons of color. In particular,

informants self-identified as African-American, black, biracial,²⁶ Chicana(o)/Mexican-American, and Latina(o). Of the five respondents, four were women and one was male, three were PhD students and two were MA students at the end of their programs of study. All were instructors and/or teaching assistants, all participated in university extracurricular activities, and all with the exception of one attended conferences within and/or outside the discipline. Interviewees' graduate experiences took place in regions of the United States including the West, Midwest, Mountain West, South West, Northeast and South.

In terms of socioeconomic status, four of five informants were first-generation students, four rated their living standard as much better than that of their parents when they were the same age,²⁷ four indicated that, growing up, their parents did not have stable work, four indicated that, growing up, their parents did not have stocks, bonds, or other investments, and three indicated that, growing up, they lived in homes while two lived in housing such as apartments. All participants reported attending public MA and PhD programs and all indicated funding their education through a combination of department funding in the form of teaching assistantships/fellowships and student loans. Of the five interviewees, two also signaled funding their graduate education through external scholarships and department research assistantships. One of these two students reported external work in addition to all aforementioned means of funding.

²⁶ As an oppositional stance, this participant expressed that she self-identified as biracial rather than as white or black. One primary reason the interviewee cited for this was the sociomaterial pressure to self-identify in singularly punctuated and ontologizing racial terms across various situations (e.g. small talk, completing forms, etc.).

²⁷ The four graduate students who rate their living standard as, "better than that of their parents when they were the same age," also voice the caveat of having student loans that, in part, furnish this "better" standard of living in a more nuanced material-discursive sense. They used student loans.

More Nuanced Participant Descriptions

To situate the experiences of Gloria, John, Beverly, Dolores, and Seshata,²⁸ I briefly and generally describe their roles within the academy as well as their upbringing. Here, I present descriptions of participants that are in some ways comparable; however, I also display slight differentiations in the descriptions of each to give the reader a more nuanced understanding of their experiences as represented to me through the narrative form. I begin with master's students Gloria and John and I follow with doctoral students Beverly, Dolores, and Seshata.

Gloria. Gloria attended an Hispanic serving institution (HSI) in the West as an undergraduate and continued to learn and teach in her home state and alma mater as an MA student at the time of our interview. Through her experience as the child of undocumented immigrants, Gloria grew up knowing the precariousness of living and raising a family as an undocumented person in the United States. During our interview she stated that, after “a long-struggle” and persistent fears that her parents would not “be around to watch [her] graduate,” they recently “got their papers” (Gloria, 2015), or they were able to legalize their citizenship status in the United States. She self-identified as Latina and her self-chosen pseudonym, Gloria, comes from the name of Chicana feminist, queer, and cultural theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa, who is best known for her coedited collection, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), and her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

John. John was the only male participant in this pilot study. He completed his undergraduate degree at a historically black college/university (HBCU) in his Southwestern

²⁸ These participant chosen pseudonyms are used to protect interviewee confidentiality from here forward. One participant, Beverly, did not indicate a pseudonym, thus, I assigned one.

home state and, as a master's student, he resided in the Northeastern United States at the time of our interview. Growing up, John lived in predominantly black communities and self-identified during our interview as black. His self-chosen pseudonym, John H. Growthe, comes from his time teaching speech and debate in an unspecified country on the African continent. While there, he and fellow instructors invented the name in order to partake in their debate coach's practice of opening class sessions with a quote that he, "would always attribute to some philosopher" (John, 2015). In John's own words, "[the instructors] didn't know many quotes off the top of our heads like [our coach] did." As such, John and fellow instructors constructed original quotes for their class sessions and attributed these to the fictional "ancient philosopher" (John, 2015), John H. Growthe.

Beverly. Beverly attended an undergraduate program in her Southern United States home state. As an MA student, she went to a program across state lines and at the time of our interview, as a PhD student, she resided in the Midwest. Growing up, she had a sense that she would go on to post-graduate education, in part, because, "both of [her] parents...also went on to get graduate degrees" (Beverly, 2015). In thinking about her experience as an MA and PhD student she said, "[W]hile I may have been one of two African-Americans in my department" as an MA student, the city where she resided "was a space where there were a lot of African-Americans in the community...so I really didn't experience that big of a difference...until I moved to [the Midwest for a PhD]" (Beverly, 2015). Here, "difference" seemed to point to material-discursive experiences of isolation as a raced person positioned in the Midwestern United States as opposed to Beverly's raced experience in the Southern United States. Beverly self-identified as African-American and her pseudonym comes from the name of feminist author and scholar Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Guy-Sheftall is best known for founding the first

women's research and resource center at an HBCU as well as for her intersectional consciousness raising works such as, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (1995).

Dolores. As an undergraduate and MA student, Dolores attended an HSI in her Southwestern home state. At the time of our interview, she resided in the Mountain West region of the United States and she was a PhD student at a university there. Dolores grew up in predominantly Latino and black urban communities. She cited the critical recognition of her "economic standing, the economic standing of [her] parents...who are immigrants, and...the lack of opportunity" in her childhood community as the "most significant reason[s]" for pursuing a post-graduate education. She self-identified as Chicana/Mexican-American and her self-chosen pseudonym is the traditional Latin-American name, Dolores. In its verbatim translation, the word means "pains" or "sorrows" and it can denote physical and cognitive discomfort, distress, or suffering. Based on Roman Catholic religious precepts, the name can also signify the Seven Sorrows, or Dolors, in the life of the Holy Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus (Ball, 2003).

Seshata. Seshata was a PhD student in the Northeastern United States attending her undergraduate and master's institution at the time of our interview. She lived in a predominantly white community growing up and she graduated as one of "two or three" people of color in a high school class of "about 87" (Seshata, 2015). In her formative years, despite the invisibility of race in her sociomaterial academic environment, Seshata noted that her father "was teaching" her about race related topics that "didn't come up in school" (Seshata, 2015). She continued to critically engage questions of race as a PhD student at the time of our interview and she saw this consciousness as intersectionally positioned within a nuanced social "puzzle" (Seshata, 2015). That is, she did not understand race as a singular or deterministic factor but rather she understood

her engagement of race as a question of interest within a complex set of situated and fluctuating social relations. Sheshata self-identified as biracial and her self-chosen pseudonym derives from the name of the Egyptian goddess ascribed with the invention of writing (Meier, 1991, p. 543).

As is the nature of interpretive and new materialist work, I do not present these brief descriptions of participants in a move to generalize about the graduate student of color population within communication studies or across the academy. Instead, I provide it to render visible particular aspects of these participants' experiences within interlocking materialities-discourses as well as to engage research from embodied and contextual vantage points given that both are precepts crucial to feminist (Levins-Morales, 1997) and intersectional methodologies (Chavez & Griffin, 2012).²⁹ This does not mean that there is nothing here that may have resonance with persons whose experiences bloom within similar sociomaterial relations. It is to say that this resonance is predicated on a preformed narrative ontological order (Fisher, 1984) that is in some ways separate from the knowing subject at the moment of material-discursive becoming. Hence, this split should alert the reader to the always situated and limited nature of interventions that I will suggest as a result of this philosophical and pragmatic research endeavor where it is methodologically predicated on this limited version of an ontological/epistemological order. This is where I begin with the sociomaterial becomings, represented in narrative form, of Gloria's, John's, Beverly's, Dolores's, and Seshata's experiences.

²⁹ As with any methodology, there are many propositions across the academy and its disciplines regarding how feminist and intersectional methodologies should proceed. Here, I base my engagement of these in large part, but not exclusively, on the writings of Levins-Morales (2000) and Chavez & Griffin (2012).

Interview Data

In this section, I present the interview data guided by participants' answers to eight narrative questions. As state earlier, these eight questions may be thought of as four question sets comprised of two inquiries each. The first question set invited participants to discuss motivations for pursuing a graduate education. The second encouraged interlocutors to discuss their experiences of sameness and difference in the academy. The third targeted their experiences of empowerment and disempowerment. The final set invited participants to discuss their experiences of being present and absent in academic settings. I present and flesh out my findings in this format and I begin by discussing participant motivations for pursuing post-graduate education, or the first question set.

Motivations for Pursuing Post-Graduate Education

At the outset of each interview, I asked respondents to discuss with me the entanglements that informed their "decision to pursue" a post-graduate education first from a generalist perspective and then from their positionality as persons of color. The first query was as follows: "Please tell me about why you decided to pursue a graduate education and/or post-secondary teaching." The second was: "Has being a person of color factored into your decision to pursue post-graduate education? If so, how?" The phrasing of these questions in some ways presumed the knowing, individual subject's agency on the external world (i.e., I asked participants as agentic, pre-formed, individuals to discuss why they "chose" to "pursue" something and this phrasing was outside of a flattened frame of discursive-material "intra-action" (Barad, 2003)³⁰

³⁰ As Barad (2003) defines it, "intra-action" is an entanglement where the materiality-discourse relationship has substance as an assemblage of "diffracted" differentiation. Here, diffraction means that discourse-matter may, for example, be "read through" one another and that materiality-discourse is always "cut together-apart" in complex relations of

and becoming where one does not purely “choose” something but rather many agencies, including human and non-human agencies, assemble in particular ways in-across particular moments). Although these articulations of the interview questions were somewhat inconsistent with a flattened onto-epistemological view, other phrasings of the questions were too difficult for participants to understand due to their open, sometimes read as nebulous, articulation.³¹ Thus, the final version of interview questions identified a clearer acting subject for ease of interaction through the (technology mediated) interview process. According to interlocutors, their primary “motivations” for being a part of the academic community were engaging in the process of rendering visible bodies of color in the academy and the process of engaging in emancipatory praxis.

Rendering bodies of color visible in the academy. All participants voiced concerns with disrupting Western ontological precepts of “what bodies belong,” or can exist, in the academic milieu through their material-discursive engagements in the academy. Interlocutors overwhelmingly located their engagements in terms of how their raced corporealities interacted with Western practices of knowing. They located their discursive-material presence primarily in terms of how they engaged their pedagogical methodologies and methods in emancipatory ways.

According to all participants, as persons of color they rarely met other similarly corporealized persons in the academy and they particularly cited the lack of professors of color, or academic role models, in their discussion of motivating factors for pursuing a post-graduate education. For example, MA student John said:

“spacetime mattering” that do not precede some finite meeting point or that intimate “distinct” bodies but that rather materiality-discourse become through their various assemblages (p. 32).

³¹ For example, in a trial version of this study’s methods section written for a course the first question was, “Please talk with me about the things that came together and that have contributed something to your post-graduate academic engagement.”

[P]eople of color, they have always been taught by middle aged white women and men and I think it's important for them to see a person of color, a black man, uh, in that capacity...to show them that, you know, 'You can go on and get your PhD'...because you can feel that all these black people, these people of color, do not go on to get a PhD because they don't see anyone in that field.

Here, John pointed to the corporeal and pedagogical invisibility of difference in academic material-discursive spaces while simultaneously voicing his commitment to opening the onto-epistemological terrain through his discursive-corporeal engagement as a scholar and future professor of color. When John said that people of color do not pursue post-graduate education by employing ocular language in his explanation of the phenomenon, he identified the disconnect between everyday discourses that "say" persons of color are welcome to take residence in the academy but disconnected everyday materialities that "show" the opposite. Here, John points to a particular material-discursive state of becoming where discourse is privileged over a flattened onto-epistemological framework for knowing the world on material-discursive terms. Additionally, by specifically pointing to intersectionally positioned white bodies, male bodies, female bodies, black bodies, and bodies of color, John's explicit articulation of "what bodies exist" and in what ways in this statement also speaks to the ontological interrogation and problematization, on material-discursive terms, in which students of color engage to navigate and unsettle these ontologically barren environments.³²

As another example, PhD student Beverly said, "[A]s both an undergraduate and master's student, not ever having an African-American professor...I felt it was important to, kind of, be in that space, if that makes sense." During the interview and in this excerpt, Beverly first noted the importance of corporeally inhabiting a material academic space before moving on to discuss her

³² This does not mean that Western environments are barren but that they are barren wherein they work to marginalize the onto-epistemologies of persons of color.

pedagogical practices. This, however, may not exactly have meant that materiality is more important to the constitution of reality or that it is separate from discursive agencies. Rather, this may point to a Western terrain that more often puts the epistemic and the discursive before the ontological and the material alongside.³³ Thus, Beverly may have begun by privileging ontological questions and material agencies not in order to privilege these but in order to render them visible within fragmented Western ontological/epistemological frameworks for knowing. Curiously, Beverly also expressed an apprehension about whether I, as the interviewer, would be able to understand the nature of her commitment to inhabiting “that [academic] space,” or materiality, on corporeal terms. I understood the ontological import of materiality in this context but her questioning of my understanding may have been telling of her awareness that, within fragmented Western ontological/epistemological positions, there lies a chasm of consciousness on materiality’s import as an affordance, and by proxy corporeality, in the blooming of reality.

Similarly, Seshata articulated on corporeal terms that, “to be a black woman as a professor...to fill that role was meaningful to me [in pursuing the PhD].” Thus, materially-discursively (i.e., as a raced body embroiled and becoming alongside academic discourses) inhabiting those onto-epistemologically monochromic spaces, or “predominantly white systems” (Seshata, 2015), is Seshata’s material-discursive way of rendering difference visible in the academy. Yet, even as she said this, she took caution to also say that her raced corporeality, the material affordance that merges with discursive agencies in the academic setting, is “really probably illogical” as a significant factor in this state of becoming and that it “admittedly probably isn’t the best reason for being in a lot of student loan debt (laugh)” (Seshata, 2015).

³³ What I am proposing in this paper is an “alongside” view of the “becoming” materiality-discourse relationship.

Seshata, like Beverly, may seem to diminish the consequence of materiality to an emancipatory onto-epistemology that blooms not through discourse alone but diffracts through materiality-discourse, but she seems to do so in attempting to render her motives for pursuing a post-graduate education palatable to me, the interviewer. It follows, then, that she may have padded her statement in the event that I was not able to understand the import of material affordances blooming alongside discourse by labeling corporeal presence as, “illogical,” even when the importance she so clearly articulated was only difficult to cogitate within a colonizing and fragmented Western ontology/epistemology.

Along with corporeal affordances, graduate students of color also considered related spatial and economic affordances while discussing their material-discursive commitment to rendering difference visible in academic settings. For example, Dolores and Gloria mentioned wanting to teach, or at the time of our interview teaching, at community/junior colleges in order to “engage that audience” (Gloria, 2015), or persons who experienced the world as intersectionally materially-discursively marginalized.³⁴ Gloria and Dolores positioned their raced and gendered bodies alongside their pedagogical methodologies³⁵ within particular material-discursive settings and they did so in ways that problematized a fragmented ontology/epistemology. On this topic, Dolores said:

I purposefully teach in the poor, the poorer neighborhoods. I teach at a junior college and so far that has worked. So, for two summers in a row, I’ve been able to teach

³⁴ MA student John similarly noted his goal to teach as a tenure-track professor at an HBCU in order to “show” by example and “mentor” (John, 2015) other persons of color and thereby open the academic terrain. By referencing the prospect of placing his corporeality, a black male body, in spaces that materially-discursively render visible his experiences and those of people intersectionally positioned in comparable ways, John calls a heightened attention to the import of an onto-epistemology of material-discursive becoming.

³⁵ These agencies are not separate from one another in the process of becoming, however, I articulate them here in a separate way

mainly African-Americans, Latino students, and also poor white [students]...at junior colleges. So, I mean ...I think about it as, "I finally, I can [finally] share what I'm learning with people who get it." You know? People who, who as soon as I start talking [about] certain historical figures, their, like, their face [*sic*] just lights up.

Dolores discussed how she carried out her commitment to render difference visible by positioning her body, communication pedagogy, and other academic discourses in spaces that were economically and spatially different from "traditional" academic settings. These contexts of becoming, positioned differently by different economies, bodies, and discourses, housed entanglements of materiality-discourse where students' faces "lights [*sic*] up" in recognition of these impacted entanglements of materiality-discourse outside fragmented Western precepts. Thus, Dolores did not solely understand her practice as reliant on critical discursive pedagogical tactics that embraced difference but she also recognized these agencies alongside material, intersectional contexts of difference that are materially-discursively raced and classed (i.e., "African-Americans, Latino students, and also...white [students] in "poor neighborhoods").³⁶ By identifying the significance of being intersectionally positioned within Western marginalizing materialities-discourses, Dolores seemed to indicate that it is not simply discourse that "constitutes" becomings in academic spaces but it is also "matter that matters" where interlocking oppressions" (Combahee River Collective 1978/1986) are of concern. Thus, the blooming material-discursive learning context, from a flattened onto-epistemological stance, informs how knowledge is taken up contextually and variously.

These examples delineate how graduate students of color make commitments to disrupt fragmented Western ontologies/epistemologies within the academy in their embodied and

³⁶ Importantly, where Dolores mentioned "poor neighborhoods," she keyed into how materiality-discourse factors into an intersectional experience where the raced body is not a freestanding form but rather one suffused within complex interlocking materialities-discourses of becoming.

methodologically conscious recognitions of, and engagements within, materially-discursively raced, gendered, and economized contexts. An important take away is that graduate students of color tend to articulate discursive-material entanglements when they discuss their academic experiences rather than simply focusing on materiality or discourse in isolation. This approach is integral to a flattened onto-epistemological view.

Engaging in emancipatory praxis. Graduate students of color expressed a range of experiences that provided few material-discursive reference points to difference within the Western academic setting. Voicing an awareness of, and commitment to, rendering difference visible as a cause of these exclusionary experiences, graduate students of color also voiced that engaging in emancipatory praxis was a primary motivation for pursuing post-graduate education across four of five interviews. Through this theme, decontextualized, disembodied, discourse-first experiences of exclusion seemed to engender a commitment to emancipatory praxis, or work not exclusively fragmented in discursive ideation but simultaneously becoming alongside the materially understood and the practically applicable.

Gloria articulated the distinction between scholarship and praxis when she expressed that in pursuing the PhD:

I wanted to have research that meant something because...I'm very purpose driven, right, so I never do something...[that is] disconnected from reality. You know, just a study for the sake of a study but not—but it isn't something that really contributes or changes lives, you know.

Gloria voiced her engagement with scholarship but qualified this as a relationship intimately connected with “reality.” And this was a concern that all, but for one participant, voiced explicitly. While the meaning of “reality” as a concept and of “changes lives” as ends are taken up differently within various material-discursive contexts, what Gloria says here about the need for “intra-acting” (Barad, 2003) scholarly and activist goals is important. Knowledge production

for Gloria and other participants was not something “unto itself” and, in this sense, it was not understood as “objective” or “pure.” Hence, practices of knowing, or epistemologies, were not disconnected from practices of being, or ontologies. Here, “scholarship” is defined as a pursuit based on learning and the production of “pure” knowledge. Praxis, then, is a variant form of scholarship in that it brings together the ideational (e.g., “pure” and “objective”) production of knowledge with activism (Bromley, 2012, p. 131) and embodied-material forms of knowing. Knowledge production and activism, as this exemplar excerpt evidences, were things that intra-acted and became within flattened and relational onto-epistemological landscapes for this population. They did not exist in isolation or even as a dialectic.

To further detail this last point, Gloria’s later statement is helpful, she said, “that’s why I care so much about the scholarship that I produce These experiences, they’re not, they don’t happen just to my family, they happen to a bunch of families. It’s our job as researchers to look into these types of interactions.” In this statement, Gloria highlighted her commitment to intra-acting scholar-activism as an important form of embodied knowledge production and she opened the onto-epistemological field of becoming to include not just her experience but also that of similarly positioned persons within a flattened, relational ontology. Gloria continued to develop this relational ontology in her recognition of the work of scholars engaged in social justice praxis across the communication field of research by pointing to their work in the following statement: “I see what they’re doing as super significant....they’re fighting a larger fight.” Here, “larger” might be interpreted as gesturing toward dualistic and fragmented Western concerns with Marxist materialism and/or “Big D discourse,” yet, this statement might also signal to a flattened relational ontology where phenomena do not just take place “within” a pre-set context but where these becomings also materialize within-across phenomenal contexts (Barad, 2003).

Echoing Gloria's, Dolores's, and Seshata's³⁷ explicit radical commitments to social transformation through praxis, Beverly spoke about how pursuing the PhD, "was a part of continuing, kind of, this question track of how to figure out ways to understand rhetoric, race, and gender in a context that is not really privileged in our discipline." Beverly's standpoint was intersectionally located and it bloomed in-across complex materialities-discourses as she recognized the invisibility of race and gender in the variously imbricated field of communication research. In this and related statements detailing her grant-funded work, Beverly also conveyed her commitment to engaging in praxis in-across various material-discursive contexts by taking up the rhetorical and embodied experiences of women of color in urban settings.

To conclude this section, praxis as an approach to teaching, scholarship, and activism for this group of graduate students was associated with experiences of academic marginalization as well as with a socially and intersectionally positioned³⁸ critical consciousness. In these spaces, the meeting of research and activism seemed to engender engagements in both theorization and intervention in-across contexts of material-discursive relevance to discussants' experiences.

Seshata summarized Dolores's, Gloria's, Beverly's, and even John's (to some extent) commitments³⁹ to attaining a post-graduate degree; for this group of students, the PhD seemed to

³⁷ The terms "activism" and "activist intervention" signify the range of practices scholar-activism can engender from interlocutors' concern with teaching, as exemplified above, to volunteering at an urban elementary school as Gloria does, to situating research at the intersection of urban schools and the health of intersectionally marginalized persons as Seshata does, and even to emancipatory scholarly thought invested in theorizing social change and the movements of differently positioned persons as Beverly and Dolores do.

³⁸ When I use the term, "intersectionally," I do not engage it solely as a signifier of discursive modes of identification but rather as the material-discursive recognition of a social location that blooms within-across moments and that "diffracts" (Barad, 2003) through overlapping social agencies.

³⁹ Although John clearly expressed a stance grounded in praxis with regard to teaching, he did not seem to conceptualize his research explicitly in terms of radical scholar-activism, as did other

be about “creating social change through communication research,” or engaging in embodied praxis that may exemplify a flattened materiality-discourse relationship.

The Academic Experience: “Differences” and “Similarities”

Where the first question set was a primer inquiring about “motivations,” read entanglements, for pursuing post-graduate education and persistence, the second set delved into respondents’ range of experiences in the academy as persons of color using the reference points “different,” “similar,” and “others...in the academy” or “your peers.”⁴⁰ The first probe was: “Has your experience in the academy as a person of color differed from that of others? If so, how?” The second was: “Has your experience in the academy as a person of color been the same/similar to that of others? If so, how?” Through these questions, I asked respondents to speak about the range of ways in which their material-discursive experiences, with specific attention to questions of race, had been different or similar to that of others such that “others” or

participants. Related to his stance on scholarship, John said that he was still trying to find his voice in the field of communication scholarship in one of his concluding interview remarks. Further, during the second question set he said:

[P]olitical communication tends to center largely on, um, the aggregate and not so much hone in on, you know, racial, uh, differences or racial, uh, yeah, racial differences. So, I mean, that’s one thing that I can bring to the table is pretty much centering on research, you know, studying around, uh, people of color, uh, a-and politics.

John expressed his ability to shift the fragmented ontological/epistemological cartography of communication research through knowledge production attuned to the material-discursive entanglements of racialization, but, again, he did not explicitly communicate a sense of this work as radical social justice praxis.

⁴⁰ This latter signification (i.e., “your peers”) was only used in the second probe regarding similarities of experience and it was used in the concluding two interviews of the project. I made this methodological choice because respondents had difficulty in locating *similarities* in their experiences to my nondescript “others.” Thus, I altered my wording, and two participants were exposed to the signifier “your peers” when asked about similarities. Still, participants continued to struggle.

“peers” were left unspecified and open to a range of understandings and similarity was implicitly fragmented from difference.⁴¹

All participants engaged discussion about differences in their experiences with a degree of ease. All participants, with one exception,⁴² struggled to discuss similarities in their discursive-material academic experiences. Difficulty with the second question in the set may have arisen for a variety of reasons and I discuss two possibilities here. First, the difficulty participants experienced in discussing similarities in their experiences with “others” or their “peers” may have been in part because they, with one exception, took as their reference point students with whom they seemed to share less material-discursive experiences as persons of color across the question set. Participants took the same reference point (i.e., students with whom they seemed to share less material-discursive common ground) for the first inquiry (about difference) as well the second inquiry (about similarity) in this set. Thus, rather than having this “consistent” reference point make for productive engagement across the questions, it may have made for a dualistic response that could answer more to difference than it could to similarity. A compounding factor to the difficulty participants experienced in locating “similarities” in their experiences to “others” or their “peers” may have been the fragmented nature of the difference-similarity relationship that the articulation of the interview question set implied. In other words, in an attempt to construct “clear” questions that might be easily understood within a fragmented Western ontology/epistemology (i.e., fragmented by asking about difference and similarity separately is if difference were not intertwined with the experience of similarity), and in an

⁴¹ This presents a conflict to a flattened onto-epistemological view.

⁴² Beverly took as her center of reference persons of color familiar to her at other institutions, the similarities she cited differed from those of other participants. The topics referenced here are those arising in John’s, Gloria’s, Dolores’s, and Seshata’s responses.

attempt to leave a point of material-discursive reference up to participant interpretation (i.e., undescriptive “others” and “peers”), I may have done more to fragment and cloud participants’ responses in practice. It may be that material-discursive projects are more logically consistent when their methods, in this case interview questions, center on continuous diffracted differentiation (Barad, 2003) than when methods focus on honing in on any one “sameness” or any one “difference.” In this way, sameness and difference may have to be read through one another as sameness-difference.

Answers to this question set were less uniform when juxtaposed with responses to the first regarding the entanglements that informed participants’ “decision to pursue” a post-graduate education. This variance may be telling of the intra-acting relationship of similarity-difference as a conceptual framework and as a situated material-discursive phenomenon. Still, common issues did arise for participants that had to do with materiality-discourse and I chose to discuss those here. Specifically, when asked about differences, respondents discussed experiencing material-discursive isolation. When asked about similarities, interlocutors most prominently pointed to “obvious” (John, 2015) material supports such as departmental funding, related teaching opportunities, and workload. Some participants engaged this question set with more trepidation than others.

Differences: isolation. Across interviews and question sets participants referenced academic contexts in which they experienced material-discursive isolation where “others” or “peers” may have experienced this less or in different ways. Participants also discussed the ways in which they maneuvered isolation. Isolation bloomed in environments where discourse-materiality became in such a way that difference was rendered invisible, and, thus, this context of becoming rendered students of color onto-epistemologically isolated. The saturated and

permanent nature of these material-discursive entanglements and their simultaneous negligibility within fragmented Western ontological/epistemological conceptual frames made it an issue graduate students of color continuously coped with and combated.

At different points during the interviews, participants discussed experiences of material-discursive isolation in their institution, field, department, and city of residence, or in intra-acting contexts within an ontology of relationality. Isolation bloomed, as discussed earlier, through the scarcity of corporeal difference in academic spaces and this materiality seemed to be diffracted through everyday discourses that rendered these already invisible materialities “unspeakable things unspoken” (Morrison, 1988). In talking about material-discursive entanglements in these contexts, Dolores said, “White bodies are already at home, and I’m always already foreign.” Gloria further expressed what it means to be materially-discursively isolated and how Western discourses render this isolation imperceptible within a fragmented Western ontology/epistemology:

[I]t’s because these spaces are predominantly white so when you bring up things like privilege and other things they’re really quick to say, “No, no. I’m not privileged. I came up from this bad background.” But they ignore that it’s not just economic privilege but there’s also the fact that I’m darker than you[.]

Gloria highlighted in this discussion that difference, in this case racial and economic difference, is present in the classroom but that fragmented ontologies/epistemologies that understand difference within a pop-bead framework result in relativistic philosophies of experience that render already invisible materialities-discourses even more negligible in these contexts. These experiences are not solely corporeal and they do not exclusively originate in exclusionary classroom discursive practices, they become alongside and diffract through their material-discursive relationship.

Beverly also mentioned initially feeling “very isolated” materially-discursively in her institution, department, and city of residence until she entered an interconnected space where she “started creating opportunities to other people” to maneuver through this terrain of scarcity. She took care to say, “I don’t think this [isolation] was by design, of course, of the program.” Beverly echoed the isolation participants expressed across question sets and stated that she maneuvered in and through these environments by making intra-active intersectional connections with similarly positioned persons. Although Beverly’s statement that she did not see her situation as created intentionally by her department, or “by design,” may be read as a “padded” statement, it makes sense within a relational and flattened onto-epistemology in a different way. Read through a new materialist framework, Beverly may have expressed that material-discursive conditions of isolation, especially in the post-civil rights era, cannot be created by the design of any one “malicious” human agent but instead they bloom through various and complex intra-active material-discursive enmeshments. Thus, by engaging in a relational ontology where materiality and discourse are inseparable, Beverly was able to engage the material-discursive experience of isolation with the material-discursive experience of relationality to create something new.

Additionally, all participants articulated that their experiences of knowledge production were different in that they had to legitimize their thinking within Western ontological/epistemological ideational frames. Participants discussed experiencing isolation, or difficulties with knowledge production on non-Western onto-epistemological terms, at different points in the interview process. These experiences were illustrated in previously discussed comments by Beverly (2015) on understanding “rhetoric, race, and gender in a context that is not really privileged in our discipline” and in John’s (2015) conversation on the invisibility of

nuanced difference in political communication research. This was a theme across interviews and Seshata added to this finding by saying:

[It]'s a constant battle to, kind of, prove why what we're interested in matters and make the case for things and maybe in a way that we don't see our peers do it. And again, it's our vantage point and our lens so our advisors on our committees may disagree but it's a conversation I've had with some of my peers, that it seems a little bit easier with some of our peers.⁴³

In this statement, Seshata mentioned conversations with peers who identify as black and contrasted their experiences with those of non-black peers. Seshata simultaneously voiced her experiences, noting them as different from some of her peers, and acknowledged the Eurocentric belief that because these experiences are not "factual and objectively true," within Western ontologies/epistemologies, they are seen as less legitimate. How the legitimization of knowledge proceeds in her material-discursive situation remains nebulous until the next question set on instances of empowerment and disempowerment when Seshata says:

I'm struggling to, kind of, embed my viewpoint into a context of existing knowledge that the faculty are conjugal with but still have my viewpoint shine in that bedding...The thing that bothers me so much in academia because of, we go back to, like, I don't know, like, Foucault. Nobody was asking [people like him], "Who says?" You know? For some reason their minds or their observations were good enough and for some reason, now, to observe the world around you and to not have detailed field notes on everything and everything encoded and analyzed and put into a theoretical framework, you know...[It]'s not good enough because it doesn't go back to these "great minds" who all they did, not all they did, but part of what they did was observed the world around them, um, and made deductions based on what they saw.

Seshata, like other participants, expressed the pressures to legitimize her scholarly production on empiricist Western terms. In these spaces, participants like Sheshata detailed instances in which they were expected to act as knowing subjects, separate from and prior to the known, by using

⁴³ Although this is evidence for an experience of difference, note how this experience of difference relies not on a fragmented understanding of similarity and difference but rather on an intra-active conceptualization of similarity-difference.

methodologies in accordance within an epistemology-first and ontology-second conceptual Western framework for knowing. However, as Seshata points out, this experience of epistemological and ontological fragmentation is not the expectation for all knowing subjects in the same way. Instead, one's material-discursive positioning affects how these scholarly expectations are taken up in the academic milieu.

John's understanding of his experience of difference diverged from that of other participants but it may be telling of how, within a fragmented and non-relational ontology/epistemology, isolation can seem "normal." John, like other participants, reported a degree of material-discursive isolation. At the outset of the question he said, "the administrators at my university a-ar-are, uh, pretty much all white and the professors are pretty much all white with the exception of maybe one or two." He continued by saying:

[A]s a black man I didn't really, the only thing I can think of was, uh, me being in-in class, uh, discussions. Uh, you know, someone would mention, uh, you know, race, or racism, or race relations in America, um, or talk about blacks in America, uh, they would look to me, uh, to be, like, the voice, you know, like, the person that knows everything about black America.

John identified the material-discursive isolation of being the only body marked as black and male in classroom discussions. He also detected discourses that disembodied and fragmented his corporeality with little regard for the multiply positioned and context-laden materialities-discourses of difference, and specifically black maleness, in the United States. Even so, John concluded his response by saying, "I don't think my experience was any different from any, any of my other classmates'. It's just that I was, uh, the only person that was represented from my race." He maneuvered his materially-discursively isolated experience by making a comparison to his time at an HBCU as an undergraduate:

[L]et's just say we start talking about white people in America, the white person was expected to have a different point of view in a classroom of all black people [so] we

would look at that white person to say, you know, “Speak for the white people.” And so I don’t think that...i-i-in my case, where I was the only black guy in the class, it was like...ordinarily, I mean, quite naturally, they’ll look at me to say something because I am black, um. And I think that would be the case for any person who’s, um, you know, who is the, pretty much the only representative of his or her racial group, uh, in a classroom, uh, full of, uh, you know, 15, in a classroom of 15-20 students.

Here too, John seemed to rely on a fragmented understanding of discourses and materialities disconnected from a relational ontology. That is, he fragmented the phenomenon of isolation and focused on the experience of one person in one classroom. He did less to read the situation through a diffracted and relational view of the local situation in and through intra-acting phenomena in-across contexts that made up the plenum of the situation. His understanding was fragmented and through this ontological/epistemological framework his maneuvering strategy discursively-materially constructed isolation as “natural.”

Tracing back to statistics on the status of difference in the academy, it is no surprise that most experiences of difference in this study are marked by material-discursive invisibility and isolation. When the saturated and permanent nature of these materialities-discourses are placed next to their simultaneous negligibility within Western ontological/epistemological frames, we can see that isolation is an issue graduate students of color continuously maneuver in various ways. Despite the strain of marginalization in their experience of difference in the academy, this group of graduate students conceived of their scholarship as necessary. Hence, notwithstanding feelings that the academic audience, “never learn[s] anything from you or work[s] for anything from you” (Gloria, 2015), intersectionally expanding frames of knowing into the flattened and relational material-discursive terrain is important to problematizing fragmented Western ontologies/epistemologies. This is an important goal because, as Seshata puts it, this process has the potential to “make room for original ideas” (2015), or ideas outside of Western frames of knowing-being.

Thus, in these spaces of feminist politicization graduate students of color do not take the personal as already political: it must be called out and lived out as so. Naming one's experience, the experience of scarcity and isolation, becomes part of a corporeal theory of experience that places the experience-knowledge of isolation within a relational, and often unexamined, discursive-material framework of marginalization (Hanisch, 1970; hooks, 1989, p. 109). As Beverly's testimony of creating connections points out, this theory of experience is one that "enlarge[s] our conception of who we are, that intensif[ies] our sense of intersubjectivity, [and] our relation to a collective reality" (hooks, 1989, p. 107). This may be a process of relationality, connecting both human and non-human agencies, where naming one's experience and locating the materialities-discourses from which that experience blooms is important to the goal of transformation (hooks, p. 108) on material-discursive terms.

Similarities: the "obvious." Although most discussants answered the first question with a relative degree of ease, all struggled with this second probe. Participants spent considerable amounts of time attempting to understand the question, and once understood, they spent some time thinking about how to answer it.⁴⁴ Some participants also had difficulty locating their centers of reference for comparison, one even inquiring, "Okay, so, like, white students?" (Dolores, 2015) while another, PhD student Beverly, answered the question with ease in identifying students of color at other institutions as her center of reference. The few similarities graduate students of color were able to articulate among their experiences as scholars and those of "others"/"their peers" in the academy, and which cut across interviews, were on overt material

⁴⁴ Interlocutors spent about two minutes on average trying to understand the question which was as follows: "Has your experience in the academy as a person of color been the same/similar to that of others? If so, how?"

terms. These included material supports such as departmental funding, related teaching opportunities, and equal workload, this did not include approaches to teaching workload.

Throughout his interview John stated that his experience was not so different from that of his peers. Still, when asked about how his involvements were similar, he said with some degree of confusion that his goals and those of his peers made for likenesses where they all strove to:

[P]retty much get-get through the master's program and, uh, and produce research, pretty much. I mean, I mean, that's, that's obvious of course but, um, but in terms of, I don't, um, I'm not quite sure how to-to-to answer this question, um.

Although he experienced unease about his ability to engage the question (i.e., "I don't, um, I'm not quite sure how to-to-to answer this question, um."), John's observation was valuable given the uncertainty with which four participants, including John, answered the query. The similarities across experiences with others were "obvious" in isolation from a context of material-discursive becoming and it was easier to point to the material "similarities" than to how these "similarities" became alongside discursive agencies as well as other materialities. All graduate students' goals, as John pointed to, have as their flagship graduation and knowledge production. The difference was in the way students approached these goals and, for graduate students of color in this study, maneuvering often included intersectional and a material-discursive approach rather than a solely discursive or material approach. In questions leading up to this one, graduate students of color pointed to the scarcity of material-discursive inclusion and to their means of navigating this isolation on material-discursive terms. However, when it came to situating their experiences as similar to that of peers in their programs, they were able to most

clearly articulate material supports as points of “similarity” and even as they articulated similarity they simultaneously articulated difference of experience.⁴⁵

When asked about similarities Seshata echoed John’s statement when she said, “I’ve been afforded some of the same opportunities...I was the only black woman or black person in the program but I equally got a graduate teaching assistantship which my peers got. Um, my non-people of color peers, um (giggle).” By centering bodies of color in her statement in jest, Seshata indicated material supports in the form of departmental funding and related teaching opportunities as similarities to the experiences of her non-people of color friends. The presence of material supports like these at the localized level facilitate the construction of a reality in which students of color are “equal” and receive the “same” opportunities as non-students of color. However, within a new materialist frame, this localized materiality obscures a relational ontology in which students of color often do not equitably meet with *material-discursive* opportunities for inclusion. Materiality and discourse are inseparable in this frame. In this flattened onto-epistemological space, ameliorations lie in intra-acting praxis that contends with the situated material-discursive becomings of marginalization as well as at the fragmented epistemic/ontological roots of the materiality-discourse duality that causes such issues. Issues of marginalization within this frame cannot be “solved” by singular appeals to large economies or appeals to D/discourse. Isolation and marginalization must be understood within much more nuanced and intra-connected frames of knowing-being.

⁴⁵ Some participants could separate similarity and difference. However, out of those that did, often de-contextualized renditions of their experiences resulted.

Gloria shared her experience and located this experience within a framework more hospitable to a flattened onto-epistemology. She added nuance to conversations about “obvious” material similarities and on teaching she said:

You can tell, it's not like they don't care, it's like they're really removed from it as opposed to, you know, me, who, I became super invested in my class, right. I wanted them...to succeed and I had, and I still have, like, this very idealistic notion of what it is to be a teacher because I do think that that's the way to achieve...social change. You know, you're planting really interesting ideas instead of just regurgitating the text you're using.

Gloria discussed her experience as an instructor in juxtaposition to that of her non person-of-color peers. Although her colleagues became invested, Gloria articulated a particular concern for her students' achievement that was grounded in her relational and material-discursive theory of experience and social justice praxis outside of traditional Western epistemologies/ontologies. Gloria taught and she had the same material support as her peers. However, Gloria's experience as a teacher may have bloomed differently from that of her peers because she was differently positioned materially-discursively. Her teaching was not simply about “regurgitating the text,” it was also about an embodied investment in her relationality with students and with the material-discursive conditions of the situation's becoming. Thus, Gloria's experience was “similar” to that of her peers while at once that similarity was embroiled in the “difference” of her experience.

To summarize, participants discussed experiences of isolation when asked about how their time as graduate students may have been different to that of their peers where their peers were usually understood as non persons-of-color. Here, experiences of isolation often stemmed from a material-discursive split where discourse was privileged in the academic milieu as constitutive. Further, participants discussed, with less ease, experiences of similarity to that of their peers. But these experiences seemed difficult for many participants to discuss in depth

without speaking to how differences in experience shaped similarities. Here also, a material-discursive split seemed to characterize the experiences of graduate students of color. Although they reported having similar material affordances in their graduate programs including funding and teaching opportunities, graduate students of color discussed how these similarities played out differently given their particular material-discursive experiences. Through participant responses to this question set, it became evident that “sameness” and “difference” of experience as well as materiality and discourse seemed to be dependent for their conditions of becoming upon their precarious entanglements. In other words, experiences of similarity and difference were not isolated or unitary phenomena but rather they were intra-actions that diffracted through one another. Additionally, graduate student responses regarding the material-discursive splits that created for less than hospitable conditions in the academy might be interpreted to mean that materiality cannot be articulated without discourse because discerning the shape of a situation depends on understanding various assemblages of the material-discursive.

The Academic Experience: “Empowerment” and “Disempowerment”

From understanding students’ “motivations” for pursuing post-graduate education and persistence, to getting a sense for the range of their experiences of “similarity” and “difference” in the academy, this next question set was intended to bear down on the range of students’ experiences of empowerment and disempowerment. I discuss these entanglements here; even so, because these types of occurrences played prominent roles throughout respondents’ engagements with issues of material-discursive disconnect across all question sets, I discuss these findings throughout. Thus, this section of findings will be shorter than other sections and I will take as my example one poignant conversation that keyed into central flows I found in other participants’ narratives regarding experiences of empowerment-disempowerment.

The first interview question in this set was as follows: “Was there ever a time when you felt empowered during an interaction with a faculty member, staff member, administrator, peer, during a class discussion, or during the course of working through an assignment? Please tell me about what happened, how you felt (physically, emotionally, or otherwise), and why.” The second was: “Was there ever a time when you felt disempowered during an interaction with a faculty, staff member, administrator, peer, a class session, or in the course of working through an assignment? Please tell me about what happened, how you felt (physically, emotionally, and/or otherwise), and why.” Participants engaged probes regarding instances of empowerment and disempowerment respectively but, due to the interwoven nature of their responses as with questions about similarity-difference, I present the data on inverse footings. This is necessary in view that instances of empowerment were overwhelmingly intertwined with interlocutors’ experiences of disempowerment.

(Empowerment-)Disempowerment. Members of the participant community identified instances of disempowerment as those where they experienced a disconnect between their material-discursive experience and that of another. In the following example, I explore one iteration of this experience.

Beverly cited one such instance of intra-acting disempowerment-empowerment when discussing a context in which she began a conversation with a professor about including rhetorical pieces by more people of color, and specifically by more women of color, in an undergraduate syllabus. She explained that the pieces on the syllabus exemplified works that seemed:

[K]ind of recycled, over and over again, were one’s that, you know, I’d seen in my undergrad and repeated in my master’s, and there’s so much out there. And so I had a discussion with the professor and said, you know...kind of expressed my concern about

having, you know, kind of, these exemplars, and so, what was like, MLK, Malcolm X, and W.E.B. DuBois, no women.

Beverly continued by expressing that the culminating moment of disempowerment came when the professor appealed to the “concretized,” or completed state, of the syllabus. By doing so, the professor ended the conversation quickly and told Beverly that while he understood that she might “feel that way,” rather than change the syllabus they might “think about that going forward.” As Beverly put it, “that was the end of the conversation.” Here, intersectional material-discursive difference, in the form of pedagogy centered on raced and gendered materialities-discourses, was rendered silent in this conversation through the appeal to a concretized syllabus. In this instance, different flows of activity came together in a particular environment of material-discursive agencies and this was the momentary “outcome.” The professor had a syllabus that may have been concretized by time constraints, a type of spacetime mattering, as well as by everyday discourses that further made time a commodity in the neoliberal university. Simultaneously in this moment of becoming, Beverly centered bodies and discourses of difference. But, perhaps in part, because this centering happened in an academic environment where there is a scarcity of material-discursive difference, these two flows of activity, that of the professor’s practice and that of Beverly’s praxis, met in such a way that foreclosed the possibility for Beverly’s proposed material-discursive assemblage in the undergraduate classroom.

Empowerment(-Disempowerment). In her response regarding a moment of empowerment, Beverly, like other participants, had a difficult time elaborating on this first probe. Yet, when she discussed a moment of disempowerment, she, like other participants, connected that moment of disempowerment to empowerment and thereby elaborated on this intra-acting set of relations. Beverly’s moment of empowerment was one in which she applied

for and earned a fellowship to study archives on social movement rhetoric. Her work was focused on the social movement rhetoric of persons marked by difference and this work was also attuned to the work of women of color. This project had as its center the same material-discursive community that she had hoped to include in that undergraduate syllabus during her moment of disempowerment. Although one of her recommendation letter writers for the fellowship program had not been able to submit Beverly's letter of recommendation due to an issue with technology (a type of materiality), and although this particular writer had expressed trepidation about Beverly's ability to attain this award, Beverly said that she felt empowered by the prospect of engaging in this new research project. This was especially so given that various material-discursive agencies had come together in this context and in other contexts (e.g., the disempowering syllabus intra-action) in such a way that made the fellowship opportunity seem like an improbable one.

In this way, this participant's experience may show that the intra-action between what we, as Western scholars, might cognize of as the "poles" of a "range" of experience (e.g., empowerment and disempowerment "or" similarity and difference) may not be exactly how material-discursive experience always becomes. It might be that empowerment is imbricated in the experience of disempowerment at times and that various forces come together not as "poles," or as dialectics, but rather in an "in-across" formation of moments and material-discursive agencies as they do in this case. Further, such in-across formations may have a "queer causality" (Barad, 2003) rather than any unitary or singular effect. Here, queer causality represents a non-linear pattern of effects that move within while they extend beyond the localized strata of any particular phenomenon. In this way, although Beverly's experiences from the undergraduate classroom to the research archives seem to be isolates, within a new materialist framework they

are intra-acting phenomena. This conceptual framework may not be of use in concretizing a particular view of action in an isolated setting,⁴⁶ for example the undergraduate classroom context described here. However, conceptually it *does* allow us to understand how persons draw “boundaries” (Barad, 2003) in particular instances and how these boundary cutting practices work to include and exclude particular material-discursive experiences.

The Academic Experience: “Presence” and “Absence”

Owing to corporeal exigencies that constitute a prime focus of this project but that many times remain disconnected from academic discourses, the fourth question set asked participants to specifically locate themselves in a context where their presence was a key factor. Respondents were asked to, if possible, disclose one context in which they were present, one in which they were absent, indicate reasons as to why they engaged and/or disengaged in the setting, and list any known outcomes of their presence and/or absence on personal and/or professional terms. On the grounds that activities such as attending class, trainings, etc. were not moments when members of the communication community had a “choice” in attendance, interlocutors were asked to focus on activities that were “by way of required,” or socially required but never open to material sanctions for absence and/or moments of an informal or social nature. These occasions of material-discursive ambiguity in the professionalized academic setting were analyzed using two questions the first of which was as follows: “As members of an institution/field/organization, there are moments when we are expected to be physically present. Please tell me about a time when you made yourself present during one of these events/moments and the career and/or personal outcomes of this decision.” The second was: “As members of an

⁴⁶ A different variety of “concrete action,” however, might have been traceable through a finer grain analysis of material-discursive mediators (Bencherki, 2012) that was not available given the interview data I analyzed here.

institution/field/organization, there are moments when we are expected to be physically present. Tell me about a time when you were physically/emotionally unable to get yourself to such an event/moment and the career and/or personal outcomes of this decision.” I discuss responses to the question set in a similar fashion as that of question set three given that this set of responses was also intra-acting.

Presence-Absence. Widely, participants had difficulty identifying moments when they chose to be present and when they did they expressed a degree of trepidation with engaging in these contexts at the moment of interaction. They also did not narrate unitary events with clear beginnings or ending. Instead, participants spoke by piecing various flows of practice together, or vignettes of sorts, to talk about what could be considered material-discursive assemblages. Thus, as participants spoke about presence, they often also spoke about absence in some form or another. One exception to this broad absence-presence trend was MA student John’s interview in which he mentioned he could, “not think about a time [he] was unable to make it,” and he expressed little unease in engaging in these contexts.

Methodologically, an issue in this section was that I, out of an initial dualistic engagement with the question set, redirected participants often when I asked about instances of presence because their inclination was to discuss moments and reasons for absence as well as unease during our discussion of presence. In these cases, respondents moved to discuss some form of absence as we talked about presence and, rather than continue to probe about absence or about absence-presence, I asked respondents to try and think of a time when they attended a department social event, for example. In this way, the fragmentation of the interview questions interacted with the material-discursive assemblages that participants were able to convey and elaborate upon. The examples that follow illustrate events interlocutors discussed and include

department social events as well as a discussion on conference experiences in the communication field of research. These exemplars typify how interlocutors cognized of their experiences of presence-absence.

I began by enquiring about moments when participants had been present at a department social occasion and Gloria discussed an opportunity she had to have lunch with a potential professor at her university on a job search. She said:

I remember that I actually got to go to lunch with the person they were trying to hire for the, for one of the positions that opened. And it was interesting because it was almost like we were asked to do it for authenticity press . . . And we were encouraged to speak Spanish to see if this person was knowledgeable in Spanish And it was weird because it isn't something that grad students traditionally get to do. Like, you don't get to go out for lunch with the faculty person, that's usually reserved for the committee. When I found out the reason why I thought, oh, that makes sense. But still, I still don't think it's okay, per se, you know.

Gloria talked about being invited to this social occasion, a job search lunch, and she discussed sharing this experience with another student of color where they were both encouraged to “speak Spanish.” The other student of color was not a native Spanish speaker but was assumed to be. This interaction opportunity was a tactic that Gloria understood as being deployed by the department search committee to ensure that the prospective professor was “authentically” different. Gloria noted the general absence of graduate students at such department social events. In our conversation, she also noted that there were aspects of the lunch that were gratifying when taken together with the work that past cohorts of students had done to open possibilities for this position. These were processes where students began petitions and held meetings to discuss the lack of difference in the department's faculty membership. Still, and as this excerpt shows, there were other aspects of this situation's blooming. Specifically, this was the hiring committee's seeming ontologization of the potential new hire through the sending of another possibly ontologized group as the “authenticity press”: graduate students and in

particular graduate students of color. While Gloria noted being present at this event she also discussed the general absence of bodies of color in the department that led to the materialization of the hiring event as well as her inclusion at the lunch. Within one intra-acting strata, Gloria was present at the event and she was an acting agent. Yet, agency was not solely originating in her as a modern agentic subject, she also experienced this pull to presence through absences at other intra-acting strata.

Seshata also talked about presence-absence in her interview. She described the experience of attending conferences as events that were “by way of required” but for which there were no immediate and overt material sanctions in her department for lack of attendance. She said:

So, I’ve been to a couple of conferences, both of which I presented at so to attend the conference and just listening to the talk and things, isn’t something that I have the financial means or really the interest to do because, again, this kind of small talk. I know that it’s going to help you in your career and I understand the benefit of it but, um, to me it feels so inorganic to just sit across the table for someone and: What are your research interests? Where are you planning to teach? And you know, have these kind of generic, dry conversations, um, topics that I’m just, really have never been, inside, outside academia, anywhere, I’ve just not, those things aren’t appealing to me.

Seshata described this experience as one in which she did not often attend conferences due to various material-discursive questions. For example, she cited her lack of financial means as a material reason for not attending conferences and she did so alongside her discussion of a lack of interest in conversations that centered on a person’s life as a scholar. This latter issue is evident in her statement that “it feels so inorganic to sit across from the table and...What are your research interests? What are you planning to teach?” Seshata also seemed to express in the sentences that followed that she was uninterested, in contexts within and adjacent to academic life, in having conversations that were “generic” and “dry.” Taken together with her last statement, and given that this conversation typified the experience of participants, I took this to

signal (at least in part) the need for a different type of materially-discursively grounded conversation for interlocutors. These types of conversations may have been, for example, better communicatively “stitched” together through an embodied approach to scholarly praxis and less so through a centering on the knowing subject separated from the known (e.g., for example, “generic” and “dry” questions about one’s research interests decontextualized from their strata of material-discursive becoming). Some persons, of course, would not find conversations regarding research and teaching interests to be dry ones. However, in-across Seshata’s experience, these conversations may have felt “inorganic” in a particular way because while they may have clearly been tied to the discursive agencies of scholarly identity in the West, they were not *also* clearly intra-acting with materiality and embodiment in a context that was hospitable to this entanglement.

Hence, while Seshata just as other participants expressed an understanding of the material-discursive benefits of attending conferences and department social events, for example various career benefits, she also expressed unease about attending such events. Specifically, participants expressed this as a dynamic beyond unitary or singular presence or absence.

Reflections

I began this chapter by describing participant demographic information in the aggregate. Then, I discussed each participant’s educational background and upbringing with a bit more nuance based on information each provided during our conversations. In the section that followed I provided data excerpts and analysis guided by the heuristics of this study and by the themes and patterns that arose across four groupings of the 8 interview questions. I also discussed methodological issues. Here, I close out the chapter by offering reflections on the

overarching themes and patterns of each question set and this, along with the analysis, acts as the basis for answering the research questions in the next chapter.

The first question set of four showed graduate students of color paying special attention to the intra-actions of corporeal, spatial, and economic affordances while discussing their material-discursive commitment to rendering difference visible in academic settings. Their commitments to presence and praxis seemed to stem from commitments to ameliorate particular material-discursive splits that “say” persons of color are welcome in the academy but materialities that “show” otherwise.

The second question set engaged respondents in a conversation about “similarities” and “differences” in their experiences as graduate students of color. Participants discussed experiences of isolation when asked about how their time as graduate students may have been different to that of their non person-of-color peers. They pointed to material supports including teaching opportunities and funding when asked about how their experiences may have been similar. Here, exclusionary experiences of sameness and difference often came from material-discursive splits where discourse or materiality were privileged in the constitution of reality at the exclusion of an imbricated view. Through participant responses to this question set, it also became evident that “sameness” and “difference” seemed to be dependent for their conditions of becoming upon precarious entanglements. When the entanglements of materiality-discourse and sameness-difference were not understood by persons in the academy as assemblages, the conceptual conditions for exclusion seemed ripe.

The third question set asked participants to talk about their experiences of empowerment and disempowerment. Participants talked about these experiences in imbricated ways. Responses to this question set showed the possibility of various agencies coming together not as

“poles” or as dialectics but rather in “in-across” formations characterized by a queer causality rather than any unitary or singular effect. Still, this question set also made evident that the conceptual framework that this thesis explores may not be of use in understanding concretized and localized action given the type of limited interview data I used for analysis. Even so, this conceptual framework allowed for an understanding of how persons drew material-discursive “boundaries” (Barad, 2003) in particular instances and how these boundary cutting practices worked to include and exclude particular material-discursive experiences.

The fourth question set asked respondents to locate themselves in a context where their presence was a key factor. Respondents were asked to disclose one context in which they were present, one in which they were absent, indicate reasons as to why they engaged and/or disengaged in the setting, and list any known outcomes of their presence and/or absence on personal and/or professional terms. Widely, participants had difficulty identifying moments when they chose to be present. They did not narrate unitary events with clear beginnings or endings. Instead, participants spoke by piecing various flows of practice together to talk about what could be considered material-discursive assemblages of presence and absence. In other words, participants often talked about practices of presence, the first question, while they also talked about practices of absence, the second question in the set. Further, and important to the conceptual dimensions under study, agency in practices of presence and absence did not solely originate with persons as agentic subjects, they also materialized due to material-discursive agencies at other intra-acting strata.

These points provide a roadmap for thinking about the research questions about which I set out to know more. In the next chapter, I discuss the research questions as well as directions for future research.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

In this last chapter, I return to my research questions and I reflect on findings as well as on the implications of these for communication scholars. I follow this with a discussion regarding methodological and meta-theoretical limitations of this project as well as dilemmas I faced as a researcher. As I engage in this discussion, I provide suggestions for future research.

My first research question was as follows, “What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about how everyday discourses of silencing, erasure of difference, and disciplining marginalize difference within the academic institution?” The experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies seemed to indicate, from within a new materialist framework, that everyday discourses that accomplished marginalization did so alongside important material agencies. Thus, the first research question was imbricated with the second regarding materiality. The second research question was, “What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about the ways in which material agencies bloom alongside everyday discursive agencies to marginalize difference within the academic institution?” Based on participant interviews, it seemed that within conceptual frameworks where discourse was decoupled from materiality, for example corporeal realities of scarcity and isolation, marginalization in its situated forms was ripe for the uptake.

These instances of Cartesian splits between material and discursive ways of knowing were initially traceable in respondents’ experiences as scholars and teachers committed to embodied praxis. According to participants, the disconnect between everyday discourses that welcomed inclusion, diversity, and difference decoupled from the everyday materialities that

signaled a more complex onto-epistemological plane of becoming, for example the scarcity of difference in syllabi, engendered their commitment to embodied praxis. Students' commitment was meant to reconcile some of the material/discursive splits that they saw as marginalizing assemblages in the academic environment through the use of their situated bodies and pedagogies in particular socioeconomic spaces to accomplish these bridging practices.

In the second question set, this materiality/discourse split was also evident as a tension. Here, experiences of difference were characterized as those of isolation where faculty and non person-of-color peers⁴⁷ may have been unable to understand how, as in the first question set, everyday neoliberal discourses of inclusion came together with materialities like the corporeal scarcity of bodies of color as well as with different ways of knowing, or epistemologies, to create a terrain of scarcity. In these instances, participants mentioned that experiences of "difference" were often experiences of relational material-discursive isolation.

Further, and consistent with a new materialist framework, participants could often not talk about their experiences of "similarity" with peers, the second question in the set, without also connecting these to their experiences of difference. This may be interpreted as a dynamic where particular experiences do not exist on "poles" or as "dialectics" but rather they are always in a state of precarious material-discursive becoming. Additionally, while discussing experiences of similarity participants often observed that the most easily cited were materialities decoupled from their contexts of material-discursive becoming. In other words, while graduate students of color had material supports such as teaching opportunities and fellowships in "similar" forms to that of peers, the ways in which these material affordances became alongside

⁴⁷ I use the term "non person-of-color" peers to denote a particular set of relations that participants articulated, however, my use of this term is not meant to ontologize race within conceptual dualisms.

exclusionary discourses-materialities created a different academic experience for participants. This was often a marginalizing experience.

In the third question set regarding empowerment and disempowerment, a materiality-discourse split played a part in experiences of marginalization but it was not as obvious as with other question sets. Still, participant responses pointed to an interesting dynamic between the experience of empowerment and disempowerment that could not be easily separated within a Cartesian logic. Thus, when asked about a moment of empowerment and/or disempowerment, participants often linked these experiences one to another without providing unitary narratives with singular causalities. These were interesting conceptual moves because they indicated, within a new materialist framework, that concretized action in any given instance is possible and desirable. Yet, it is not the only way to go about maneuvering marginalization. This question set was useful in parsing out a different logic within which spatio-temporally bound “concretized action” was not always as interesting as paying careful attention to how people drew particular material-discursive boundaries (e.g., around an undergraduate syllabus) and how these boundary cutting practices excluded and included particular materialities-discourses. Thus, the practice of tracing materiality and discourse within a flattened onto-epistemology rendered an emergent understanding of a complex reality that stretched across various strata of intra-action rather than any singular or unitary setting.

The fourth question set was similar to the third question set in that participants often talked about practices of presence, the first question, while they talked about practices of absence, the second question in the set. This logic was noteworthy in that participants imbricated material-discursive agencies in their discussions of presence and absence and they did so in such a way that placed agency for presence-absence not singularly within the human agent,

themselves, but also with other material-discursive agencies at various intra-acting strata. This was an interesting finding given questions of how materiality and discourse bloom alongside to produce marginalization because it signaled that these intra-actions are nuanced and complex. Marginalization cannot be singularly tied to any particular malicious human agent; it cannot be unitarily tied to the mysterious force of “Big D” discourse or to Marxist materialisms. Marginalization becomes in contextually bound and precarious ways where materiality-discourse bloom alongside in unexpected and cross-cutting intra-actions.

In understanding the import of the findings at the intersection of the four interview question sets and to what this totality means for the question, “What do the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us about the ways in which material agencies bloom alongside everyday discursive agencies to marginalize difference within the academic institution?” one more comment on findings is integral. Across question sets, participant responses indicated that webs of domination assembled when materiality-discourse, those things that could be known, were disconnected from one another as human and non-human agents in understanding the constitution of reality, or how that reality could be known.⁴⁸ Additionally, as participants represented particular marginalizing material-discursive assemblages in answering question sets two through four, they were often conceptually unable to know their experiences of similarity-difference, empowerment-disempowerment, and absence-presence as separate phenomena. These findings bring an important heuristic to bear on the study of onto-epistemology and marginalization. Those things that can be known, material-discursive assemblages, cannot be separated from how they can be known, through a relational

⁴⁸ This finding was also evident in that when participants did not engage a relational onto-epistemology it was most difficult for them to pinpoint how marginalization materialized in their experience.

onto-epistemology. If we, as Western communication scholars, want to engage in knowing the world as discursively-materially imbricated, we can do this only if we come to know the material-discursive world through a flattened, inductive, and relationally entangled onto-epistemological methodology. This means, then, that the experiences of graduate students of color within communication studies tell us that marginalization is not simply an issue of identifying material-discursive assemblages of exclusion, this issue blooms alongside the onto-epistemological problem of how we come to know those assemblages.

Given these findings, there are key implications for the third research question and that inquiry is as follows, “What do the becomings of precariously positioned materialities-discourses tell us about how Cartesian Western epistemes, disconnected from ontology, work as conceptual webs of domination within the academy?” The experiences of graduate students of color in these instances tell us that marginalization becomes a key inflection of experience where a conceptualization of reality is one in which materiality is decoupled from discourse and where questions of ontology are decoupled from questions of epistemology. As a conceptual framework that relies on Cartesian dualities, the materiality/discourse split accomplishes situated presumptions of materiality decoupled from discourse, of the mind as decoupled from the body, of causality as acting at one strata of linear interaction, of humans as the sole provenance of agency upon an external docile world, and of ways of knowing separated from what can be known. The precarious becomings of materiality-discourse in the reported experiences of graduate students of color provide a different way of understanding reality and, thereby, interventionist practice. These experiences give us, as Western communication scholars, an understanding that does not rely on “structure” as the cause and answer to marginalization in a Big D discourse or in a Marxist materialist sense. Rather, these experiences push us to explain

how “structure” seems to become an “intelligible” form of everyday experience in nuanced and imbricated material-discursive ways.

Interventionist practice, therefore, is problematized because it cannot work, within a new materialist frame, at any one strata of interaction and it cannot be thought of in terms of simple linear or localized causality. Instead, interventionist practice must be understood as a type of relational endeavor not only between persons but also between and betwixt contexts and intra-active boundary cutting practices where persons privilege particular materialities or discourses at the exclusion of a materiality-discourse view. This finding points not only to directions for future research but also to limitations of the present study.

Specifically, an initial goal of this research was to provide interventionist suggestions. However, intervention is often defined as the practice of interceding in a particular context with concretized action to solve a particular problem. Therefore, within a new materialist theory, interventionism must be rethought and redefined to account for a flattened onto-epistemological view where few clear and unitary localized contexts or originating agents exist. In this field of intervention, persons must scrutinize material-discursive boundary cutting practices that span in-across contexts as they consider intervention. As Barad writes (2003):

To be more precise, the point is not merely to include nonhumans as well as humans as actors or agents of change but rather to find ways to think about the nature of causality, agency, relationality, and change without taking these distinctions to be foundational or holding them in place . . . what we commonly take to be individual entities are not separate determinately bounded and propertied objects, but rather are (entangled “parts of”) phenomena (material-discursive intra-actions) that extend across (what we commonly take to be separate places and moments in) space and time (where the notions of “material” and “discursive” and the relationship between them are unmoored from their anti/humanist foundations and reworked). Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime-mattering, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of “quantum entanglements”, which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting “components.”

In this way, intervention is not simply a matter of acting on others' bodies in a unitary field of interaction. Intervention must be thought of in more complex ways and persons must consider fields of agencies in-across contexts as they work to precariously intercede in fluid onto-epistemological spacetime-matterings. In practice this might mean, for example, that although persons may be offered instruction on how to communicate with different types of audiences as an interventionist practice, this intervention is insufficient, albeit not inconsequential, because it targets the person understood as a disentangled individual and it focuses on discursivities that in some ways eschew materialities. Further, this view does not account for the way that a practice, such as pedagogical practice, becomes alongside participants' material-discursive boundary cutting habits. That is, one cannot simply "offer" a course because the pedagogical intra-action is affected by human and nonhuman agencies in the process of relationality and queer causality. Hence, intervention must be understood as a living and breathing form of praxis (i.e., conceptual and embodied thought-action) within a field of intra-action. In these spaces, "the problem" is not understood as having one provenance but instead it is understood as existing on a flattened plane of many matterings where one intervention must also give way to different and nuanced others. Further, intervention is just as much a philosophical and conceptual process as it is a practice of "doing." This means that persons must endeavor to understand how particular materialities-discourses become cemented in-across contexts with such force that people, especially those marked by processes of differentiation "outside" Western precepts, lose their voices and their lives.

Research methods must also be rethought within a new materialist framework and this study, as well as the dilemmas I faced as a researcher, provide good starting points for future work. In particular, my use of interview methods provided important and nuanced data at points,

but interview methods did not allow for me to be within the constant state of becoming that a new materialist flattened onto-epistemological conceptual framework proposes. Because I used interview questions, I was not able to capture as much nuance and ambiguity in the experiences of participants and instead I had to be as “clear” as possible within a Cartesian Western logic to elicit “clear” responses from participants. This manifested, for example, in my use of poles for questions where I fragmented experiences of similarity from difference, of empowerment from disempowerment, and of presence from absence. This fragmentation was meant to capture the range of participant experiences but the articulation of the interview questions, which were also technologically mediated in their delivery, served more to fragment the recounting of those experiences than it did to capture a “range.” This may have been for several reasons including that even within the “range” formulation of experience two poles exist as the conceptual frame of reference.

From a conceptual standpoint, therefore, we, as communication scholars in the West, must continue to theorize how feminist and intersectional approaches become entangled with communicology as well as how these meetings become diffracted through the flattened onto-epistemological view of new materialist theory. In this way, communication scholars may further fracture and reimagine the Cartesian dualities that continue to colonize our work. Specifically, and harkening back to an earlier point, the paucity of methodological discussions in the communication field of research is of import here. It is not often that communication scholars have explicit methodological discussions of how theory and methods meet to become as nonhuman agents in a field of inquiry. Further, across the humanities and social sciences it is not often that scholars sit at the round table of scholarly thought to converse about how methodologies work at hybrid locations between and betwixt disciplinary paradigms for

knowing. Still, the nonhuman agency of particular methodological hybrids, especially those as new as intersectional and feminist frameworks in communication research, looms large over these endeavors that then go on to influence not only future research projects but also praxis. Hence, communication scholars might do well to enter into more explicit methodological conversations that go beyond recognizing theories as guiding lenses and then going on to use generalist qualitative methods to answer questions. More thought should be given to how all of these nonhuman actors coalesce with human actors in the process of research. Theory, methods, and human actors are not split subjects; they are embroiled in a complex process of becoming that requires us as researchers to disentangle various indexing processes of becoming rather than “decipher” the “unitary” text.

Further, and an adjacent concern, that which may be accomplished from a feminist, intersectional, and communicological standpoint might benefit from our rethinking the conceptual dualities that plague communication research. These dualities include constructs such as “big D” discourse and “little d” discourse as well as the conceptual fragmentation between the idea of Marxist materialism or discourse as constitutive. These philosophies have paid their dividends. However, it may be time to shake up the communicological philosophical, theoretical, and methodological repertoire through a meeting of intersectional, feminist, and new materialist thought. These entanglements would be particularly useful in the accomplishment of destabilizing the Cartesian logics that plagued the current project methodologically as well as the material-discursive splits that participants articulated were marginalizing in their academic experiences. Put another way, this conceptual work would allow us, as Western communication scholars, to, as Barad (2003) writes, “find ways to think about the nature of causality, agency, relationality, and change without taking these distinctions to be foundational or holding them in

place.” These pursuits might lead us as Western academics to different ways of knowing discourse(-materiality) that are more inclusive of difference.

Given all of this, then, in practical terms a better methodology may have been performative ethnography, for example. Future research within a new materialist framework may do well to experiment with such emergent qualitative methods that rely on an ontology of becoming more so than interview methods that presuppose there is a reality to be known by an “external” agentic knowing subject. Additionally, the issues of naming that I faced as I made methodological choices and during the process of analysis may have been related to the need for conceptual frameworks that were less fragmented by the affordances of dualistic Western ontologies/epistemologies. These fragmented conceptual frameworks continue to envelope communication scholars’ thought about feminist and intersectional methodologies even as we have made strides to incorporate such critical thought in our research endeavors. For example, words and phrases such as “becoming,” “blooming,” “intra-action,” “boundary cutting,” and “imbricated” may have been hard to follow but they were words that navigated around Cartesian logics and that moved toward a flattened onto-epistemological terrain as a differential conceptual framework for relational knowing practices. Thus, although it may be an unsurprising finding given feminist commitments to naming “unspeakable things unspoken” (Morrison, 1988), communication scholars may also benefit from experimenting more widely with practices of naming throughout the research process.

Final Reflections

I began this process with a dualistic understanding of materiality and discourse as split matterings even as I framed this project to move beyond this frame of knowing. As a person of color living within and without the academy, it was very hard for me to privilege discourse in

such a way that it could become conceptually entangled with the material within a flattened onto-epistemological terrain. This seemed too dangerous a conceptual move to make in such a conceptually split environment that often seemed to privilege the discursive. This research project was a becoming process within which I bloomed as a researcher along with human and nonhuman actors such as my research methods and the participants of this study. I began with a fragmented and dualistic understanding of materiality/discourse and now, at the conclusion of this project and at the beginning of others, I feel that I have begun to shift my conceptual standing ground enough to understand an imbricated view of materiality-discourse within a flattened onto-epistemological terrain.

Within this terrain, structure is not the conceptual answer to marginalization. I cannot point to “Big D” discourse or a conceptualization of Marxist materialism as monolithic answers for why, across various intra-acting strata, marginalization so often is a companion of difference. This is an unsettling experience because, once again, I do not have concrete answers but rather I have more questions that metamorphose given situatedness and the additional imbricated factor of materiality not as a “structural” concept but as a fluctuating agency of many proportions that becomes variously alongside discourse. Despite this, and possibly more accurately because of this, I found that the relational onto-epistemology of becoming that feminist, intersectional, new materialist, and communicological standpoints engendered in-across my endeavors during this project has been transformative. I may not have concrete answers or concrete, unitary solutions. Yet, I have a wider and more complex sense of how marginalization materializes and this state of becoming is in many ways comforting in all of its chaos. As scholars and as human agents imbricated in many processes of becoming, we cannot always hold on tight to particular ways of knowing and being in the world because too many factors and ways of knowing are at play even

as some are silenced more than others. Part of reconstructing these boundary cutting relations means that we think in fluid, intra-acting, and phenomenologically becoming ways just as much as we relate to one another in these ways. However, this task cannot simply be the burden of those marked as different, it is not solely the task of women, of people of color, of those differently abled, or of the GLBTQ community. Further, this cannot happen if we only understand marginalization in terms of individual human actors. The world is not solely filled with mean individuals, although this would be easier to “fix” as a problem. The world is filled with intra-acting materialities-discourses that come together in fluctuating boundary cutting practices and these practices explain what human and nonhuman agencies cement as “structure.” This is an unsettling conclusion, yet, decolonization should be nothing less.

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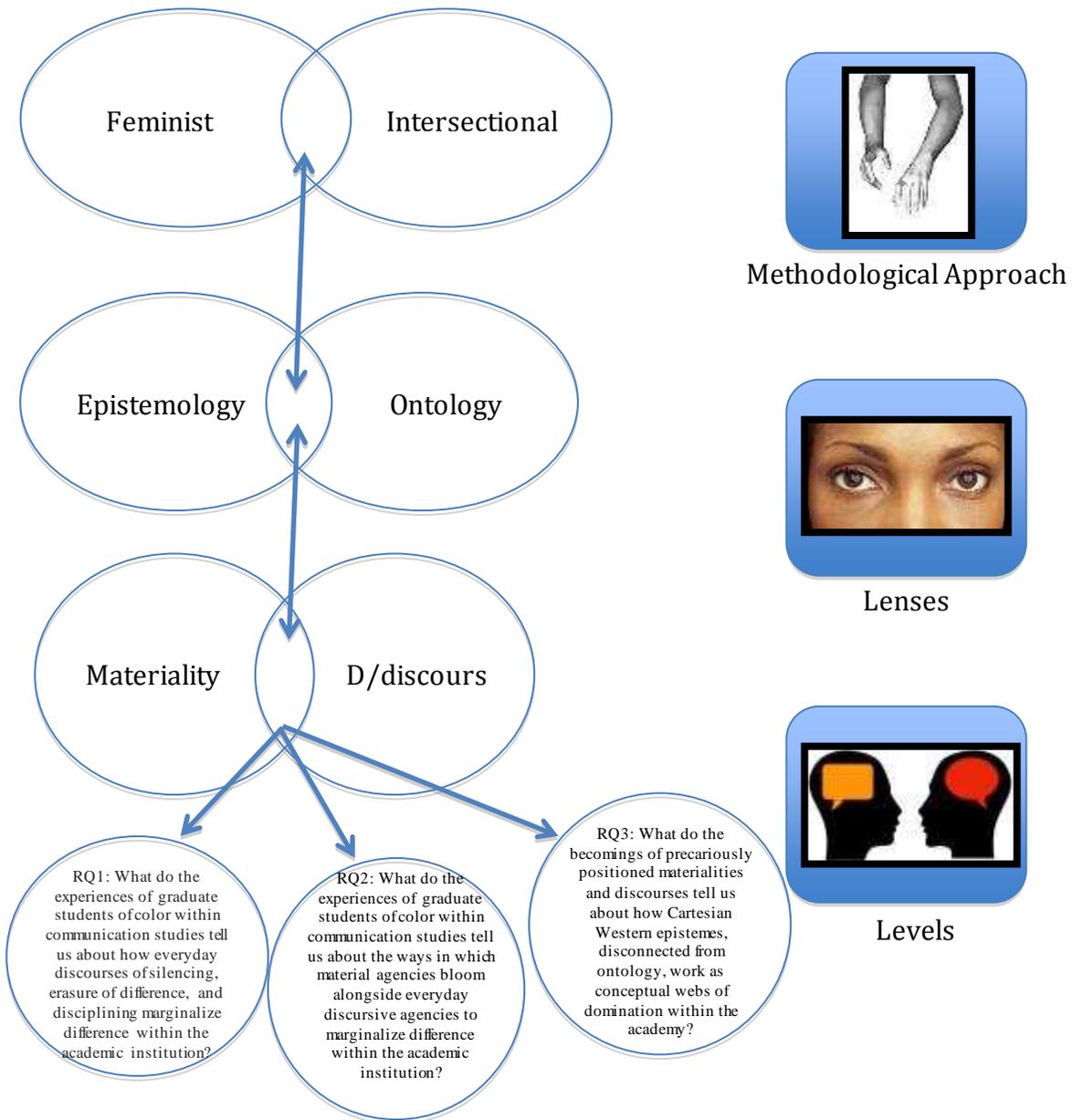
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Appendix A

This study analyzes the embodied experiences of graduate students of color within the communication discipline through two methodological approaches (feminist and intersectional) two lenses (ontological and epistemological), and at two entangled levels (material-discursive). I interrogate corporeality, materiality, and discourse in this milieu in order to identify possible relationships between materiality-discourse for future use in emancipatory research and praxis. A broader goal is to problematize and expand understanding(s) regarding how fragmented Western epistemology and ontology work together to marginalize difference within the academy.



Appendix B

CRTNET Announcement

Subject line: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

My name is Elisa Varela and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University. I am recruiting domestic (non-international) participants of color for a study focused on examining student experiences within the academy. Specifically, I am recruiting MA and PhD students. The end goal of this research is to better understand the experiences of graduate students of color in order to contribute to knowledge that has the potential to foster transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions.

If you are a domestic graduate student of color, with at least one year of experience within the academy, and are at least 18 years of age you are eligible to participate. Your participation would involve a 1-2 hour interview as well as a brief demographic survey. The interview would take place over the phone, via Skype, or in person at a time and location convenient for you. To find out more about this research, please contact me at: elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to the possibility of engaging your input in order to contribute to more inclusive and transformative spaces within the academy.

Elisa M. Varela
Co-Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Graduate Student
elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu

Cindy Griffin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Professor
Cindy.Griffin@colostate.edu

Appendix C

Subject line: Request for Research Participants

Hello:

My name is Elisa Varela and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University. I am recruiting domestic (non-international) participants of color for a study focused on examining student experiences within the academy. Specifically, I am recruiting MA and PhD students. The end goal of this research is to better understand the experiences of graduate students of color in order to contribute to knowledge that has the potential to foster transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions.

As the director of graduate studies at NAME OF UNIVERSITY, I am contacting you in hopes that graduate students in your program may be interested in contributing to this project. If this sounds like an engaging and important opportunity for students in your program, I ask that you forward the study announcement below to all students in your program. Sending this information to all students helps ensure that no student is left without an opportunity to participate, especially when considering the nuances of demographics.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Elisa Varela, at elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of volunteers in this research, please contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to the possibility of engaging the input of your students in order to contribute to more inclusive and transformative spaces within the academy.

Warm regards,

Elisa M. Varela
Co-Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Graduate Student
elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu

Cindy Griffin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Professor
Cindy.Griffin@colostate.edu

Message to Prospective Graduate Student Participants

Hello:

My name is Elisa Varela and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University. I am writing to invite your participation in a study focused on examining the experiences of domestic (non-international) students of color within the academy. Specifically, I am recruiting MA and PhD students. The end goal of this research is to better understand the experiences of graduate students of color in order to contribute to knowledge that has the potential to foster transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions.

If you are a domestic graduate student of color, with at least one year of experience within the academy, and are at least 18 years of age you are eligible to participate. Your participation would involve a 1-2 hour interview as well as a brief demographic survey. The interview would take place over the phone, via Skype, or in person at a time and location convenient for you. To find out more about this research, please contact me at: elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to the possibility of engaging your input in order to contribute to more inclusive and transformative spaces within the academy.

Elisa M. Varela
Co-Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Graduate Student
elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu

Cindy Griffin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
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Cindy.Griffin@colostate.edu

Appendix D

E-mail Response to Respondents via CRTNET, Graduate Programs and NCA Caucuses
Hello:

Thank you for your interest in this study, the title of which is “Materiality and Discourse: Toward a Relational Understanding of Marginalizing Onto-epistemologies in the Ivory Tower.” As you know, my name is Elisa and I am a graduate student at Colorado State University in the Communication Studies Department.

I am asking for your participation in this study in order to better understand the experiences of graduate students of color within the academy. The end goal of this research is that of contributing to knowledge that has the potential to foster transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions. Participation in this study includes an interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours and includes a brief demographic survey. The interview will take place over the phone, via Skype, or in person at a time and location convenient for you.

As far as the collection and dissemination of data, identifying information will not be included in any write up. Although I may include short direct quotes with your permission, your information will be combined with that of other participants in the study and your contributions will not be directly attributed to you in these written materials.

If you would like to participate, please feel free to reply with possible dates and times that might work for us to connect and conduct the interview. If you have further questions about the research, please contact me at: elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu. Finally, if you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Again, thank you for considering this opportunity to act as a participant in this research. I am looking forward to the possibility of connecting with you as well as working to build more transformative and inclusive spaces within the academy.

Warm regards,

Elisa M. Varela
Co-Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Graduate Student
elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu

Cindy Griffin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Professor
Cindy.Griffin@colostate.edu

Appendix E

Informed Consent



March 1, 2015

Dear Participant:

Thank you for choosing to take part in this study on the experiences of graduate students of color within the academy. My name is Elisa Varela and I am a graduate student at Colorado State University in the Department of Communication Studies. The title of my project is “Materiality and D/discourse: Toward a Both/And Corporeal Understanding of Marginalizing Onto-epistemologies in the Ivory Tower.” My faculty advisor and the Principal Investigator of this study is Cindy L. Griffin, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University. I am asking for your participation in this study to better understand the experiences of graduate students of color with the end goal of contributing to knowledge that has the potential to foster transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions.

If you make the choice to participate in this research, the interview will last approximately 1-2 hours and will take place over the phone, via Skype, or in person at a time and location convenient for you. You will also take a brief demographic survey that will take no more than 7 minutes. In order to ensure accuracy, the interview will be audiotaped. Only the research team will have access to the audiotape, and the recording will be destroyed once it has been transcribed. Identifying information will not be included in any write up. Although I may include short direct quotes with your permission, your information will be combined with that of other participants in the study and your contributions will not be directly attributed to you in these written materials. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. You may also choose to skip certain questions.

There is no direct benefit to you associated with this research, but a possible benefit of your participation in this study is that graduate students, faculty, staff and institutional administrators working toward transformative change in our classrooms, scholarship, and institutions may use information contained in the final report to effect change.

There are no known risks to participating in this research, and although it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize

any known and potential, but ultimately unknown, risks. In the event that a question(s) impact you emotionally, local and university counseling centers are helpful resources.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Elisa Varela, at Elisa.Varela14@alumni.colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Thank you for your participation. I will be following up with you to confirm our interview date and time within the next week. I look forward to engaging your contributions as we work to build more inclusive and transformative spaces within the academy.

Sincerely,

Elisa M. Varela
Co-Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Graduate Student
elisa.varela14@alumni.colostate.edu

Cindy Griffin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Colorado State University
Department of Communication Studies, Professor
Cindy.Griffin@colostate.edu

Appendix F

Narrative Interview

- 1) Please tell me about why you decided to pursue graduate education and/or post-secondary teaching.
- 2) Has being a person of color factored into your decision to pursue post-graduate education? If so, how?
- 3) Has your experience in the academy as a person of differed from that of others? If so, how?
- 4) Has your experience in the academy as a person of color been the same/similar to that of others? If so, how?
- 5) Was there ever a time when you felt empowered during an interaction with a faculty, staff member, administrator, peer, a class discussion, or in the course of working through an assignment? Tell me about what happened, how you felt (physically, emotionally, psychologically, or otherwise), and why.
- 6) Was there ever a time when you felt disempowered during an interaction with a faculty, staff member, administrator, peer, a class session, or in the course of working through an assignment? Please tell me about what happened, how you felt (physically, emotionally, psychologically, and/or otherwise), and why.
- 7) As members of an institution/field/organization, there are moments when we are expected to be physically present. Please tell me about a time when you made yourself present during one of these events/moments and the career and/or personal outcomes of this decision.
- 8) As members of an institution/field/organization, there are moments when we are expected to be physically present. Tell me about a time when you were physically/emotionally unable to get yourself to such an event/moment and the career and/or personal outcomes of this decision.

Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

ELISA:

This concludes the interview portion. The following are demographic questions. You may choose to skip a question(s) and/or seek clarification before answering.

AGE / SEX / GENDER IDENTITY

1) My age is:

2) My sex is:

Female

Male

3) My gender identity is:

Female

Male

Other

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

10) Growing up, your immediate/nuclear family:

Mark all that apply

11a) Owned a home

Yes

No

Not sure

Prefer not to answer

11b) Had a secure job

Yes

No

Not sure

Prefer not to answer

11c) Had a college education

Yes

- No
- Some
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

11b) Had stocks, bonds, or other investments

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

11b) Had health insurance

- Yes
- No
- Sporadically
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

11) Compared to your parents when they were the age you are now, your own standard of living is much better, about the same, somewhat worse, or much worse than theirs was?

- Much better
- About the same
- Somewhat worse
- Much worse
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

ETHNICITY

5) Please self-identify in terms of your ethnicity:

- Possible answers include:
 - Black or African American
 - For example, black not African, Ethiopian, Kenyan, Nigerian, and so on
 - White/Caucasian
 - For example, Irish, German, Italian, U.S. American, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, White African, Caucasian, and so on
 - Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish
 - For example, Mexican, Salvadoran, Argentinian, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Spaniard, Puerto Rican, Brazilian and so on
 - American Indian
 - For example, Cherokee, Shawnee, Cheyenne, Iroquois Confederacy, and so on
 - Alaska Native
 - Please indicate name of enrolled or principal tribe if applicable.
 - Asian

- *For example, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Cambodian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, and so on*
- Asian Indian
 - *For example, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and so on*
- Middle Eastern or North African
 - *Please indicate all that apply, for example, Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, Libyan, Moroccan, Tunisian, Yemenite, Algerian, and so on*
- Pacific Islander
 - *For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, and so*

ROLES WITHIN RANGE OF EXPERIENCE

7) My experience(s) as a member of the academy include(s) the following roles for the indicated number of years:

Mark all that apply

Student Roles

- Graduate student— MA
 - Served as instructor of record/teaching assistant
 - Participated in university extracurricular activities
For example, graduate student council, graduate students of color council, and so on
 - Participated in conferences
For example, the National Communication Association, Western States Communication Association, Eastern States Communication Association, and so on
 - Other— *Please specify*
 - Number of years spent as MA student

- Graduate student— PhD
 - Served as instructor of record/teaching assistant
 - Participated in university extracurricular activities
For example, graduate student council, graduate students of color council, and so on
 - Participated in conferences
For example, the National Communication Association, Western States Communication Association, Eastern States Communication Association, and so on
 - Other— *Please specify*
 - Number of years spent as PhD student

- Total number of years spent as a graduate student?

REGION

8) The roles in my range of experience as a member of the academy occurred at a program(s) that I would classify as:

Student Program Description—MA

- Public master's
- Private non-profit master's
- For profit master's
- Other—*Please describe, for example, "I transferred and first attended..."*

Region

- Midwestern
- Northeastern
- Southern
- Western

Funding

- My studies were/are funded by the institution/department where I attend(ed)
- My studies were/are funded by federal and/or private student loans
- My studies were/are funded in another way

Student Program Description—PhD

- Completed at same institution as MA
- Completed at institution different from MA— *Please describe*
 - Public doctoral
 - Private non-profit doctoral
 - For profit
- Other—*Please describe, for example, "I transferred and first attended..."*

Region

- Midwestern
- Northeastern
- Southern
- Western

Funding

- My studies were/are funded by the institution/department where I attend(ed)
- My studies were/are funded by federal and/or private student loans
- My studies were/are funded in another way

10) Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important research. Before completing this interview, is there anything you would like to add in order to help me understand your experience better and/or to improve the content?

ELISA:

Again, thank you for participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, Elisa Varela, at Elisa.Varela14@alumni.colostate.edu. or, If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

I look forward to engaging your contributions as we work to build more inclusive and transformative spaces in academe.