

DISSERTATION

TRANSFORMATION AND CONNECTION:
THE STORIES OF FOUR YOUNG WOMEN ATTENDING AN ALTERNATIVE
HIGH SCHOOL

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

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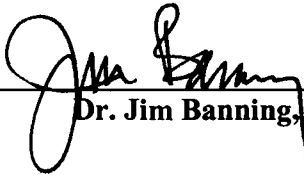
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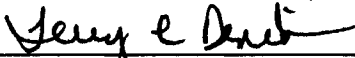
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Committee on Graduate Work



Dr. Jim Banning, Co-Advisor



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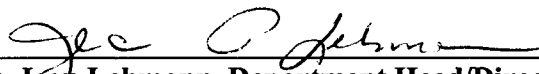
Dr. Terry Deniston, Co-



Dr. Jennifer Cross



Dr. Jean Lehmann



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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

TRANSFORMATION AND CONNECTION: THE STORIES OF FOUR YOUNG WOMEN ATTENDING AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

This dissertation tells the story of the author's oral defense. It is written from the perspective of the author, as she experiences her defense, watches her participants tell their stories, and converses with her committee. To do narrative inquiry, the author had to write an encompassing story. She could not rely on strict academic form and structure and continue to assert that people learn best through stories and through the experience of hearing another's perspective. She had to write and teach how she believes people learn best, through story.

This story explored the authors' research on the experiences and stories of four young women who attended an alternative high school. Each young woman in the study had once been enrolled in a traditional high school and then chose to attend the alternative high school. The goal of the study was to understand how each young woman made sense of her experiences of disconnection from the traditional high school and reconnection to the alternative high school through story-telling and to explore how each made sense of her personal transformation. Semi-structured, participant-led interviews were employed to uncover stories of transformation, connection, and sociological implications of their educational experiences.

The stories told by the four women who participated in this study revealed the complexity of their experiences. When heard fully without the label "at-risk," these young women's stories revealed far more complex stories and sense-making than could otherwise be explored.

The four young women transformed their lives, were supported in that transformation inside the alternative school setting, and felt connected to their education and their educational community in the alternative school. These stories depict success for the young women who transformed their lives and connected to their education and for the educational system that provided them that opportunity.

This research also explored implications for narrative qualitative research. Topics include intersubjectivity, participant participation, idiosyncrasies that inhibit an exact practice, and parallel story telling.

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Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

-Melody Beattie

Many wonderful people provided me with valuable resources, perspectives, support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my journey, helping me to create the product before you, and it is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I write this “thank you” to demonstrate my appreciation of their contribution.

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My biggest little brother, Andy, and I lived together through a large part of my journey. While living with fraternity men was interesting and entertaining in its own right, spending time with Andy, listening to his advice, and watching him care about others was an incredible joy for me. Andy, I always knew you supported my work and you would help me in any way you could. Thank you for being there when I needed you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION	11
Beginnings	11
Middles	13
CHAPTER II –THE STORIES BEFORE THE STORIES	19
Two Young Women	19
Research Questions	23
Definition of Terms	24
Significance of Findings	24
Reflexive Statement	25
CHAPTER III – OUR STORIES	32
Rose	32
Reflection	50
Jawny Dehp	54
Reflection	69
Molly	76
Reflection	92
Adina	98
Reflection	116
CHAPTER IV – THE DEFENSE	122
Research Questions	122
Stories of Transformation	125
Literature & Theory	140
Disconnection & Reconnection	147
Sociology of Education	158
Methods & Quality Qualitative Research	163
CHAPTER V – REFLECTIONS	174
Young Women & Alternative Schools	174
Qualitative Research & Narrative	177
About Myself	180
EPILOGUE	183
REFERENCES	186
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY	197
Theoretical Framework	197
<i>Postmodernism/Transformationism</i>	198

<i>Symbolic Interactionism</i>	200
<i>Radical theories</i>	201
<i>Theoretical combination</i>	204
Design	205
Participant Nomination and Selection Process	208
Interviews	210
Ethics	212
Approach to Analysis	214
Assuring Quality Research	216
APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEW	218
The History of Alternative Education	219
A Detailed Description of Alternative Education Today	225
<i>What is an alternative school today?</i>	225
<i>Purpose of alternative education</i>	227
<i>Characteristics of alternative education today</i>	229
<i>Types of alternative education</i>	231
<i>Benefits of alternative education</i>	234
<i>Best practices</i>	237
<i>Impact of zero tolerance</i>	239
Capable Students	244
Capable Women	249
<i>The development of the capable woman</i>	249
<i>Adolescent females</i>	255
<i>Capable young women students</i>	257
Further Research	259
APPENDIX C: FLIER, ANNOUNCEMENT, & CONSENT FORMS	261
Flier	261
Announcement	262
Consent Form 1	263
Consent Form 2	266

PREFACE

A good story cannot be devised; it has to be distilled. – Raymond Chandler

The room is small and awkward. The long dark wood conference table fills most of the room, leaving only enough room for people to squeeze between the walls and furniture when the oversized aqua green high-backed desk chairs are pushed under the table as much as they can be. The wall adjacent the hallway holds the door and shade-drawn windows. The opposite wall also contains windows. One is cracked open, leaning inward and letting in a gentle Colorado autumn breeze. The temperature in the room is muted by the welcome cool crisp air. I am thankful; this room can get stuffy.

I sit just inside the room at the head of the table nearest the door, waiting. In front of me, sprawled on the large conference table are my notes and a pile of loose papers on which my dissertation has been printed. My high-backed chair extends up beyond my head, acting only to create the appearance I am too short for this room. I am wearing my favorite Anne Taylor Outlet grey tailored suit, with a light blue fitted blouse under my suit jacket. I played with my hair for 30 minutes this morning and hope now that it looks relatively similar to the hairstylist's form. I sit nervously, shaking my legs in unison, thinking back through my notes, and hoping I can pull this off. What was I thinking getting a Ph.D.? I think to myself. I am not cut out for this stress. I smile and think back over the last several years. I am cut out for this stress, I have done just fine, and everything is ok, I remind myself.

Smiling, I look up to see Lizzy looking down at me. She is holding the 2 inch binder I gave her containing the draft of my dissertation. She sets it down on the table beside my notes and swings her light brown leather purse off her shoulder and onto the table. She opens her arms wide in front of her. I smile, stand up, and give her a big hug.

“How are you?” I ask, as we lean back and look at each other, still holding each others’ forearms.

“How am I? The more appropriate question is how are you? How are you feeling?” she says.

“I am great,” I tell her. “Nervous, but feeling great.” I smile.

“I am so proud of you,” she says.

“Thank you,” I say, nodding as tears begin to well up in my eyes. I shake my head and release her arms, turning to my ratty faded navy blue canvas satchel leaning against the wall on the floor. “Not yet. Shoot. I need a tissue.”

Lizzy reaches for her belongings, swinging her purse over her left shoulder and clutching the binder to her chest. She is wearing light blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and a blue jean jacket. Her dark thin framed glasses encircle her bright, warm eyes, accenting her dark ear-length, brown hair. She pushes the conference chairs under the table and squeezes around the table to a seat on my right. I blow my nose and hear a familiar voice behind me, entering through the door.

“Hi Becky. Hi Lizzy,” says Mike, who bows his head each time he says hello.

I turn to say, “Hi Mike. How are you?”

“Just fine. Just got back from Sante Fe last night,” he says nodding. “How are you doing?”

“Nervous,” I respond.

He smiles and says cheerily, “Oh, don’t worry. I only found a couple of things we should talk about. Only questions and suggestions. Nothing to worry about.” He smiles and begins the process of pushing the chairs and squeezing into one at the back of the room, opposite me at the head of the table.

Somehow those easy words always seem to make me nervous. “Oh okay,” I say, wondering again to myself, what am I doing?

As I do, Lisa walks confidently into the room. “Hi Becky,” she says. Making eye contact with Lizzy and Mike, Lisa says hello to each of them. She turns back to me and asks, “Are you ready?”

“Are you every really ready for these things?” I ask, sincerely wondering if I am the only one that feels like I could have worked on this project another 12 months and not be “ready”. Everyone smiles and giggles. Oh, I wish I had worked longer and harder on this, I think to myself. Well, if anything, they will just ask me to do a lot of work on it and meet with them again. Somehow that thought is not as reassuring as it should be. I am having surgery next week and I do not want to have to work on this while I am recovering. This is it, I say to myself, as Kate rushes in the door.

“Am I late?” she asks, with a huge smile on her face. Her short red hair bounces as she looks around and says, “Hi” to each of us. She too clutches her binder and a pile of other notes to her chest.

“No, you’re right on time,” I say. “We were just chatting and I was telling them how nervous this experience makes me.”

“Oh,” she says, laughing. “You have nothing to worry about, Becky. I do have some questions, but you should not worry.”

“Oh, okay,” I say, realizing I am having that sinking gut feeling again. Oh boy, just relax, I think to myself. My mom and I worked on my presentation and dissertation a lot over the last two weeks. It is what it is. She says it is good and ready to go. I trust her judgment, but as usual I still want more feedback. I am not sure there would ever be a time in my life I could get all the feedback I am looking for. I just keep asking and asking, receiving and receiving, with no end or conclusion in sight.

Just my way, I guess, as I think back over the last couple of years. This all started about a year and a half ago, when I had a clearness committee meeting in the summer of 2004. I did not know what to do with my life. Should I finish my degree? Should I quit? If I do, what should I do? If I stay, where do my passions lie? What should I study for my dissertation? I organized a group of my favorite people together and asked them not to give me advice, but to guide my self-questioning and self-answering. The process was exactly opposite of my usual feedback-gathering behavior. It was challenging and interesting. Mike once commented that it was the strangest thing a student had ever asked him to do. I smiled when he said that to the Qualitative Analysis class he was teaching, as he introduced me to teach Narrative to the graduate students in his class. It was weird for me too, I thought. How funny he thought it was so weird.

Kate wakes me from my thoughts and asks me if we are waiting for anyone else. “No,” I say. “Not today. Today it is just us.” She pushes her way around the table and picks a chair next to Lizzy. She is wearing a light green flowered dress that flows lightly

to her ankles and a tan sweater. Her dark rimmed glasses make her green eyes look even brighter. Lisa, who has been standing next to me, asks if I need anything.

I say “No, I have my water.” She takes a seat on the left side of the table, avoiding the pushing and squeezing everyone else has experienced. She pulls the chair back and turns it at an angle to face me. She is wearing black jeans, a black turtle neck cotton shirt, and a short red jacket. Her large beaded necklace ties the outfit together and she looks confident and stylish as usual. I look around the room. Lizzy, Kate, Mike, and Lisa are all looking at me.

“Should I begin?” I ask.

“Sure,” says Mike, as he looks down at his notes. “Tell us about your project and then we will each ask you questions,” he says, looking up and leaning back in his chair. He crosses his right leg over his left and folds his hands in his lap. Lizzy takes out a small stack of white printer paper and a pen. She sets up to take notes as I speak. Kate opens her binder in front of her, before leaning back and turning her chair to face me. She smiles and nods, “Go ahead.” I look towards Lisa, who takes out her binder and opens it in front of her. I notice the red ink all over the cover page. Oh boy, I think. Stop it. Don’t look. Relax. I smile, pull my notes in front of me, and begin the way my mom and I practiced it.

“I want to begin by telling you what I have done with my dissertation. You will notice throughout my dissertation I used quotes to begin different sections. These not only helped guide and focus my thoughts for certain sections, but they also rang true for me given the nature of different sections. As you read through my dissertation, read them

before each section. After you read the section, you might want to read the quotes again. I hope the text helps solidify their meaning and the choice I made with their placement.

“This dissertation is written from my own perspective, with four sections for each woman written directly from their perspectives. The point was not only to make the reading and writing smoother and more interesting, but also to highlight the uniquely personal venture this was for me and the young women I worked with. Although each of you was part of this project, I spent many hours alone with my thoughts and my data, reading and rereading my notes and the transcripts, preparing and interviewing four young women, and trying to mold all the divergent thoughts and experiences into a cohesive dissertation. My thoughts and feelings draw the entire journey together. I wanted the end result of my work to speak of the journey, as much as the stories, because the journey is the larger narrative that ties it all together. To do narrative inquiry, I had to write an encompassing story. I could not rely on strict academic form and structure and continue to assert that we all learn best through stories and through the experience of hearing another’s perspective. I had to write and teach how I believe we learn best, through story. You were part of that journey and are part of the story you will hear today.

“Let me frame what you will be experiencing more fully. Please turn to the introduction and I will lead you through my thoughts and experiences as we go.”

Mike sits up and pulls his binder out from underneath his stack of papers. He opens it to the introduction and says, “What do you mean we are a part of your story?” I watch as Lizzy, Kate, and Lisa turn to me as they open their binders to the introduction.

“Well,” I say, “my dissertation journey has not occurred in a vacuum. I have met with each of you individually and collectively on many occasions. Each time, I took

notes of the thoughts or feelings I had about my dissertation and my committee, realizing that my dissertation was formed and manipulated through each of these conversations. Each of your perspectives added something new or different to my thoughts, to my direction, or to my approach. I believe part of the validity of my research is the collective wisdom that went into forming my perspective and my work. Each of you is part of the process and will be shown helping me throughout the journey. That's all I will say for now. As we go through my dissertation, you will see how I wove you into my story."

Mike nods. I look towards Lizzy who smiles and nods, enthusiastically. I think my thoughts and process ring true for her. I knew they would. Before I even began my research, Lizzy and I met at a coffee shop that used to be called The Coffee Connection, a couple of blocks from my old house. I was looking to her for advice about setting up a clearness committee and about how to approach finding my place in the world. We chatted for a long time about what was happening in my life, what I wanted to do with my life, and possible ways to figure it out. After a long conversation, she handed me an article called, "Living Life as Inquiry". She said she knew that there would be something about academe that would touch her life and would work for her, and she finally found it in this article. She suggested I read the article. I never did read it, but I knew from the title and her enthusiasm that she would understand inquiry through story and experience. Mike too knows the direction I am headed. He introduced me to autoethnography and Carolyn Ellis' book, *The Ethnographic I*, which became the catalyst for this dissertation. I bet he wants to know that I can speak clearly and purposefully about narrative and story.

“Are there any other questions?” I ask. The room is silent, Kate and Lisa look down at their notes and shake their heads, and Mike says, “Go ahead Becky.”

“Ok, let’s take a moment to review the story I will be recounting,” I say removing my top page of notes. I begin to read my introduction.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The end is in the beginning and lies far ahead. -Ralph Ellison

Beginnings

“I always thought I would start at the beginning and chronicle four lives from their early beginnings to their present experiences. What was I thinking? There are no true beginnings, no places that scream ‘this is where it all began’. Stories are not such neat and tidy progressions. They do not arise one morning unaccompanied and eager to begin. If they had, I would have found their inception. I would have located the true beginning, documented it, analyzed it, and followed the progression. I would have been able to see growth and maturity over time, watched the ebb and flow of our lives, and been able to plot the stories event-by-event. After all I have been part of this story, this episode, this chapter in four lives as well as my own, for over a year. I have been thinking and rethinking, questioning and reviewing, these lives, our lives, for over a year.

“This explanation of so-called beginnings is not an excuse. I am not saying ‘well, there are no beginnings, so I simply can’t start the story’. Rather, this explanation is a realization, a learning, a description of the way things are. Stories are told as if they are clearly marked with a beginning, middle, and end. And yet, when each of us tells a story, an in-depth narrative, we realize internally there is so much more that contributed to the ‘false’ beginning used to tell the story. We have chosen to exclude pieces of the picture we do not want to share, we do not see as relevant or valuable, or that do not create the image we want. In other cases, we have not yet recognized all the pieces of the picture

we are relating. Additional life experiences, reflection, and perspectives are needed to identify the missing pieces. And yet, we may never know the entire picture or share the entire picture with others. Our stories are partial.

“It is immensely difficult then, to begin to write, to begin to story what you have heard and experienced. I have heard four stories, stories that have no true beginnings. Sure, each woman portrayed her life as if it flowed from one source, as if each piece fit neatly after the one before it. For these women, and all of us who tell our stories, this arrangement of pieces makes sense, creates order, and reminds us of how we got ‘here’. For me, the observer, the researcher, and the one trying to connect the pieces cohesively, the arrangement and even the order are not so simple. It is not just that Rose’s behavior and attitude worsened over time and the progression led to rebellious and often dangerous experiences. It is that Rose’s family, before she was born, was not connected to education, was living a certain path, and molded the idea of an angelic Christian child to become Rose. The interplay of Rose, her family, and her culture did not even begin there. There is a history from which feelings, truths, and experiences flowed, flowed into what Rose retells today. There is interplay at work all throughout our lives intermingling the past and the present. How do you recognize this interplay and claim to begin a story at the same time?

You're searching, Joe, for things that don't exist; I mean beginnings. Ends and beginnings -- there are no such things. There are only middles. -Robert Frost.

Middles

“Perhaps it will be easier to write from the middle of experience, to write in medias res. The middle, after all, is the part I know the most about. After the ‘beginnings’ and before the future of the stories are the pieces I listened to, learned about, and feel most comfortable with. These young women’s stories began long before I arrived and will continue on past our experiences together, as did and will my own. We met for four months and shared our experiences, our stories, our laughter, and even our grief. Our stories merged over four months, after the beginnings and before our futures, and it is this middle of our stories that I will share with you. Each middle will be presented independently at first to give you an opportunity to get to know the women as I have gotten to know them. I hope you will notice the way the stories are partial, incomplete, local, and temporal. The middles cannot possibly tell the ‘whole’ story, but today they are the only part we (the young women and I) know to story.

“I have chosen to relate each story from the perspective of each participant, in order to maintain their integrity. Each woman’s language was unique, personal, and authentic and I chose to maintain their perspective and therefore, their authorship. As often as possible, their words, phrases, and expressions are used to tell their story. I have chosen to use ‘emotional recovery’ (Ellis, 2003) and my notes, to respond to and relate with each story as they are being told by the young women. Their stories were not told and did not happen those four months in a vacuum. My own story and the stories of those surrounding us also ebbed and flowed. The ebb and flow of my own life reflects on

and relates to their stories, as we moved together for four months. However, it is not only during those four months that our stories joined. As I read and reread, write and rewrite, and tell and retell our stories, the mix continues, as does my story with you.

“I have chosen to relate my process of analysis, learning, and reflection as the story it is. Although the depiction is fictitious, I hope you will find places that ‘ring true’ for you. I hope you will find where your contribution, reflection, and friendship were and are valued. I chose this story-line not only because my life during this process was storied, as all our lives and experiences are, but also because the story-line provided me with a profoundly appropriate framework with which to approach our stories. Each member of my committee was chosen for the contribution she or he would make to me, my project, and my mental health through a long arduous process. Each contributed invaluable knowledge, support, and guidance. As it turns out, they each contributed a piece to my analysis, a way to approach my data that will frame my analysis process. Perhaps, a brief description of each character will illuminate how you, my committee, became my framework for analysis, learning, and reflection.

“**Mike,**” I say, gesturing towards Mike, “is a psychologist by training and by nature. He is curious about the individual. When I met with him to discuss my methods and analysis throughout this process, we inevitably discussed my thoughts and struggles with life and his own stories and reflections. He listened, talked about where I was getting lost, and then said ‘well, you will figure it out,’ which I always responded to with, ‘what? You mean you are not going to tell me what I should do?’ Mike contributes that unique perspective to this project. He will guide my analysis of the individual, identity,

and growth. He alerts my sense that each story is unique and must be examined individually.

“**Lisa**,” I say, gesturing towards Lisa, “however, is a sociologist by training and by nature. Her concern and interest lies in the impact social issues have on the lives and education of these young women. I speculate she would ask me to return to social theories and comment on the connections these stories have to those theories. She would ask me to look at the bigger picture of education and society. She would want to know what my research says about public education, communities, and society in general. Her guidance will help me address broader sociological issues and concerns.

“**Lizzy**,” I say, gesturing towards Lizzy, “wants to make sure each voice is heard and each person feels valued. She listens, really listens, and then reflects with you in a way that makes you feel like you are as incredible as she trusts that you are. Her desire to support growth, transformation, and reflection has reminded me to ask myself, what am I learning and in what ways am I growing? Without her, my process would have felt stale, distant, and objective. What value is there in research we, all of us, including the researcher, do not connect to or find relevant to our lives? Lizzy will guide my learnings.

“Although Mike is my methodologist, it is **Kate**,” I say, gesturing towards Kate, “who questions whether my research is really research. She is the steadfast questioner, the one who believes in the scientific methods and finds value in identifying quality research. I know this not because she has told me, but because of the mentoring and feedback she provided my partner, Todd, when he was finishing his Master’s. She challenges me to do ‘good’ research. Her thoughtful questions will guide me through

Elliot Eisner's (2004) proposed standards for qualitative analysis and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) means for establishing trustworthiness.

“Following the introduction, four young women will tell you their stories from the middle. They will engage you in their lives and ask you to draw your own conclusions and locate your own connections to their stories. My story will contribute to theirs and, hopefully, depict the experience we shared more richly. This will be the presentation of our stories or the ‘what?’ for this reflection. Next will follow the ‘so what?’ a fictitious meeting between my committee and I, aimed to outline my analysis, learnings, and reflections. Finally, the Reflections section will detail the ‘now what?’ or ‘take-home’ message.

“How are you all doing with all this?” I ask. “Are there any questions?” I feel more confident and comfortable after presenting my ideas.

“Becky, I have a question,” says Kate. “What do you mean by ‘ring true’? You keep mentioning that as if it is some measure of validity we should all recognize. What are you referring to?”

“Actually, Kate, I am referring to a measure of quality for qualitative research. The idea is that stories retold to participants or other audiences should resonate with their own experiences. When I mentioned that the young women's stories will invite you to draw your own conclusions, I meant that when you listen to the stories, listen for your own thoughts or feelings and ask yourself if you have had or could imagine similar experiences, thoughts, or feelings. For example, a couple of weeks ago I stopped by your big new office down the hall right after Jim's son had been injured in Afghanistan. I told you about my inability to sit still while watching ‘Hotel Rwanda’ and how hard it was for

me to watch that movie and realize our country did nothing to help the people there. You nodded enthusiastically, sharing your reservations about seeing that movie for those same reasons. What I said about my experience and about 'Hotel Rwanda' rang true for you.

"I went to Elliot Eisner's presentation at AERA in 2003. He suggested several ways to assure quality qualitative research. One way he suggested was to measure referential adequacy, asking the question 'does this work resonate with other understandings we have in this area?' That is what I mean by 'ringing true;' the story resonates with our understandings about this area. Dictionary.com (October 10, 2005) defines resonate as: '2. To evoke a feeling of shared emotion or belief and 3. To correspond closely or harmoniously.' When you ask yourself if something resonates with you, you are asking whether the work evokes feelings or corresponds with your own experiences, feelings, or ideas.

"I actually thought about this question before our meeting and googled 'definition ring true.' I found a quote by Kendall (2003) of the Christian Science Monitor. It said:

'Due to poor equipment and the scarcity of precious metals, metal workers of the Middle Ages were not able to produce coins that were uniform in appearance and weight. This situation gave criminals an opportunity they couldn't resist. Thus, when in doubt over a coin's validity, a tradesman would drop it on a stone slab to "sound it." If phony, it'd make a shrill or dull, flat tone in contrast to the clear ring of a true coin. By extension, a story tested and found acceptable is said to ring true, and its opposite, to ring false or hollow.'

"Okay, I get it. Thanks Becky," says Kate.

"No problem. Are there any other questions?" I ask.

“No. I just can’t believe you just cited the Christian Science Monitor,” Lisa says, laughing.

“Yeah, I know,” I agree, smiling and giggling. “It gave as good an explanation as any. Speaking of explanations, I am now to the part where I tell you how I got to this topic. You have all read this part before, but it has been a year since you read it. I thought it might be helpful to have a quick reminder. What do you think?”

“Sure,” said Mike, laughing to himself. I am almost positive he made a joke to himself about not remembering something he read a year ago that he chose not to share. We open to the second section, The Story Before the Stories.

“Here is where we embark my journey,” I say. I begin to read the story and explanation I gave to explain my research agenda:

CHAPTER II: THE STORY BEFORE THE STORIES

Nourish beginnings, let us nourish beginnings. Not all things are blest, but the seeds of all things are blest. The blessing is in the seed. -Muriel Rukeyser

Two Young Women

“I sat across from them at a table in a local dinner theatre, waiting to see a local, small rendition of CATS, the musical. I was stuck, literally. My left shoulder touched the half wall at the back of the theatre and my right shoulder rested next to the shoulder of Todd, my partner. Behind me was another patron’s chair, four inches from mine and in front of me... the young women who were to become the inspiration for my dissertation research. They were beautiful and young. The paler of the two was pregnant. She had small brown eyes, long curly chestnut hair, and a crooked smile. ‘Due in July,’ she told me, almost giggling. I am not sure if she was uncomfortable with me or with the idea of having a baby in 2 months. She and her boyfriend were ready for the pregnancy to be over, but not quite sure what it would be like when the baby came, she went on to explain. ‘We’ll make it on our own, but for a little while we will live with his parents.’ She looked nervously at her friend.

“Her friend’s smile never faded. She was excited to be here, to have this experience. Her skin was flawless, and her stunning black hair as brilliant as her wide-open smile. Both of her parents were arrested last week, Todd told me as we walked to our car later that evening. They deal drugs out of their house, the same house this beautiful young woman goes home to every night. I could hardly believe it. These two

women's lives were filled with more struggle and demonstrable perseverance than I had ever expected.

“I am not sure what I expected. I had heard stories of broken homes, drugs, abuse, and violence before, but this was different. Todd and I were sitting at a table with two young women who had had experiences far more painful and threatening than either of us had ever experienced, and not only were they here to talk about it, but they were succeeding. Both were scheduled to graduate in a couple of weeks and both planned on getting at least an Associate's degree in the next couple of years. How did these two young women succeed in their home environments? How did they find the determination to finish school? What keeps them motivated?

“As dinner progressed, they casually talked to us about school and their upcoming graduation from high school, smiling continuously. ‘So are you excited about graduating?’ I asked. They slowly looked at each other, sharing a deeper understanding of their feelings about their journeys ahead. My experience with the look they shared led me to believe that graduating was bittersweet. ‘We loved the Sundown program and we are so sad it is closing,’ they said. They credit the Sundown program for not only saving their educational career, but also their lives. Sundown was an alternative school housed in Horizon High School during the evenings. Todd had explained to me that going to school after business hours ended was a savior for students whose home lives were terrifying, oppressive or abusive. Students would be out of the house when their parents got home. It also allowed many students to work during the day to help support their families. I listened as the young woman whose parents were just arrested talked to me about her sister. She became quieter and hung her head. ‘I have been so lucky to have

Sundown. I am not sure how my [little] sister will survive day school,' she explained. I tried to comfort her, but I was not sure how she would survive either. Sundown sheltered and nurtured these students, when their families could not.

“This was not the first time I had met these two young women. Todd was their science teacher during the 2002-2003 school year. He cared about them and they cared about him. Administrators for the school invited him and me to numerous events and field trips, hoping we would come to show continued support for the students and to help chaperone. ‘They like to see me and I think they know I care about them if we go,’ Todd explained. I wonder how many students in Sundown have adult role models who care about them, their lives, and their education. We go to support them and to hang out with them. We have gone to barbeques, a corn maze, local museums, musicals, theatre, and other local cultural events. The students come from a variety of experiences, have vastly different personalities and abilities, and choose to come to Sundown. They feel accepted and respected by teachers and fellow students. They have flexible schedules at Sundown that accommodate their lives and preferences. They learn the same material and take the same standardized tests, but that is it for similarities between their school and the day school.

“I left the dinner theatre that night hungry for more stories of struggle, transformation, resistance, and success like the stories of the young women I talked to. I had learned so much about schooling, families, students, and a caring, connected education in that brief conversation and I wanted to learn more. It was painfully obvious to me how students get left behind in schools, how they disconnect and fail to succeed, and how public education can fail to meet their needs. I left wanting to tell the world that

the failure-success binary was too easily and erroneously attributed to students whose lives are far more complex than we know. How can we forget that our own lives are too complex for those labels and yet use them frivolously to explain away the educational careers of students disenfranchised by their school, their home, and their lives?

“Since the 1980s, Alternative Schools have been described as schooling for the delinquent and disruptive students, the students no one wants to teach, or the students at risk of failing school. Yet, from what I am learning from students in those schools and articles written about the successes of those schools, I suggest they be labeled as the schools for students who want to be seen, for students whose whole lives need attention, for students who have been overlooked or ignored during the race for better standardized testing scores, and for students who are ‘institutionally marginalized.’ These schools are for the students whose school has failed to recognize the complexity of our lives and who have forgotten to care for students.

“In all fairness, the ‘beginning’ of my journey with alternative schools and the students within them did not start there. This again is the middle of my experience and those pieces that were left out and are relevant will be explored in other chapters. My experience the night of the dinner theatre could be considered the major catalyst for my research, but so could my relationship with Todd and my experience with a clearness committee. Those events also propelled me down this path. Underlying all of the experiences are my experiences and beliefs, my interests in education, and my family and friends.

Research Questions

“The young women that night at the theatre touched me and disrupted everything I thought I knew about at-risk and disruptive youth. From that night on, I secretly wanted to know more, spend more time with them, and begin to understand them more. I never dreamt that the study of their stories could be my dissertation topic. Then, on the day of my clearness committee, I decided to be honest about my interest in these women and their stories. I had never disclosed my interest in this topic before and I knew it would be a surprise to my committee members, friends and family. Little did I know, the surprise was all mine, for not only did no one flinch or say a word about my topic choice, but everyone there said they would support whatever direction I chose to go. They felt the decision was mine, and with that confidence, I knew I wanted to spend the next year talking to women in alternative high schools.

“My questions were simple. I wanted to listen to and retell the stories of young women in alternative high schools. What are their stories? What are their experiences? What are the taken for granted aspects of traditional and alternative schools? What motivates women to continue their education in an alternative school? How does the culture of alternative high schools enrich their lives? In what ways does it harm them? What meaning do they give their experiences? What meaning do they give alternative high schools? In what ways do they rebel against their experiences and in what ways do they embrace them? My study will attempt to narrate the stories of women, stories that are rarely, if ever, heard. The changes in social and historical contexts over time necessitate a closer look at alternative high schools and the students who attend them.

Definition of Terms

“Several words I will use throughout my dissertation may need clarification. For the purposes of this dissertation, *disconnection* will mean to sever the connection, relationship, or communication between the student and her teachers, administrators, and/or fellow students. A *reconnection* will mean developing relationships between students and her teachers, administrators, and/or fellow students that were not there before. *Young women* are females of school age attending or having recently attended an alternative high school. *Traditional schools* are public schools whose structure of instruction focuses on academics disengaged from most students’ experiences outside of school and whose structure works best for students who are not troubled and who have resources and support at home. *Alternative high school* will mean a school that is geared towards incorporating students’ feelings and troubles into the daily structure of instruction, listening and supporting students who need support and guidance, and teaching students using their lived experiences. It will also mean a school of choice and a school in which students and teachers have more decision-making capabilities. As is true for all definitions, these definitions are not all encompassing and may need revision throughout my dissertation.

Significance of Findings

“The existing academic information of women in alternative high school settings is limited, especially when approached with critical interpretations of social, economic, and political ramifications. My research on young women in alternative high schools will explore areas that the academic arena of education must be aware of, in order to prepare

future teachers, administrators, policymakers, and voting citizens. The academy should be a place to explore new ideas for change when inequalities are not being remedied by the larger society. This work can act as a change agent for what we currently hold to understand about the seemingly neutral dissemination of educational opportunities.

“My research will also impact the greater community and ‘enable others to care about the depth and complexity of human experience, care enough to craft their own responses to it’ (Ouellette, 2003, pp. 14). By revealing the experiences of these young women to the community, I hope to encourage dialogue about the inherently subjective nature of schooling and the social impact of alternative schooling. ‘Individuals can go beyond given situations and act against the limitations or prohibitions that are hegemonically and objectively constructed but that are subjectively felt’ (Bloom, 1996, pp. 296). The knowledge disseminated in schools perpetuates understandings of the world that must be questioned. My research proposes to encourage those questions. My ‘research efforts ought to enable [my] readers to reflect on their own lives and to help us to envision lives for ourselves and our students that exist within communities of difference and hope’ (Tierney, 1996, pp. 111).

Reflexive Statement

“My personal circumstances and characteristics impact this project. I come to this project aching to engage in critical dialogue and action. I want to look for the solutions to social ills and act through my research and teaching to remedy them. I am multifaceted. I see my ‘subjectivity as always in the process of being produced or nonunitary’ (Bloom, 1996, pp. 289). I am a middle class, partly-privileged/partly-

exploited, white, previously Jewish/currently developing, active, physically able, female student. I work hard academically because I enjoy learning, exploring, and teaching, and because I believe the knowledge I gain will be beneficial to my future. I construct knowledge much like I am taught to construct knowledge and will be attempting through this research to venture out of the positivist/modernist notions of knowledge creation and validation. I am tentative and cautious, yet intrigued and hopeful.

“I am trying for the first time to bring myself fully into my research and am, even currently, questioning how well I will do that. Where do I see myself? Why can I not see myself more clearly? I try to see ‘an alternative view of self located historically in language, produced in everyday gendered and cultural experiences, and expressed in writing and speaking’ that Bloom suggests and find it difficult to find one space to call my own (1996, pp. 291). ‘Claims for the existence of a unique, fixed, and coherent self in humanist ideology deny the possibilities of changes in subjectivity over time, mask the critical roles that language, social interactions, and pivotal experiences play in the production and transformation of subjectivity, and ignore gender as a social position that influences the formation of subjectivity’ (pp. 291). Perhaps this evolution is what makes locating me today so difficult. I will continually revisit who I am and where I see myself developing with this project.

“Philosophically, I assume that what I see is different from what others will see (Ouellette, 2003) and that I bring a unique perspective to this research. What that means, I am not sure. I plan to construct my ideas as I go and use reflection each step of the way. I am eager to try narrative and feel the movement of it all, lives, stories,

transformations, and inductive discoveries. This project is a growing experience in many ways.

“My experience with alternative schools and the students who attend them had been minimal before this project. I attended two different alternative elementary schools when I was younger. One was a creative, small, student-centered, and democratic school for children in grades pre-kindergarten through third grade. We did not receive grades, but our parents were updated regularly on our progress as they were actively involved in our education. The school was housed on the campus of the Claremont Colleges and was progressive and liberal. For third through sixth grade, I attended another alternative elementary school with a family emphasis. The school was structured with mixed age/grade groupings and teachers had a more open approach to curriculum than any other school in Claremont. For seventh grade and beyond, I attended traditional schools, and felt quite certain that I never and would never fit in to those schools.

“The next experience I had with alternative schools and their students was through my partner, Todd. As I explained, he and I were not officially related to the alternative school, but informally we were invited to almost all of their functions as a school. I enjoyed spending time with the students and the teachers at the school and found I learned a lot from them each time I saw them. During the fall semester of 2004, I attended weekly ‘Community Time’ at a local alternative high school to get a better sense of the school before doing my research there. I interacted with students and teachers, casually discussing political, social, school-related, and personal issues. I was welcomed with open arms and hearts, which I truly appreciated.

“From my limited experiences I have seen that there is a wealth of information and experience within the alternative school that I felt (and feel) needed to be tapped. I also have seen the connection of the alternative school to my explorations into critical theory and special populations. Alternative high schools connect well to my feeling that every person deserves an equal chance at success and happiness, yet sometimes education does not provide that equity. Additionally, I am drawn to the fascinating lives the students I talked to had lived thus far. Stories are important and I am drawn to retelling theirs to anyone that will listen. These stories, I believe, will change lives and possibly directions for public education. I do not just believe they will; I know they must for the sake of all the children yet to go through public education. This project is not only a growing project for me and the students I talked with, but hopefully also for those intricately involved in the future of public education.

“As I retell these stories, it will be important that I check myself and my process. I have found that sometimes I lean dangerously close to romanticizing difficult, confusing, and complex moments that need more than a romantic outlook; those moments need my honesty. I also lean towards the opposite of that spectrum. I find that there are moments I see as ‘doom and gloom,’ negatively portraying moments that have hope and the capability of healing. I will be conscious of myself and my writing throughout this process in order to honestly retell the stories we find. I will reread my work and check it for inappropriate romanticism or gloominess.” I look up to see if everyone is following me still. I have read a lot and I hope it was engaging.

“Becky, how well do you think you were able to do this? To avoid and check for inappropriate romanticism or gloominess?” asks Mike.

“That is such a good question. I wrote the stories, or well, I guess the better way of saying it is: I arranged the stories that I was told and did very little modification to their original transcripts. I didn’t even think about how romantic or gloomy they were because I did not alter them. Each young woman asked me to remove the ‘likes’ and ‘uhs’ and Rose asked me to leave one story out altogether. Other than that, though, I only rearranged the stories that were told to me. I decided they would be easier to read and follow if the stories were arranged by topic. Sometimes they would begin one story, interject another story, and return to the original story in the matter of three lines. I found that hard to follow, so I moved all the similar stories together.

“So I would say that I was able to avoid the tendency to romanticize or to ‘gloom-and-doom’ the stories well. I remained as true to their stories and their words as I was able to. I felt that the new arrangement provided more benefits than harms in this circumstance.”

“In qualitative research, are you allowed to manipulate the data in that way?” asks Kate.

“The idea in qualitative work, and especially narrative inquiry, is to tell the story so that it invokes reaction in the reader. ‘Manipulation’ is up to the researcher and approved by the participants. I got permission from each young woman to include what is included in each story and to clean the stories as I saw fit,” I respond. “Each woman’s words were used to retell their stories. They are authentic, even if rearranged. I would say that it is not ‘wrong’ to manipulate qualitative data, as long as the original feelings, thoughts, and experiences are expressed. Many times qualitative researchers rearrange

data so that readers can glean a better picture of those being studied. It is part of the analysis. It is part of teaching an audience about the research.

“In narrative research and especially in this project, the researcher-participant distinction is blurred. I wanted to co-create their stories with them, meaning I wanted to acknowledge how the young women created their stories in relation to me and the ways I created my own story, asked them questions, and related to them in communication. The stories that I retell here are the stories that we created. They told what they wanted to tell in relation to me, my questions, and our relationship. Then I retold those stories, moving pieces around to align their stories and explanations. I co-created these stories with these young women.

“The next section will be presented by each student. To encourage readers to find their own connections to these stories, I chose to have each woman present her story. Listening to her words and watching her body language will teach more holistically and authentically. Each young woman’s language is unique and demonstrative of her experiences and background. I have invited each young woman to come present her story to you. After each young woman speaks, I will tell you a little bit about what I was feeling and thinking after our meetings. Rose is our first guest. May I ask her to join us now?”

“Sure, Becky, but before you do, can you comment on the order in which you chose to present their stories?” asks Lisa.

“Actually, the order in which they will speak to you is irrelevant,” I stated. “It does not reflect my feelings towards each young woman or their personalities at all. If anything, I jumped between the stories as I wrote them and chose the order based on the

order in which I finished each story. Some days I worked on stories I found more difficult to piece together, other days I worked on stories that were easier and more cohesive.

“Each story is unique. They do not build on each other. They do not paint a unified picture or draw together a connected whole. Actually, after listening, reading, rereading, and retelling these stories, it became even harder for me to talk about them as if they were all similar in some way. Using the term ‘at-risk’ or any other definitive term to define them became harder and harder,” I say, pausing for a response. I wonder what they all are thinking. I hope they do not mind that we will have guests tell their stories. Oh well. What is done is done. I turn towards Lizzy, knowing her warm smile will quell my nerves. “Any other questions?”

Lizzy smiles and says, “I want to meet Rose. Let’s invite her to join us.”

“Okay,” I say, smiling and pushing my chair away from the table. I stand up, take the two steps to the door before opening it, and ask Rose to join us. I hope she is not nervous. I hope she is ready and in a good place to talk this morning. I smile as she approaches the door. All four of them have been sitting outside the door waiting for their turn. They must feel very weird about this. I wanted them to wait inside, but where? There is no room. I told them they could squeeze in, but they preferred to wait outside the door. They like opportunities to chat, they told me. They weren’t interested in hearing my spiel anyway. They had heard it many times before.

CHAPTER III: OUR STORIES

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment. -Rabindranath Tagore

Rose

Rose walks confidently into the room through the door I am holding open, with her head held high, her shoulders back, and her hands down at her side. She is wearing a puffy navy blue Adidas jacket with white stripes down the arms and a large hood hanging down her back. The jacket covers her torso and reaches down to the middle of her thighs. A navy blue shirt barely peeks out from behind her big jacket that crinkles when she moves. Slightly faded black pants extend over her shoes and to the ground. She has thin, light brown hair that probably reaches her hips when she lets it down. Half of it is pulled back just above her ears and clipped at the back of her head. She wears dark brown, plastic rimmed glasses and a gold cross on a thin gold necklace. Her skin is very light with a few freckles scarcely visible on her cheeks. She wears no finger nail polish, no

make up, and no perfume. Today, she is happy and open to conversation, a rarity for Rose, I have found. She speaks freely, but rarely smiles.

She takes a seat just to the left of mine. Everyone says hello to her. I shut the door and take my seat, pulling my seat up to the table again. “Rose, let me introduce my committee,” I say. “To your left is Lisa, then Mike at the end, then Kate and Lizzy across from you.” They each nod and smile as I introduce them. I am a little nervous. I want her to feel comfortable and I want the committee to really hear her. I hope this works. “I have not told them much about you, other than you are a young woman who attends an alternative high school,” I say. “Why don’t you tell them about yourself and your experiences? The floor is yours.” Rose sits up straight leans over the table and places her arms on the table in front of her. She begins:

Memory believes before knowing remembers. –William Faulkner

You want to hear this poem that I wrote? I am a writer too. I wanna publish this book of poems. [She talks as she shuffles through her backpack. Papers shuffle against one another, as she riffles through a disorderly stack of papers and books. She pulls out a wire-ringed notebook of lined paper and opens it to a page with writing on it.] *There it is. It’s called Memory Lane. We had to bring in a picture and write what’s going on in the picture. What’s happening, if you can’t see it or whatever, what’s happening in that picture, in that frame of time. I had a picture of my trailer park that I was living in. My mom is holding me in her arms and we were in my backyard. I was like 5 or 6 years old, somewhere around there. I read this in front of the class too and man, I was balling. I was crying my eyes out.* [She begins the poem, sitting up straight, with her head bent

over the white lined paper in front of her. She reads softly and slowly, pausing when appropriate. She has practiced reading poetry or perhaps this poem.]

*I look at the picture in front of my face,
My mind goes somewhere in memory lane.
I jump into the picture and I am there.
Behind me this pretty little face, this happy little girl,
Is a pain so unimaginable, it makes me sick to my stomach
I take her from my mother's arms and we run together
Through the swing set, between the houses, into the street
Then she looks off into the distance and she starts to cry
I look and I know why she is crying
This boy three years older than her,
Thinking of how bad that must have hurt her little body
Then my brother appears and says
"You are a liar. That is my best friend you are talking about"
She starts to cry more and more
Did he even care?
I pick her up and hold her in my arms.
I cry too, feeling her pain.
Then my uncle appears and he starts stroking her hair
Then her arm, then her back
This little girl that I hold in my arms starts to scream bloody murder
She jumps out of my arms, then runs and jumps into her mother's*

I snap back to reality and realize that the picture has changed

That is not a happy little girl smiling and laughing

That's tears coming from her eyes

That is not a yard they are standing in

It's an ocean of tears and her mom is holding her head above water

Well, I got raped and that's what it was. Two times, when I was five years old. It happened by my uncle and by my brother's best friend. The first time it was with my uncle and we were in Wyoming. It was me, my brother, and my uncle. My uncle was 13 or 14. We were all lying in the same bed in the basement and then we were about to go to sleep. My brother gets up and wants to go upstairs and watch scary movies with my other uncle. That's when it happened. My brother left me by myself with him.

The other time, I went with my brother to his best friend's house and nobody else was there. His name was Joseph and I see him in pictures. I despise him. I was 5 years old and he was eight. He did it. That is just ridiculous, because how eight year olds... I mean they can't really... I don't know. I guess something happened to him. When I told my brother about it, he was like "you're lying". He was like "you must have been dreaming or something. You're lying. That never happened." He started calling me all sorts of names and he got into a fight with me. I actually have held a grudge for my brother for so many years. [The anger is visible, as she leans forward, crosses her arms on the table, and lifts her chin defiantly.]

My mom always told me, because like she got raped by her dad when she was younger. For years, he raped her and his friends also raped her. She got raped by plenty of other people. My grandpa would always tell her, he was like "well if you tell

somebody, then me and your mom are going to split up and you don't want to split up the family, do you?" He told that to her every single time and then he'd be like "I won't do it again," and then he would do it again. [Again, the anger is palatable. She speaks loudly and defiantly.] She thinks that it's good that it happened to her because of the fact that she can relate to other people that it happened to. She would always tell me when I was little, like since I could speak, she would say "Rose, if any one ever touches you in a wrong way, you need to tell me, you need to tell me." [Her voice softens.]

I told her. I was like "mom, would you get mad at me if I told you something?" and she was like, "no, I won't get mad" and I told her. She told my dad and man, it took everything that my dad had... I mean my mom, my grandpa, my uncle Troy... there were like four people holding down my dad so that he wouldn't go kill my uncle for doing that to me. That was really hard for me but I mean I don't remember the therapy. My mom told me that I went to two years of therapy. I don't remember those two years. [She shrugs her shoulders and puts her hands back in her lap. Her jacket crinkles.]

I was all mad at everybody, but especially boys. I always got in fights with boys in elementary school, all the time. I beat up like seven guys by the time I was out of Linton. Like when I was in Kindergarten I hated them. That's why I fought them all the time. [She sits up straight and crosses her arms on the table in front of her. She frowns slightly.] I was just fighting guys and beating them up. They would say something bad to me, "pow," you know? [She sits up and punches her right hand into her left hand.] Just beat them up. They did stupid things. Like this one guy, I didn't beat this guy up, but I should have. He pulled my hair. He would purposely get in line behind me just so he could pull my hair because it was long. I had long hair and he would just pull it for no

reason. [She reaches behind her, pulling her own hair and jerking her head back slightly.] *I think he liked me. A lot of guys do.* [As she thinks about this, a big smile crosses her face and she giggles to herself.]

Elementary school, I think it was fun. [She shrugs her shoulders.] *Good memories of getting into fights and stuff. I can look back and laugh at it.* [She giggles.] *That's kind of the good times, you know? When I was in elementary school, I got into fights so much with boys, because of the things that happened to me when I was a little little girl. Those made me hate guys, like bad, hate them. I mean like any guys that got on my nerves, I just would fight 'em. Beat 'em up. I would yell at them, punch them, kick them until I felt better, you know? That's how I was.* [She shrugs her shoulders.]

First, I went to [L] Elementary School. I had good teachers there and one bad teacher that made me cry. The only one bad teacher was for my third grade. This guy kicked me in the shin and I got so mad. So I punched him in the side of the head and then he went and told the teacher, who just started yelling at me. I tried to explain my part and she wouldn't let me say anything. I just shut up and then this other guy knocked some toys on the ground. He's like "pick those up" and I'm like "no, I'm not going pick those up – you're the one that dropped them." [She speaks with anger and defiance in her voice, sitting up straight, and acting as if she is talking to the boy.] *He's like "pick them up or I'm going to go tell the teacher" and he went and told the teacher. The teacher came and yelled at me, "You're going to the principal's office as soon as we get back to school." I hate when nobody lets me speak my mind about what happened. I hate that. She never listened. So I just sat and cried.*

I remember this one kid I really popped. [She smiles briefly.] *He was making fun*

of my little brother because he used to stick his butt out the window. This boy lived in the same trailer park that we did. He was like "I seen your brother with his butt out the window" and I said "shut up." I got all mad and so I beat him up. I started punching him and then I grabbed him by his arm and swung him around in a circle. [She pretends to grab an arm in the air and swings it out in front of her.] Oh, I was mean. [She shakes her head back and forth.]

I've always had that like instinct - if someone really makes me mad, I just take them on. There was another time when this guy beat me up actually, and he was older. He was in 6th grade and I was in 3rd grade. Out of nowhere this guy grabs my hand and like bangs my head up against the side of the pole of a jungle gym. [She jerks her head to the side as if she just hit the pole again.] I got him into a lot of trouble. I went to the principal because I didn't do anything to this guy. If I deserved it, then OK. I'll fight with them. But I didn't deserve it. So I went and got him in trouble and he got kicked out of school.

My mom, she didn't do anything about the people that did that kind of thing to me. She just said, "You know, it happened. When you're little, it's going to happen. You're going to get beat up. You're going to get hurt, you know? It's just going to happen and there's no way of getting out of it. You've just got to be the better person. Try to be the better person." My parents are weird. They just kind of let us learn life as it comes.

After half of fifth grade, I moved to [T] Elementary because my brother got into a bunch of trouble and we had to move from where we were at. We had to switch schools and switch our home. He was doing drugs and he was selling them at the junior high. He was stealing things out of people's lockers and he was bringing knives to school.

[Her head hangs a little.] *[T]was just weird, just like school. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't great. It was just weird people. When you get into a new school for the first time and you don't know anybody, it's like a lot of people don't talk to you. After awhile, I got to fit in somewhat.*

I made a couple good friends. I have this one friend from elementary school all the way up to junior high and she was a good friend to me but we always fought. It was just playing around fight, but we actually hurt each other. [She sits up and crosses her arms on the table.] She would kick me in the shin with her heel and in the thigh, really hard, as hard as she could, just for no reason at all. [She kicks the air under the table in front of her, holding onto the table with both hands.] Like we would be playing a video game or something and she'd die or something and then hit me or sock me in the arm. Sometimes, like if she really did hurt me and wouldn't stop, then I would get mad. The harder we hit, the harder we could make each other hurt, the better - the more fun it was, you know? [The corners of her mouth turn up slightly as she talks.] I know, it's weird. It just went on like that. That was our whole friendship, but we had a good friendship. We talked to each other about everything. My parents kind of got worried and her parents got really worried. They were like, "you guys need to stop this!" Even sat us all down and we just laughed about it. [She giggles to herself.]

I won't be friends with her anymore. Her mom taught her bad morals. [Her voice rises and sounds angry.] I told her things in confidence that I wanted her to keep to herself but she took it upon herself to tell her mom and her and my mom have known each other for 20 years, before any of us kids were even born. So she went and told her mom, her mom went and told my parents, who already knew the things that I was going

through. My parents said, "You know what, you don't need to be knowing about this stuff because this is our family business, you know? You just need to mind your own business." I just laughed in her face.

I wasn't friends with her for like a year after that and then we started gradually becoming friends again and then I told her another thing. I had a new boyfriend and I started doing things with him. I ran away and then I came back and I told her "I did these things." She's like, "oh cool. I won't tell anybody." She told her mom, her mom told my mom again, and my mom was like, "I don't believe you," because my mom's the kind of person who thinks, "Rose is an angel, Rose doesn't have sex before marriage, she doesn't do this and she doesn't do that." I kind of kept that little idea going with my mom.

I was like, "you've been my friend for this long and you betray me!" [Her voice rises and she points into the air in front of her.] She's really hurting too that she lost me as a friend because I was a good friend to her. I kept everything that she told me a secret. I do that to everybody. If somebody tells me they want me to keep it secret, I will unless they're going to go and commit suicide or something.

I attended [L] Junior High School after [T]. I was in the principal's office almost every day. It wasn't really like teachers teaching me because I didn't really pay attention to almost anything there. I'd just go to class, get kicked out of class because I was too talkative, fighting or I didn't do my homework. I didn't really care though because I liked the ISS teacher anyway. She would just talk to us all the time. Her name was Miss Parker. She was cool. [She nods her head slightly and looks down.] I was one of the ten regulars to ISS. I was in there almost like maybe three times a week. Going to ISS, that was just the place to be, you know? [She looks up.] Every time we went there, we had to

write a paragraph on what we did wrong and how we could make it better. Then just sit there for the rest of the class period just kicking it, just talking to the ISS teacher. She'd give us candies and it was good to just talk.

Me and one of my friends, Kenaan, we would just get in trouble for the heck of it, just to go to ISS. Kenaan really liked me. We got in this fight and were yelling at each other on purpose, like we even planned it out before class and we accomplished getting sent to ISS! Oh my gosh, it was hilarious, man. [She smiles and giggles to herself.] Because I got sent to the office a lot, I got to know the vice-principal pretty good. We got close. If he was having a bad day or something, he would be rude and I would say, "You know, what's wrong? You know, what's happening?" [Her face shows concern.]

I got in trouble a lot for fighting, but it just felt like I'd done something big, you know? My dad was the one egging me on. Like I'd come home and say, "I got in a fight today and I am kicked out of school for the next week," and my dad would say, "did you win?" Everyone was supportive of my fights. Like, "yeah! Yeah." Even at [the traditional high school] too, everyone was like, "go Rose!" I felt good every time I'd beat somebody up. I think sometimes fighting's OK because at least they'll wake up in the morning that way. For the people, the gangsters that go shoot people, that ain't cool. They're just gone, you know? You can never take that back. [She shakes her head back and forth as she speaks.]

I fought maybe three, no four girls. Well, actually it was five then. [She counts them out on her fingers and looks up as she thinks.] But I only got beat up by one girl. We were good friends, but it wasn't healthy. We were doing bad things together. We broke into this guy's house and stole money, like tore things up in his house because they

were hitting on us the day before. [She laughs.] We knew that they were gone and so we broke in. Teepee'd the outside of this guy's house together. We snuck out together and got drunk, smoked weed, did whatever. The guys still stayed close with us. There was this one time that we were staying at her house and one of the guys, the cutest one, he didn't speak very good English, he snuck into her window and started macking on both of us, like kissing on us and all this. He was 19 and he thought we were 16 but we were 13, 7th grade. She's the one that invited him over. By then she had already slept with like eight guys.

Me and her got in lots of trouble together. One day she wanted me to go cruising with her and her new boyfriend. So I was like, "all right, let's see if we can work this out." I lied to my mom. I told her, "hey, I'm going to this girl's youth group." She's like "OK, just be back at 9:30" and I was like, "OK." It was her and her boyfriend in the back seat and they were all smoking and all over each other. I was in the passenger seat and this other guy in the front seat. He didn't know how to speak English that good and I didn't know how to speak Spanish at all, like AT ALL. They took us up into the mountains until like 11. I was like, "I have to be home, I'm going to get in so much trouble." We got down into town and her and her boyfriend just got out the car right in the middle of the street and just started walking. I was sitting there alone with this guy I didn't know at all! He didn't even speak English and I'm just freaking out, like "I'm going to get raped! Something's going to happen to me." I finally got him to go to my house where I'm supposed to be and he was like, "I want keys." I was like, "I don't have no keys man, just leave me - stop right here and let me get out," and he's like, "I want keys." I was like, "no keys! I don't know what you're talking about, seriously." Finally

I got it, he was meaning to say kiss and I was like, "yeah, blech! See ya!" [She sticks her tongue out.] I just got out and just starting walking, and he followed me there and I was like, "hey! Turn around and go home!" I was freaking out, but I got to my house and I knew that I was going to get in trouble so I was like a dog with his little tail behind him, freaking out. I went and hugged my mom and she's like, "where were you?" I told my parents everything. I got beat with a belt and I deserved it. My mom screamed at me and I'd never heard her scream at me like that. She threw a chair at me!

So when I got back to school that is a reason to beat somebody up seriously. She left me all by myself. She took me into a place where she knew it wasn't safe. [Her voice rises in anger.] I started a fight with her and I was like, "dude, don't ever talk to me or else I'm going to seriously hurt you!" I started pushing her and then she clocked me, right against my head and it made this big old lump on my head. After that, she threatened my house. I didn't even see her but I knew it was her that was doing it. That girl finally got put in jail.

I only got in one fight at [the traditional high school]; I wasn't there for very long. I just was in a point in my life that I was just like I don't care about anything. Why do I need all this stuff for? [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her palms upward.] I want to do what I want and I don't care. You know, how sometimes you want to rebel? That's what I did. Have you ever heard the phrase "Fuck you, Fuck me." [She points forward and then at herself.] Its like if I am saying this against my parents, then it hurts me more than it hurts them because I am just making myself bad. By getting away from school and like f-ing school, it is not hurting them, at all. It is hurting me, because I don't have enough credits so that I can graduate on time.

People are still scared of me. [She sits up tall and puts both hands flat on the table in front of her.] I ask some people and they're like, you just have that look like you can tear some crap up. I need to get on your good side or not talk to you at all. If they get really close, good friends with me, then there's no way I'll beat them up, even if they do something.

I got kicked out of [the traditional high school] one time. Not like kicked out but like suspended because this girl, my locker partner, went off and gave all her friends our locker number. I guess so that they could put all their stuff in the locker or whatever. But I was mad. I got my math book stolen and I had to pay \$52 for it. One girl she gave our locker combination to ended up getting in a fight with her and they ended up not liking each other any more. The other girl ended breaking into our locker, taking some of my stuff and some of her stuff and putting it into the trash. When I dropped out of school, I came and I knew where her 2nd period class was, right by our locker. I waited for her after class and I just beat the crap out of her, bad. She was crying. I beat her up bad. [She smiles and giggles to herself.]

I told my parents I was kicked out a couple of months before I was kicked out, just because I didn't want to go anymore. What I would do was, I would get up in the morning, get dressed, then say goodbye while they were in their room or whatever, and then I would go up in my top bunk, until they left. [She reaches her right arm above her head and with her palm facing down, makes a flat motion over her head.] I would just come out when they left and do whatever I needed to do: watch TV, ate, hung out, that was it. I had some friends over. My boyfriend, his aunt and I used to spend time together and we used to talk about life and things. I know a lot more things about her than my

boyfriend does and that's his family. A lot of things that had happened to me, happened to her also. She and I were really able to connect, and we used to smoke a lot of pot all the time. When you do that it's like, you really talk about a lot of things that you wouldn't talk about if you weren't like that. Whenever I talk about it, it is a whole stream of memories and I can still remember when it happened, every little thing, every little detail, like it was yesterday.

My brother is the one that got me started on that. He gave me my first pot, my first bowl, and my cousin smoked it with me. Once I started getting into it more, I found out that, my aunts and my uncles and my GRANDMA do it too.

Give me one moment in time when I am more than I thought I could be, when all of my dreams are a heartbeat away and the answers are all up to me. –Whitney Houston

I started at [the alternative high school] first semester of this year. My parents said that if I didn't get into school by when school started, then I would be grounded until I got into school. So, I went back to school the next year. I visited and I liked the way everyone just got treated with respect here. That is what this school is all about is respect. They don't care who you are, they'll just talk to you. I mean the teachers over there at the other school are just doing a job and going home. [She points off to her right.] They just didn't care if I was there or not. They don't know all the students there, but here every teacher knows every student, personally. I mean they have a one-to-one friendship basis. [She points in front of her and then back at herself.] Maybe a couple teachers don't have that basis. But every teacher tries to have a friendship with all the students. That's a lot better because they're trying to keep you in here, doing anything to help you understand and to help you pass the class.

I love it here at [the alternative high school], man. This is the best school. I learned a lot, mostly just from the six weeks of Disco. I learned a lot, like how to deal with my anger. A lot of times when I got in fights, I would just blank. [She waves her hand in front of her face.] What happens is that I get adrenaline and I start shaking, my whole face feels hot, and I go crazy on somebody. I blank out and sometimes I don't remember what I did. They talked about it in the Discovery program. The thing you need to do is before they flick your switch on, you need to make steps that will like decrease your anger instead of escalate. Mostly take deep breaths and talk it out instead of trying to fight. I learned that "Fuck you Fuck me" thing in Disco too.

In Disco, you had to write a autobiography about yourself and your whole life and all the struggles I had been through and it was HARD to go through that again. [She looks down and shakes her head back and forth.] I was on this chapter I could not get through, man, tears streaming down my eyes and everyone's like "what's wrong with you? What's happening to you?" Everyone learns from the Discovery program. Some don't. Some just "fake it to make it." The people that really do, they are the ones that are truly changed.

I have a boyfriend. He is 6'2" and 260 pounds. [She lifts her right hand above her head with her palm down, and then spreads her arms on either side of her, wider than her torso.] He actually doesn't go to school anymore. He dropped out. He did go to [the traditional high school]. Not when I was there, but way back before me. He was there for three days and he just kept ditching. I am trying to get him back in school here. He will like it here. He really needs the support because he's the kind of person that likes drugs. We broke up for awhile because he was doing drugs. He was saying "this is my

last day, I am going to have big party on this day, and then I am going to quit.” That was my birthday. A couple of nights after that, I caught him. I caught him doing drugs, so I broke up with him. I was “unless you get your life straight, then you can come back to me.” That is just how it works. You have to work things through. It was teaching him a lesson. I mean he was suffering. I mean he made me suffer for a long time. He didn’t tell me anything. He hid things from me. He had a \$400 debt with a crack dealer and he didn’t tell me about it. He hid it from me. He became a big old crack head.

He has been sober for not that long, like a couple of weeks and a half. He’s doing alright. I just need him to get in here so he can learn about life and about how everything’s supposed to work. I have been with him a year and seven months. I love him. I feel comfortable with my boyfriend and my boyfriend protects me. Still when I have been with him, I have been molested. I mean I haven’t been raped since I was 5 but sometimes guys try to touch me and do things to me that I don’t like. The first time that it happened when I was with him, my ex-boyfriend would sleep at my house and he really treated me like I was a toy to play with. [She speaks with anger in her voice, sits up, and places her hands flat on the table in front of her.] He made me do things, like persuaded me to do things that I really didn’t want to do. I was sitting by him, and then my parents went to sleep and then my little brother had just went into his room. We were watching a movie and I wanted to watch the rest of it. I told him I was cold, so he like took my arms aside [She spreads her arms to each side.] and was like, “let me see [your nipples]”, and I was all like “dude, don’t touch me.” He was like, “well you always liked when I did that.” I was like, “when did I say I liked it? I thought you really liked me, but you used me. And that’s not cool that you think you can just do it again.” I went to sleep and I

told my boyfriend the next day and that was the first time my boyfriend was like, "well did you do anything with him?" I was like, "I am telling you that this guy molested me and you are telling me did I do anything?" [She speaks with anger in her voice.] From then on he was like, "ok I won't let anybody hurt you ever again." That guy never came over again.

I tried to kill myself once. [She looks down and shakes her head.] It was this boyfriend thing. He was accusing me of cheating on him and he's like, "there's no more us." And I was like, "oh my gosh, he won't even listen to me." That was the only solution at the time. But then why should I punish myself for something that's not my fault? I took pills, a whole handful of aspirin. My mom saved my life actually. I had to crawl to my mom's room and I said, "I need to talk to you." She helped me stand up and she sat me at the kitchen table and I told her what happen and she said OK. I just seen a little tear come down her eye, and she's like, "OK, this is what you need to do, we need to keep you up." She stayed up with me the whole night until like four or five o'clock in the morning and we had to go to church the next morning too. She stayed up with me, she walked me around the trailer park, and she made me eat some bread to soak up some of the stuff that was in my stomach. [She rubs her belly as she speaks.] She kept me alive.

I have a promise ring. [She plays with a thin gold band with a clear stone on her left hand ring finger.] Me and my boyfriend will get married later after I'm graduated and then we're going to go travel. After we get married, that's going to be our honeymoon, just travel. Probably go live up in the mountains in California. I have never been there, but that is the land of opportunity. That is why I want to go. I want to be

with him and I want to see him change because I'm so involved in his life. He has a job now. Well, actually, he didn't get it because he's illegal. Today was supposed to be his first day, but he needed to have his ID and he doesn't have one. He will have to borrow someone else's.

I work 20-25 hours in a fast food joint. I got suspended from my job for three days because I called one of the managers the B word. I don't like her anyway. She's always been mean to me and just had an attitude from the very first start. Sexual harassment's a big one in my work. I've had people just sit there and stare at me, customers just sit there and stare. [She pokes her head in front of her and opens her eyes wide.] I'm the lobby person. I have to take care of the lobby and make sure it's all clean, so I have to be out there a lot. I've had people who are like 34 years old still hitting on me. There are a lot of guys that like me, but people at my work try to flirt with me all the time. I'm just like "crazy guys!" [She smiles and giggles to herself.]

My life now I feel like it's not even real, like I'm in a dream world or something, that's how I feel. [She smiles and nods.] It's a really good life that I have. I am pulling pretty good grades. Mostly g-d motivates me. It gives me, like strength and hope, to just keep going like "I can do it." G-d wants me to do something in my life and I can not do it if I am going to be in school and be in school and be in school forever. I have to hurry it up and get this stuff done and take care of business. That's what the motto for Discovery, "take care of business." I feel proud that I have a job and I keep a job. I pay for my own stuff, everything that I need. My parents don't pay anything for me. I have no help from my parents, except for maybe like food and shelter. I have a 3.7 GPA. Plus I am doing this stuff that I do with work and all that.

My dad is setting up a contract for my singing career. Actually, he had it set up and this guy never called me. [She sits up.] If things don't work out, I have a feeling that there will be other leads. There's this guy who has a recording studio in Denver who said he'd like to hear me too, but I have to have a \$100 of recording time. I have to bring up the money and go to Denver. There's another guy in Greeley with that same situation. My boyfriend just went to California and he met this guy over there, his brother's friend, that he has his own recording studio and he's been looking for a female voice. So I have a few other ways I can get there. If not, I'll go to beauty school and start doing famous people's hair. [She sits up a little more.]

If I don't get where I want to be, if I'm not already singing by the end of high school, then maybe a few years after that because I want to travel for a few years. I want to go back to school because I want to go seek opportunities while I'm traveling. I want to see if I can get into the music business, then after that I'm going to publish a book of poems. I'm going to do that and I'm going to be somebody in this world. Man, I want people to remember me.

Reflection

When she is through, I ask Rose, “would you like to stay and listen to my thoughts or return to the group?” She wants to hear what I have to say, she says, as she leans back in her chair and folds her arms over her chest. I hope she is as curious as she is concerned and defensive.

“I enjoyed meeting with Rose and listening to her stories,” I begin. “Although she could remain distant and somewhat distracted, she did appear to enjoy herself.

Several times while I talked to her during the interview times, she chose to answer her ringing cell phone. I listened to her half of the conversation while I waited for her to be finished. Each time she was talking to her boyfriend, assuring him she would be by to visit, and asking him 'ok? Ok?' several times. I found it interesting that she thought everyone was afraid of her, but with her boyfriend, she seemed more afraid of him. I once told her that I was surprised everyone was so afraid of her because she had never given me any problem. She said, she was glad." Rose smiles at me and unfolds her arms. "She believed she was changing and that g-d was helping her and her boyfriend be less violent. It occurred to me several times that Rose identified with being aggressive and felt fondly about those times in her life. Her pride is changing; now, she is more proud of her current path and the ways she is using what she is learning.

"I noticed throughout our conversations that I wanted to relate to Rose's story. I tried to tell her about my own experiences, to counterbalance the burden of sharing oneself and to relieve some of the stories and thoughts I was having about my own life. She never asked me about myself and I felt like her lack of questions or engagement after I told my stories meant she was not interested in me or my story." She giggles, looks down, and shakes her head.

"My notes about Rose are sparse. I am not sure why. There are several times I mentioned her stoic manner of interaction outside of the interview setting. She would stand before me as I talked with her in the hall or the dining area and look the other way, lean against the wall, and provide little in the way of give-and-take in our conversation. She mostly listened, and when she would respond, she typically gave me short responses.

“I asked Rose to tell me about being interviewed and about sharing her life with me. She felt good about sharing her life. She liked talking about her story; each time she did a piece of her healed. She said: *It is sort of weird to listen to my whole story about me.... It is unusual. I like telling about my life and what I have been through, but... listening to it like, its like listening to a movie or a book being told to you, you know? It's like 'whoa!' I liked it because I like telling people about what I have been through and all the places I've been and all the things that I have done and I like telling people that kind of stuff, but listening to it being told to me is a whole different story. That is like my whole life like right there. [She giggles.] ... I'm not shy to tell people, you know.... Well, it changes the way I think about myself. Like, like watching my whole life, in an hour is weird, you know. Because it seems like I have been living for like 19 years and to listen to it in a whole hour, it's like whoa. It makes you look at it differently.* I asked her to tell me how she saw herself differently. She had difficulty responding to that question saying, *I don't know. What do you mean? What do you mean change?*

“One of the areas that stood out for me as I talked with Rose, as I read her stories, and as I retold the stories in this dissertation was that Rose had a very interesting relationship with the men in her life. Through Rose's view, very few men in her life were not attracted to her and did not flirt with her. I wondered if she ever noticed her relationships to men were similar or if she in some way needed those relationships to be the way they were. I remember thinking about the theories explaining the impact early sexual experiences have on young women, wondering if Rose always identified her relationship to men as sexual.

“Rose did ask me to leave out one story she was afraid might get one of the least-

liked teachers fired. I honored that request. The story could have caused problems for one of the teachers at the alternative high school and would not have benefited this narrative. The power struggle she was experiencing with this teacher could be seen in other stories Rose told.”

Rose smiled and looked relieved. I bet she was thinking I was going to do something mean with her story. I am glad she stayed to listen and was not offended by what I said.

“Cool. Am I done now?” she asks.

“Sure, unless there is anything you’d like to say in response?” I respond.

“Nah. That was all I wanted to say,” she says, pushing back her chair and standing up.

“Thanks for sharing,” says Lizzy. “You are truly an amazing young woman.”

“Yeah,” says Kate. “I liked hearing your story. Thanks for being here.”

“Thank you Rose,” says Mike.

“Take care,” says Lisa.

Rose smiles back to everyone and nods. “No problem,” she says. I walk her to the door, open it, and as she leaves, I lean out to invite Jawny Dehp in next.

Jawny Dehp

Jawny Dehp is a small, stylish, 17-year old young woman. She has beautiful blond hair tussled in a loose ponytail on her head. Her eyes are accented with black eyeliner and brown eye shadow. The decorations on her wrists include rainbow strings, ribbons, yarn, leather bands, beaded bracelets, and silver rings. Her sleeves are slightly pulled up her arm. She wears a pink light jacket over a thin white flowered shirt and a white undershirt. She is wearing khaki colored corduroys that hang low on her waist and run below her puffy grey and pink tennis shoes. She talks very quietly. After walking into the room, she chooses a chair on the opposite side of the room near Mike, sits back, draws her knees up, and rests her feet on the edge of the seat cushion. She smiles, wraps her arms around her shins, and places her chin on her knees.

I close the door and take my seat. “Jawny Dehp, let me introduce you to my committee,” I say, smiling. I introduce everyone. They smile and say hi. She smiles back, giggling and bringing her hands to her mouth and then playing with her hair. I bet she is nervous. She is used to telling her story like this, but I am sure it feels a bit different considering the location and our relationship. She is used to telling her story in the drug court, the court room, and her support groups. This is a bit different for her, I think. She readjusts before she begins, laying her head back on the chair, sitting on the edge of the seat cushion, and stretching her legs out in front of her. She begins her story, talking directly to me:

Friendship is a sheltering tree. –Coleridge

Joe's leaving. I can't believe it. When I heard, I cried for two days straight.

[She tugs her sleeve and wipes it across her face, smelling the fabric. She pauses.] *He*

was the main reason I went to this high school. There's no point now. I don't even know if I am going to come back. I wanted to go back to [the traditional school] after Disco, but Joe was here and I was all happy and so I just stayed here. He is such a good buddy. It will be so hard for me without him here. I didn't want to come to school today, I was all rested and relaxed, and I just wanted to sleep in, but my mom said she wouldn't come pick me up later. I wanted her to come take me to school later, because I knew Joe was bringing his daughter today. I had to see her. [She smiles broadly.]

Joe's my favorite. [She sits up and looks around the room.] He told me he has favorite students and I told him I was going to go talk to my other favorite teachers. He's said, "Don't say that. You are my favorite." Now, he's leaving. I can't believe it. I am so sad. It will be hard. We're going to Pine Ridge together though. We're going up to the reservation to do a little sweat lodge. It's a third world country in America. I am kind of scared, because there's scary people up there and I don't get to shower for eight days and you've got to use port-a-potties. [She giggles.] There are spiders in them. I am going to go with insect repellent up the ying-yang and you can't bring your blow drier or your curling iron. [She raises her right hand and begins to touch and move her hair.] My mom was like "you are not going to make it. You are going to be calling halfway through and telling me you want to come home." [She smiles and giggles.] I was going to leave Pine Ridge early to go to that leadership conference in town. Joe told me he is leaving, so I decided I am going to Pine Ridge the whole time, instead of the leadership thing.

I know it is not just Joe, but he is the main reason I am here. I chose this school because I felt like it would help me get through this whole thing and the teachers. I love

the teachers. They are so great. I chose to come here. I got kicked out of [the traditional school], because I wasn't going. If I was high, then I would love school. "Oh, yeah, school!" [She smiles and giggles.] Otherwise, I wouldn't go. So I will graduate in like 2007. I was supposed to graduate in 2006, but it's not going to happen. [She smiles and giggles.] Oh well. My mom says that I should stay and then she can use me for her taxes, so I can wait until I am like 20.

Too many people keep looking forward to the good old days. –Arnold H.

Glasow

I always think like how stupid I used to be. I always think about everything that happened and how it all happened. Yesterday was 4-20, which was really hard because it was like 4-20. You don't know what 4-20 means? [She shakes her head and smiles.] It's the number for pot. All the pot heads are like 4-20. It used to be a cop number, but also when marijuana first came out there were only 420 chemicals in it. Now there's like thousands. My probation officer was really worried I would do something stupid on 4-20, but I didn't. I did last year and got thrown back in jail for 3 weeks. I used to be so stupid. [She looks down at her legs and fiddles with the seam on her right pant leg.]

It was the drugs. They are powerful, drugs. Like I was happy, but I was unhappy because of the drugs, and I have been clean and sober off of the drugs for 7 months, almost 8. And that's huge. When I was in drug court, like the whole time I kept getting high. Like people used to call me like a hoe and a druggie because I was like the only girl in my school who had lost her virginity and I was like the only girl who did drugs, so I was like this big no-no. I hung out with all the guys because all the girls were like preps or Mexicans and I was neither. So I hung out with all the boys. [She giggles.] All those girls now are doing what I used to do, like they are all into sex and stuff and they

are all like hoes and I'm just like "been there, done that, girls." They are thinking it's so cool. When I went back, they were all like "oh my g-d! I can see why you smoked pot back then". I was like "you're dumb. So stupid." Girls, man. [She shakes her head and looks down at her pants again.]

When I was in the third grade, we had this tent in the back yard and my brother, he had some pot in a pipe and all his friends were there and saying "let's get your sister stoned." [She looks up, smiles, and giggles.] So they got me stoned. I wanted to do it because I had seen them do it all the time. I was like "yeah, let me have some." They held it for me and I just took in a breath and I coughed so hard. I was like "let me have another one." After that, I used to see my brother's bong in his room and I used to light it to see if there was anything in it. I was like 8. He was like 12. [She smiles.] When I was 13, I started smoking pot regularly. I started marijuana in like 6th grade. I started meth in the summer between 7th and 8th and then acid and all that stuff. I did a lot of mushrooms in Nebraska and when I got here I did quite a lot of acid. I did a lot of Coricidin in Nebraska because it was easier. I started alcohol when I was 14. We would spend a few days doing meth and then we'd go on an alcohol binge and then we'd smoke pot like every day and then we'd go to hallucinogens and then we'd start the cycle all over. [She smiles and giggles.]

We all started at the same time. We used to hang out with the older kids. When I was 14, I was with people that were like 19 and 20 and 21 and I thought I was cool. They were all dropouts and we used to smoke pot at first. Then all of a sudden, they were like "do you want to try some of this?" I got into hallucinogens through friends. I used once a week until I moved here. During the summer, I like did it all the time and then I moved

here. I used every day because my friend got killed in Nebraska. This guy who raped and murdered her was like one of the guys I used to hang out with, so it was so horrible. If he ever gets out, I'll kill him. [She raises her voice and sounds angry.]

I can't remember much about the schools I have been to. [She looks down and shakes her head. She furrows her brow and looks up.] *I started kindergarten and went through half of 1st grade at [CV] Elementary. My mom had just married her lover. He had two kids, two boys, and then I had a brother. They were nice, but I don't really remember much of them. I remember his anger. He was like getting mad at my mom and my bedroom was right next to theirs. He had a cigarette in his mouth and crazy anger in his eyes.* [She motions to the right side of her mouth and then narrows her eyes to look sinister.] *He was walking down the hall trying to grab the door and open it. I just hid underneath the blanket.* [She holds her fists up around her neck as if pulling up a blanket.] *I am not sure; I think he did hit her.* [She moves her hands back to her lap.] *My real dad used to abuse my mom too.*

I went to [K] Elementary School in Denver for half of 1st and half of 2nd. I don't remember much of that. I think that is when they divorced was when I went to [K]. When they divorced, my stepfather, he took all the money out of all the savings accounts, maxed the credit cards, and left us with nothing. We had no choice. We had to stay in a shelter. It smelled like shampoo. It just was a lot of abused people, but that is a thing of the past. I hope I don't have that for my kids.

We had to move again, so I went to [C] Elementary School. I went there for half of 2nd grade into half of 3rd grade. Then in third grade my ex-step father found out where we lived and so we had to move with my dad. [She looks up and begins to twist her hair

around her right index finger.] *My mom was frightened for us. My dad wanted us to come live with him. He moved to Nebraska a month before we did and he had a girlfriend, so it wasn't like they were going to reconcile. I hope my mom didn't want to. She might have but I don't know.*

So we moved to Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Half of 3rd through 5th grade, I went to [LH] Elementary School. I loved it there, because it was so small and the first day I went everybody loved me. Everybody was so welcoming. [She smiles broadly.] I tried to be welcoming for new people too. My mom and brother smoked pot a lot and I tried it that one time in the tent out back. For 6th grade, I went to [B] Middle School. That is when I got into pot everyday. I used to not do my homework and slack off in school because it was cool. I guess I was trying to look cool. If you are all brain, you are not as cool. It was like "do your homework? oh my gosh... NERD. I'll just copy off what's her name that sits next to me." [She laughs.] I was trying to make an impression on the boys. I had a lot of boyfriends, but I was always the heartbroken.

We moved to Gering and I had to change to [G] Junior High across the North Platte River. So I was called a "river rat." My mom had this bi-polar boyfriend named Matt. He was a complete dick. [She speaks with an angry tone in her voice.] He didn't take his meds, so he would be nice one minute and then he and my brother would get into a fist fight. Once he kicked my brother's teeth in, and that's how my brother went to Job Corp. We moved out of his house, because it was awful. My brother went to Job Corp, so my mom moved us back in with him. I hated him and I had to live with him. He had all this anger towards my brother to put towards me now. I hated him. Once I was on probation for a curfew violation. I was out past ten and under the age of 16. I didn't go

to court, so I got put on probation. I didn't know there was a curfew until I got in trouble for it. It was like 2:30 in the morning. [She giggles.]

Back then, I smoked pot with my mom and Matt. My mom said, "If you don't straighten out, I am going to like blah blah blah." He was always mean, so he was like, "I will tell your probation officer that you're smoking pot." I was like, "you do that and I'll tell 'em that you raped me." [She sits up and puts her hands flat on the table in front of her.] He was like, "but there are tests that can prove that I didn't do that." [She shakes her head.] I was like, "but I can get those taken care of," because I hated him. He got scared that I was actually going to do that. He didn't tell my probation officer, but we moved out. [She lies back in the chair, slouching, and begins to play with her nails.] That's why we moved here in the middle of my 8th grade year. I went to [L] then. At this point, I had gotten into my drug cycle and had met friends to do things with.

The Coricidin pills, cough and cold, were great. If you take like 8 of them, you will hallucinate. I used to do that all the time. I loved it. It is so fun. You do things... like you just go have adventures and it is like so much different to be like in this mind stage and to look at the world and thinking of all these different things. You can look at someone and like "oh my g-d this person..." and all these things go into your head. [She smiles and leans back.] We used to go to the Wal-Mart because it's open all night. [She smiles and giggles.] We would go there and walk around. If you look at someone and you wink your eye, it's like you see two eyes, two noses, and two mouths and it's all like on the same face. [She winks her right eye and smiles.] It is better than sitting there.

We'd usually stay up all night and go across the street to the tennis court and play over there with all the swings. We'd stay up until like it wore off and we would watch the

Sponge Bob cartoon early in the morning. [She smiles and giggles, putting her hands in front of her mouth.] That is why I love Sponge Bob. I used to watch him when I was hallucinating and he is so much funnier. We'd go get those fuzzy posters and color them in all night. I have like eight of them at my house. [She motions her hands to the size of the posters, approximately 1 foot by 2 feet.] We'd do puzzles. We'd talk.

My friend's mom didn't like us doing hallucinogens but she smoked pot with us, she used to do meth with us, and she would drink with us. Have you never met one of those cool moms? [She smiles and giggles.] I've met a lot. My mom is like that. She likes to party.

I used to steal too. [She smiles and giggles.] I stole hundreds of dollars from my brother and his friends. I was so mean to them. They wouldn't even notice that I stole 50 bucks from them. They hated me. I would come home and bring my friends over who I had smoked pot with and leave them with my brother. Then my other friends would come over and I would go back to my room with weird creepy looking guys and just smoke. My boyfriend and I just did drugs together. When I sobered up, we didn't have much in common. [She smiles and giggles.] He was cute and he was rich. That is all you need in a man, right? That is what my mom says. [She smiles and giggles.]

My mom knew all about my drug use. In 9th grade, I started smoking pot a lot with my brother and my mom. It was a whole family thing. [She smiles and giggles.] Like every day. My brother went to Job Corp and that's when I went crazy, I guess. When I got to town, my friend had died, so I was doing a lot of drugs then, you know like hallucinogens and I had gotten into meth really bad. It is pretty addictive, and so you know I was going at it for forever. I hardly went to school or did work, so I had to go to

[the transition school] to do packets and make up the credits of my 9th grade year before going to high school. After [the transition school], I went to [the traditional school] for like a quarter and a half. I was kicked out for poor attendance. I was too interested in doing drugs. Like I wouldn't go to school unless I was high. [She smiles and giggles.] I'd go sober every once in a while but that was just that I felt I had to go to school and I had to quit skippin'. I got 5 credits for the time I was there. [She smiles and giggles.] It was that bad. I had four classes a day and they were an hour and a half each class. It is so long and boring and the teachers weren't engaging or anything. I left in January.

My mom yelled at me, "You got to get out of here. I don't want you staying here. If you aren't going to go to school, you've got to leave." She won't admit to that. She says I ran away but she kicked me out. I packed up all my bags and I left for a couple weeks, until she went to jail. She had this outstanding warrant from 1992 in Denver for bad checks. She went to jail. I went home for awhile. She got all mad because I didn't get her out, and blah blah blah, and so she came home and she was pissed. She was like "you didn't get me out of jail, and blah blah blah blah." It was nice for her not to be there. [She smiles and giggles.] She cried, still to this day. [She smiles and giggles.] She sent me to court and she called me where I was and told me I had court and so I went back to court and she told the judge that she didn't want me back at home. She didn't know what to do with me. I was out of control. I was into drugs and blah blah blah blah. They put me in jail.

That was last January and I cried. You get one phone call, you know? The next period I called her and I was like, "you are going to be sorry for this. Don't you ever do this to me again! F-you, you F-en bleep." [She laughs.] I was going crazy because I

hated it there. It was so horrible. It is so boring. [She shakes her head.] You have to go to school. It's dumb. They have a school there. You go every day. If you are not going to be there for awhile, you just go to the orientation pod with the boys. You have to wear these green clothes and your hairs messed up because you don't get a brush and you only get six minutes to take a shower. [She touches her hair.] From the minute they open your door, you have six minutes to shower and get back. That means you have to brush your hair, brush your teeth, wash you body, wash your hair all in six minutes. [She does the motion of each activity with her hands.] You take off half your clothes in the room and you run out there and get your soap. [She smiles and giggles.] They only have body soap. They don't have shampoo or conditioner. Your toothbrush is miniature. [She puts her thumb and index finger two inches apart and lifts her hand in front of her.] It sucks and the comb, it's a comb. You have to brush it in six minutes and you are ripping out your hair. [She motions brushing her hair, with her head jerking back as if hair is being pulled out.] It sucks.

I was like up for four or five days before that and I hadn't eaten in so long. I was coming off several binges. [She smiles and giggles.] We went to bed at like 9:30 and woke up at like 5:30 and I was falling asleep the whole day because all I needed to do was go sleep and eat. I got light headed. You are really hungry and all you want to do is eat and lunch or breakfast would come. I was like "yes yes," and it didn't even get me full. It was so horrible. I just ate and slept the whole time. I don't ever want to go back there.

So my mom got put in jail for five days. She got upset. We got into a fight and I went to jail for two weeks. When I came back, I was on ankle monitor for a couple of

weeks. I couldn't leave my house. My friends would come over and do drugs with me. I was in drug court and they didn't really notice. I would go to court high. [She smiles and giggles.] If I had a UA today, I would go home after the UA and get high. I wouldn't have another UA for like three days. It only stays in your system for 72 hours. I knew how to do it like that but I haven't done that in a long time. [She smiles and giggles.] It's hard because like the other day I went over to my friend Drew's house and he and his friends were just doing it right in front of me and I just started crying. It's so hard. Somewhere in there, I stole my mom's car and I went back to jail for a week.

In April, I started orientation and Disco for this high school, but I failed because of 4-20. I got high on ex and lied to Ryan. I told Ed and Ryan that someone put something in my drink and that's why I relapsed because I was so scared that I was going to go to jail. [She smiles and giggles.] I didn't want to go to jail, so I'd try to be good, but then like, something always messes things up. [She smiles and giggles.] So I went to drug court and the judge was like "tell me what happened." "I did ecstasy" and so I went to jail for two weeks. I failed Disco.

After I got out, I did good for awhile, but then I got sick of all the UAs and all the appointments and all the court dates, so I ran away for 9 days back to Nebraska. My mom came and got me because I guess my friend's boyfriend told on us. [She speaks with anger in her voice.] The cops came and got me and they called my mom and put me in jail there, which is like three bedrooms and an office. I was just sittin' there, sittin' there, waiting for my mom to come get me. She's just like "we are just going to take you home and put you on ankle monitor" and when we got home, she sent me to the judge.

She said "I don't want her anymore, send her to jail." I went back for 3 weeks and then had to go to [TP] for 6 months.

[TP] is an in-patient treatment center, so people live there. Your day is planned out for you. Like when I got home, it was rec and after rec, it was group and after group, it was.... It was cool. [She smiles and giggles.] I really followed the rules because I wanted to get out. It was just such a motivating factor not to be around those girls, having all those rules, and not being able to sleep in my own bed, in my own room and take as long showers as you want. [TP] sucked. The girls there bring you down. If you're having a good day, they like piss you off and there's like nothing you can do about it. [She shakes her head and raises her voice.]

While I was there, I just wanted to come here because basically, when I came here, since I was in drug court, I needed help and support. This school had it. If I needed someone to talk to, like an adult figure or something, they were there. It just clicked in me, this is the school for me. So I was in [TP] for 6 months and the whole time I just kept thinking about this school and how I wanted to go back. I came and talked to Ed. He said, "You have to prove to me. You know actions speak louder than words. You have to do good in [TP]. I want a good report back before you come back." So I had to do all this stuff to get back. I had to show him. And then I got the highest grade in my Disco class. [She smiles and giggles.]

The people here are so smart. [She extends the "so" for a couple of seconds.] You'd expect rockers to be here but no, they are really smart. I have trouble keeping up with them. They're like "oh that's easy" and they're filling out the whole worksheet. I'm like "what did he just talk about?" Since I have been trying, now I get straight As and

stuff. Not like straight As, I did get a couple of Bs, two Bs all year. It helps a lot that I am on ADHD meds. I am not as fast as I usually am [She lays back in her chair, feigning an slow, exhausted state.], but I think that after I get done with drug court, which is like in 4 more months, I am going to stop taking it. It's helping me get through it, like instead of wanting to use and stuff. When I stop taking the ADHD meds, I am happier and more social. I change back and am a social butterfly again. [She smiles and sits up.] If I stop taking it, I may want to go back and use. I am just sticking to it, keeping it. I might wait 'til schools over, until I've graduated but... it's not me any more. It's changed me altogether. In positive ways but I used to be a social butterfly. I used to talk to everybody and now I just talk to a few people and people still talk to me, but it is not like it used to be. I had a lot of friends and I was cool. [She smiles and giggles.] Now I feel like I don't want to talk to anybody. Half the kids in this school, I don't even know why they are even here. [She shakes her head and motions her hands around the room to mark the entire school.] They don't have any problems. I guess in their other high school they just didn't get a long, so they felt like they needed to come here.

The past is an old armchair in the attic, the present an ominous ticking sound, and the future is anybody's guess. –James Thurber

There are so many things you can't do because you have to be sober. [She smiles and giggles.] I can't date. I can't hang out with friends. I can't hang out with the same people I used to hang out with. I have to just stay at home most of the time. You have to call in and the recording says a bunch of colors and flavors. Mine is Lemon for BA and Scarlet for UA. [She smiles and giggles.] So I do that. Usually when I have UAs, I can't pee. I will like sit there for an hour. The police have to watch me. [She widens her eyes, sits forward, and crosses her arms over her chest.] It's ridiculous. [She relaxes and sits

back.] *I think if you're a juvenile, you shouldn't have to be put through that, you know? I get stage fright and they're like "do you have something to hide?" I'm like "no, I just can't, you know." So all day I hold in my pee, so when I go, I'm ready. I have to be able to wet my pants before I go in or else I can't pee. It's that bad. I wouldn't want to watch anybody pee. [She smiles and giggles.]*

Now I also have yoga and court and group and mentor. [TP] provides you with \$30 a month for the staff of your choice to mentor you. They take you out to eat or to movies. I have sponsors for NA and AA. Friday nights I go to the young peoples meetings. It is a like a lot of people that I know go there. I usually go to the CMA meeting, which is Crystal Meth Anonymous, but last time I went they were so mean. Everyone was just cussing at each other. It wasn't a good meeting, so I won't go back to that meeting. I'll find another. I have to find an NA meeting that I can go to.

It's not hard to stay sober. It's all in my mind. I can go every day without using but if I think about it, then I'll want to. [She smiles and giggles.] What's really hard is that I get off drug court in the summer and I am worried if I go back to using and if I come back next year, they are going to be like "you're a totally different person". After I get out of drug court and I don't have to have UAs waving over my head, I may use. I don't think I would but there's always that chance. I feel like I am on the right track, but I relapsed a lot of times.

I can think clearer now that I am sober. I think if I ever did want to use again, I could be "it's my choice." I don't have anyone holding my back up to this. It's not like I want to do it, but if I do, it is all up to me. If someone else was going to stop using, I'd be like "do it for yourself. No one can help you stop. You have to want to quit to be able

to quit.” I have done a lot of stupid things. [She smiles and giggles.] It just messes you up, like your head and stuff. Last year, I was so not functioning in my head. [She sits back and pulls her knees up to her chest, resting her shoes on the edge of the seat.] I was completely different last year than I am this year, because of sobriety. I was strung out all the time, not caring, so tired, and skinny. I weighed 80 pounds. I was nasty. [She makes a disgusted face.] When I see people like that now, I’m like “gross.”

The people in drug court who are getting off at around the same time are like “I can’t wait to go get high.” I’m like “I can’t wait until I can have my Mondays and Wednesdays off. I can’t wait.” The yoga’s fun, but drug court is a lot of time. I haven’t gotten in trouble since before [TP]. The only kids that are sober anymore are the kids on probation, the kids that get in trouble, or other really weird kids. I’ve noticed that others despise me here because they’re jealous. [She smiles and giggles.] People I don’t talk to are mean because I don’t talk to them. They’re just not the kind of people I want to talk to. I like people who look interesting. The people who wear black and those are not people I want to talk to, because they look scary. Probably if they were to shoot up our school, I’d be the first ones they’d shoot. Most people know me in this school as a bitch. [She smiles and giggles.] I don’t like taking crap from people because I have taken crap for so long that I don’t want to. I took too much crap from Matt, my mom’s boyfriend. I hate him. [She speaks with anger in her voice.]

My mom still talks to Matt. She knows I hate him. My brother hates him too. My mom’s kind of weird. She’s like, almost hippy kind of. [She smiles and giggles.] She’s not like peace and all that but she listens to rock and roll and parties and all that kind of

stuff. She's a nurse, a nurse that goes to people's houses who are handicapped, like cerebral palsy and Alzheimer's and stuff.

My brother is still a pothead. [She smiles and giggles.] Actually, last week he got a DUI and now he has to ride his bike to work. He's 19 and he got training in job core to be a welder, so he welds. He is moving out, hopefully, this weekend. I was telling him I might move in with him. Probably, not though. I have my own room and I just have to learn when my mom is being mean, to be like "bye mom, see ya."

My dad is gross. [She makes a disgusted face.] My dad has shot up meth for years, since after he left my mom and started doing drugs. He has black teeth and a long beard. He doesn't work. He's into selling drugs. Lately, like my brother talks to him a lot, but if he comes down, I try not to be home. He is going to die soon because he thinks he has AIDS. He had a son, like a year ago, who was born on meth. He's dumb. I hate him. My case worker said he is not allowed to come around me ever.

Reflection

When she is done, she brings her knees back up to her chest and rests her feet on the end of the chair. "Thanks for sharing, Jawny Dehp. You are more than welcome to stay for a little while I tell them about my experience talking to you or you can leave. Which would you prefer?" I ask.

"I'll stick around but I have to be at drug court in 20 minutes, so I can't stay long," she replies.

"Is Rose taking you? Or is your mom coming to pick you up?" I ask, hoping she has a ride arranged.

“Rose will drop me off,” she replies, giggling.

“Great,” I say, turning to my notes. “Jawny Dehp was a lot of fun to interview. She was personable, talkative, and cheerful. Her attention span was short and so was mine. I appreciated the quick movements she made between stories of her past and her life now. After many years struggling with drugs, alcohol, and a variety of other harmful behaviors, Jawny Dehp has begun the difficult task of taking responsibility for her life and making her life what she wants it to be. There were several times, however, in the story telling where Janwy Dehp felt she might start using even though she didn’t want to, almost referencing an external locus of control. She was still struggling with the idea of taking control of her life and choosing what she wants.

“Jawny Dehp has ADHD and must take medications to remain focused. During one interview, she mentioned that she had forgotten to take her ‘meds’ for the last two days and apologized for not being more coherent. As the interview was taking place, I remember feeling like I could not follow her, but later as I thought back to the experience, I wonder if the absence of ‘meds’ made it hard for her to follow me or to follow her own line of thinking. She raced around from topic to topic, saying one or two sentences in response to my questions and then getting side-tracked. She’d notice the designs on her clothes or flip flops while she was talking about her experiences and immediately change topics. That interview was frustrating for me at the time, but later I recognized what valuable information I got from it.

“Throughout the four months of our interviews, Jawny Dehp missed or canceled more than half of our interviews. I made several notes of my frustration and my concern that she was not interested in being interviewed, noting that I should ask her the next time

I saw her. Her explanation was usually that her schedule was packed and she easily forgot her commitments. She was always apologetic when that happened. I found it easy to accept her apologies and move on mostly because she was so personable and fun to talk to. She mentioned at the end of the last interview that she felt badly for ‘dogging me out,’ meaning not showing up or telling me she would not show up.

“At one point, she asked me why I did not know about drugs or alcohol. I laughed and responded that ‘I am a little sheltered.’ Her response was striking: *Oh, I wish I was like you.* She seems to regret some of the things she has done or was involved with in the past. I told her that I learned a lot from our conversations and our visits to the court house. She laughed. I also found it interesting that Jawny Dehp did not discuss her future, except for discussions about how much longer she would be in drug court and the job she wanted to get that summer. Other than those two items, I am not sure she had thought about what she would do after high school. Her concerns were more present than that. She wanted to remain sober, follow through with drug court, and get good grades. Jawny Dehp also expressed how much she wanted to be a mother. She can’t wait to feel stable and in love, and then have children. She said, *I just want them because they are so cute.*

“She chose to be named Johnny Depp because *He’s so cute. He’s my favorite.* We changed the spelling together to give her some distance from Johnny Depp and the copyrights associated with his name, if there are any. She was thrilled with the new spelling. She thought it was very cool.

“Several times during the interviews I asked her about her romantic relationships. She never answered my questions, frequently saying *what do you mean?* or changing the

subject. I would drop the topic but would remain curious, often wanting to know what had happened in them in order to connect my own struggles to hers. Again, I could feel myself wanting to ‘chat’ more than interview throughout these four months, which were not only challenging for me academically but also personally.

“At the last interview, I asked her what she thought of being interviewed. She said: *I’ve never really told a lot of people like all that stuff. It’s kind of good to get it all out because someone else can share my experiences with me. Everyone knows about the jail, because all my friends used to say I was stupid going to jail.* [She smiles and giggles.] *I want people to read my story. It’s like a big whirlwind.*

“Thanks for sharing your story with us Jawny Dehp. It was provocative and informative. Does anyone have any questions? Or Jawny Dehp, would you like to say anything?” I ask, looking around the room.

“What’s provocative?” she asks, looking squeamish and uncomfortable. She sits up, looks at me, and gives me a forced smile.

“It means stimulating or thought-provoking,” I say. “Your story made us think. It was very interesting.”

“Ok, got it. What time is it?” she asks, smiling and looking around the walls for a clock.

“Three-twenty-four,” I respond. “Is it time to go?”

“Yeah, I better get going to the court house, so that I can bum a smoke before going to yoga,” she responds.

“You have to smoke before yoga?” Lizzy asks.

“Yeaahhh,” she says drawing out the vowels, nodding, and giggling.

“Where do you do yoga?” asks Lisa.

“At the court house,” Janwy Dehp responds. “The magistrate leads yoga in one of the jury conference rooms. It is part of drug court.”

“Do you like it?” asks Lizzy. “Yeah, I do. I have become more flexible and it helps me relax,” says Jawny Dehp, “at least for a little while.” She giggles.

There is a light knock at the door. I push back my chair, stand, and open the door. Rose sticks her head in. “Jawny, it is time to go,” she says.

“Alright. Thanks Becky. See you around,” Jawny Dehp says, slowly standing and walking towards the door. She gives me a quick hug.

“Take care,” I say. Lisa, Mike, Lizzy, and Kate all say good-bye, wishing her luck and thanking her as she leaves. I close the door.

“Any other questions?” I ask.

“So her family... they still do drugs?” Lizzy asks.

“Yes,” I respond. “Her brother and mother continue to do drugs in front of her. They smoke pot a lot, she says, and I would imagine they drink, because her brother just got a DUI.”

“Wow,” she replies. “That has to be hard. Here she is trying to remain sober and her family is using around her.”

“Yeah,” I say, nodding and smiling. “But she is doing well. She is drug-free, taking responsibility for her life, and getting As and Bs. She is on the right track. The complexity of these students’ lives becomes more visible when you listen to all of them. It is hard to ignore all that is happening in their lives when you hear the whole story. I often wondered if her teachers, school counselors, or principals knew what was

happening in her life. I was not sure she was ever asked or ever talked to about the choices she was making; however, even if she was confronted, she was having such a good time with her drug cycles, why would she have listened? The alternative high school was not able to make her stop using, but it has created a support network for her that will help her from starting to use again.”

“Becky, I noticed that you said she gave you signs that she might use again. What were you talking about?” asks Mike.

“Well, when we first started talking, she mentioned her drug use and all the good things that had come of it, the fun she had had, the ease she had making friends, the way she felt about herself. It was obvious to me that she missed the days when she used regularly. I asked her one afternoon, if she liked it so much, why did she quit? Her motivation that day was to stay out of jail, she said. She hated not being able to bathe, eat, and sleep the way she wanted and when she wanted. I thought that was weak motivation. I could imagine her telling herself, ‘well I will use this time and I will be sure not to go back to jail. I won’t be stupid about it and it will be just fine.’

“Additionally, when she told me that her ADHD meds helped her remain sober, she also told me she would stop taking the meds after drug court because there would be no reason to take them after that, no UAs hanging over her head. I asked her if she thought she would use again, and she responded, *maybe*. A couple of weeks later she quit taking her meds altogether. It seemed to me that she did not feel like her decision to become sober was her choice and remaining sober might not be a possibility once she stopped taking her meds. She talks as if she has little control over her life or her choices.”

“Interesting,” responds Mike. “I want to ask you more about this, but I will wait until we hear all the stories. Who’s next?”

“Okay,” I say. “Any other questions before I bring Molly in?”

“Not right now,” says Kate. “I will save mine for later as well.”

“Bring in Molly,” says Lizzy.

I smile at Lisa, who nods. I stand, open the door, and look for Molly. I see her bouncing around excitedly in front of Adina, obviously talking about something very exciting. “Molly, are you ready?” I ask, pausing to hear her response. When I realize she does not notice me, I walk into the hall and stand next to her until she does. “You ready?” she asks.

“If you are...” I respond.

“Kay,” she says to me, before turning back to Adina and saying “read that book while you wait. It is great!” We walk back to the conference room, I open the door and we walk in.

“Where should I sit?” Molly asks. “I’ll take this one, I guess.” She pulls out the chair to my left, next to Lisa, who backs up to avoid being hit by the backpack Molly swings from her shoulder.

Lisa says, “Be careful there. You almost hit me.”

“Oh my bad,” says Molly. “So should I just start?”

“Sure,” I respond. “Go ahead.”

Molly

Molly is tall, skinny, and full of energy. She hops or runs more often than she walks or stands still. She is 17 years old and completely devoted to a band called ICP, Insane Clown Posse, and the people that follow them called Jugaloos. She is wearing a much worn black, almost grey, ICP shirt over a black turtle neck and overly large dark grey sweats. Her hair is long and blond with sporadic black streaks and it is tussled on her head in a loose rubber band. Her teeth are slightly crooked when she smiles. Her backpack sits on the table in front of her and is riddled with safety pins of several different sizes and logo patches from the different ICP albums. She is happy, smiling, and ready to begin.

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. –Helen Keller

I moved here from Florida when I was 6. [She nods and looks around to see everyone. She sits at the edge of her seat and leans her elbows and forearms on the table in front of her.] *My mom and dad got a divorce and I moved with my dad here.* [She taps her fingers on the table.] *She was an alcoholic and she was cheating on my dad. She drank a lot and didn't think she was an alcoholic. She used to give sips to me and my sister when we were little. I don't know why I wouldn't drink it but my sister would take a sip of beer. At the time I wasn't sad that I was moving away from my mom and my brother, because my mom wasn't there at all when we grew up. I just remember my parents got into a big fight and two weeks later we moved.* [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her right palm up. She rests her forearms on the table again.]

My mom was crazy. She'd go to work and she'd bring my uncle over cause they would drink. They'd leave and then my dad'd come home when she wasn't there. I never

knew where she was and after school my brother would watch me and I don't know where she was. I don't remember her being there a lot. On the weekends, she was there in the morning and then she'd leave at night. She was with my uncle. I remember she worked at a flower place. She'd bring us purple gum home or red gum home every day, from her work. After we left, we tried to send her letters, but she doesn't send any back. Now I don't think she's in the same house anymore. [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her right palm up. She rests her forearms on the table again.]

I have no idea where my mom is. After we moved out here, we tried to keep in contact with her. [She bounces her legs under the table.] We'd call her and we'd send letters. She always promised that she'd call and come get us in her letters and she never did. I had a brother that lived out there with her and I haven't seen him in like ten years. I think he lives in California now, because my mom couldn't take care of him. She's an alcoholic, so I think she gave him up to my aunt. We can't get a hold of him. We, some of my relatives on my mom's side, tried to get a hold of him but I guess they moved or something. [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her right palm up. She rests her forearms on the table again.]

We were down in Florida. I think I had just turned 7 and we went back over there to visit my aunt. We were staying with her and my mom showed up. My step mom was with us and I had already started calling my step mom "mom" because she had been with us almost a year already. Actually I think I was about 8. I was like "mom?" and my step mom's like "what?" My real mom said "what?" too. I was like "no, not you." I said that to my real mom and she looked at my sister and said "you always were my favorite." [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her right palm up. She rests her forearms on the table

again.] *My mom told me that story and I was like “that is pretty messed up.”* [She leans back, throwing her head back and her arms in the air. She leans forward again and rests her forearms on the table.] *I think she was drunk. She probably was. She'd been drinking. She brought us toys; a little pony for me and a big doll house and stuff for my sister. There you go.* [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her right palm up. She rests her forearms on the table again.]

She would call when we were little and pretend to be my aunt. She would pretend to be my aunt and my dad would be on the other line trying to figure out if it was her because she would do it all the time. I'd be like “who is this?” She'd be like “you know who this is, this is your mom.” My dad'd be like “you can't call here.” We'd send letters and stuff to her but like every time she'd call, she'd be drunk, she'd be like “I miss you so much. I am such a bad mother.” [She slurs her words together.] *She'd be just crying and drunk. The crazy thing I wonder is does she even know she has a grandson? My dad didn't want us to be around that, so he would say “if you're going to call, you'd better call sober.” My dad said that my brother went into the marines or army and got out a couple of years ago or something. One of my aunts tries to keep in touch with him, but we haven't heard from her in almost a year now. She called a year ago and surprised us all. It was crazy.* [She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her both palms up. She rests her forearms on the table again.]

My uncle lives out here, so we lived with him for like 6 months when we moved here and then we got our own place. My dad met my step mom and we all moved, her family and then my family. They have been married nine years. She has three kids and

then me and my sister. Her daughter Shelley is as old as my older sister Helen and her daughter Cheryl is as old as me. James is like 12.

My real sister, Helen, is graduating the top of her class. 4.0 average. She gets all As. No A minuses, all As or A pluses. It's awesome because her boyfriend doesn't have a job yet. He's been looking for a job. She has a job, she goes to school, and she takes care of the kid. She moved out because she had a baby. She is now living with her boyfriend. She is doing good at it too. She has time to spend with our family too, and she comes up here. She's going to college in June at IBMC. [She points to her right, as if to IBMC.] She's going to be a massage therapist. It's crazy. I didn't think she was going to make it this far. [She shakes her head.] She used to smoke drugs. She would smoke pot all the time. She got into smoking pot all the time when she was like 12 years old because she hung out with older girls. She had really bad grades in junior high and 10th and 11th grade. Midway through her junior year she started buckling down because that's when she had her kid. I'd find her drugs and she'd like sneak out to go smoke with her boyfriend. [She leans back in her chair.] I would cover for her so many times. She would sneak out, I'd call her when dad wanted her, and then she would rush to the window with my other sister, Shelley. Now Helen's going to college. She got a scholarship to IBMC for massage therapy. She is going to do it for 6 months and if she likes it, she's going to go back for another year.

She and her boyfriend are supposed to get married. I don't even know when. It is sometime soon. June, July or something like that. He still does drugs. [She shakes her head and looks down.] That's why he gets fired. He used to do it over at my sister's house and he came home from work. She's eating a sandwich. She's sittin' at the table

and my nephew was playing around on the floor in the living room and he's just smoking weed right there. It's like "ok, what the fuck's wrong with you?" He's an idiot. [She shakes her head.] He said he isn't going to do them any more because he got fired and he got caught. He came to work high. He was trying to tell my mom and my dad that he got fired because the manager didn't like him there. [She leans forward and rests her forearms on the table.] I don't see how she can love him. He's a loser and he is really ugly too. He's an ogre. He's a big fat kid and he's ugly and stupid. Uch. I hate him. I don't know if she loves him. She shouldn't if she does. I hate him. My dad hates him too. My mom doesn't like him either. Maybe they are just getting married for the kid. He doesn't got a job and he's not responsible to take care of the kid. He only expects my sister to take care and buy diapers and stuff for the kid.

When I first got here, I went to [I] Elementary. I had done 7 months of kindergarten in Florida and then had to start all over again, so I should be in the 11th grade. I remember we had a huge classroom when I was in Florida. [She looks around the room, attempting to judge how big this room is comparatively.] It was so big. It could have seemed big because I was little. It was divided into sections of play areas and we would have class outside a lot. It was a really big school. Maybe it was just because I was little. I remember we only had half days. My mom would take me and then my aunt would come pick me up. I remember getting up in the morning, at like 3 in the morning and eating cocoa puffs and watching TV with my dad. Me and my dad were really connected.

When I got out of [I] Elementary, I was really sad, because my step mom was making me go to [CLP] Junior High and all my friends went to [L] Junior High. She

thought [L] was a bad school. Kids got stabbed there, but my aunt went to [L] a long time ago and she never got stabbed. I ended up going to [L] though because I ended up getting kicked out of [CLP]. I had a bad attitude, I guess. I got a letter over the summer in the mail that said I was kicked out from there. [She reaches for her backpack that is on the table and begins to play with the safety pins.] I wasn't nervous. A lot of people get scared. I was like "I don't know what's gonna happen and I don't really give a shit." People are like "take me back. I'm sorry for doing this. I'm sorry for doing that." I'm like "I am not sorry for anything I ever do." [She sits up straight and shakes her head.] If I hurt somebody's feelings, I won't apologize. I'll be like "ok maybe it's wrong that I did that, but I am not going to say sorry." I think saying sorry is like saying I regret what I did and I don't regret anything that I do. I won't say I'm sorry but if I have done something wrong, I'll admit that I was wrong. [Her voice begins to get quieter as she sits back and shakes her head.] I don't believe in apologizing. I will be like "I was wrong. Can you accept my..." not apology really. [She looks down at her hands in her lap and talks quietly.]

I didn't start getting in trouble until I was at [CLP] when I was in the 8th grade, because I would talk back to people. I don't like being told what to do. [She leans forward and places her forearms on the table.] If somebody wants something from me, they have to ask, "can you do this?" They can't be like "you have to do this." I didn't like the principal that was there either. Oh, and there was a counselor there, oh she was a bitch. I hated her so much. [She shakes her head and looks down.] She'd get me for everything. If my pants were sagging this much [She holds up both her index fingers 3 or 4 inches apart.], she'd bust me real quick. I hated her so bad. I was always the loud

person during passing periods and stuff. I would yell down the hall. She'd be like "you're disturbing people" and I was like "um it is passing periods. No body is teaching any body. I'm not disturbing anybody. We are not even in class right now." Oh I hated her so much. I guess she had cancer. I was all "so, you have cancer, serves you right. Good, good for you." She was losing her hair and stuff and I was like "hey you're going bald." I loved torturing her. She was such a bitch. I'd be loud just to make her angry. She was a mean lady. I think it was because she got divorced and lost all of her money. Or maybe she's just a bitch. She wanted the power seat. She couldn't compromise or let me talk. It was her way or no way.

If you have no confidence in yourself, you are twice defeated in the race of life. With confidence, you have won even before you have started. –Marcus Gavey Devante

I was school choice, so when I got kicked out of [CLP], I had to go to [L]. I had a lot of problems at [L]. I like ICP, and you can't wear ICP clothes there because they think it is gang related, I guess. They don't let you wear it to [the traditional high school] also. That's probably the reason that I didn't like [the traditional high school] either. I'd wear them anyways. I'd get in trouble for that. Even if you had like ICP written on your hand, they would tell you to go to the office. Once I had written it on my toes because I had sandals on. They sent me to the office and I told them I wasn't going to go. They suspended me for the last four days of school, because I had ICP written on my toes. [She leans back and points to her toes, shaking her head and frowning.] I was like "how do you know that is what it stands for? It can stand for something totally different" and she was like "well, you know you have to take it off." I was like "I am not

taking it off.” It was the last hour of school and they kicked me out. My mom was infuriated.

I went to [the traditional high school] for 2 months too but I hated it. At first I thought it was going to be an awesome community because it’s a big school and a lot of my friends went there that I hadn’t seen in a really long time, because I switched junior highs after 8th grade because I got kicked out of [CLP]. I thought they weren’t going to care and they weren’t going to be on you all the time about it, but they were. They would come to our group and make sure we were not wearing ICP clothes or that we didn’t have it with us. We were the only ones. Kids would be smoking cigarettes over here and you can’t do that on school grounds. [She points to her right.] All we’re doing was sitting there and they are coming to make sure we don’t have ICP written on our books. [She leans back in her chair.] I had song lyrics that I typed up and glued on my planner and they made me take them off because they were ICP words. They didn’t have cuss words in them. They were just lyrics and it was horrible.

One of the reasons I left [the traditional high school] was because of the assistant principal. He hated my sister, he hated my sister’s boyfriend, and my sister and my sister’s boyfriend and my mom who also went to [the traditional high school]. He didn’t like them. I don’t know why. I think because they like ICP and just because he’s a jerk. The reason I like it here is because you can compromise with people. You can tell them what we could do and make a plan or whatever, but at [the traditional high school], you have to do what they want you to do. There’s no compromising at all. I hated it so much.

I got in 3 fights in a month and a half time at [the traditional high school]. Two of them were with the same girl because she would run her mouth about my sister

because my sister had a baby, calling her a slut and dirty. My sister couldn't fight her because she was pregnant, so I was like, "keep talking!" [She postures and slaps her hands against her chest.] I fought her twice, and then I got suspended twice for that. I got suspended twice for wearing ICP clothes. Once I had it covered even. My jacket was over and zipped up, and they made me unzip my jacket and show them that I had it on. It wasn't even hurting anybody. [She points to her t-shirt.] They couldn't even see it. I once had a ICP logo necklace and I wore it to school and they made me take it off. I couldn't even like tuck it in so they couldn't see it.

I got into a fight with this other girl who I went up to because she flipped me off after school for no reason and just drove away for no reason. I was like "why were flipping me off and you just drove away." She was like "leave me alone, blah blah blah." I was like "no, I want an answer. Why were you talking crap to me and flipping me off and you left?" One of the teachers passed by and we had to go to the office. They said I was a threat to her because I was asking her why she was talking crap about us. The VP suspended both of us but didn't suspend her even though she is the one that started it. I felt really bad for my friend I was with because her parents are horrible. Her step dad beats her, she got kicked out, and she went to my house. When I got suspended, my mom got called in and the assistant principal gave us the times that [the alternative high school] was going to start orientation. "We don't want you here. Go, go to this school." [She flicks her pointed index finger in front of her, like "go away.]" They basically said that I was a threat to their school. I was corrupting their culture. "She brings bad vibes to this school." One of my sister's resource teachers, who I have

known since 3rd grade, works at [the traditional high school] now. She defended me when they said I was a threat to their culture. She came in and was angry about that.

The only person I really got along with there was the school resource officer. I don't remember his name. [She shakes her head.] He had to enforce a rule that you couldn't wear it, but if he like saw somebody he would just give them a warning, like "don't wear that again." I gave him the ICP book and he read the whole thing. He listened to the CDs. He is not all into it, but he would like listen to it and he said he has respect for what other people like.

When I got suspended, my parents don't get mad because I have a reason. When I got kicked out because of my clothes, my mom went down there a couple of time. My parents, my friend's parents and their friends are going to go to school with ICP t-shirts on and paint their faces for Halloween. My mom thinks it is the stupidest thing. I mean, my mom and dad do not like the music, but they will defend me because it's just music and it is not hurting anybody. My sister and my boyfriend got into it and so when I got into 8th grade, I just got into I too. Then my boyfriend got into it and then all my sisters and their boyfriends. I got a sticker of Hatchetman for my mom and I put it on her car the other day. [She smiles broadly and giggles.] She doesn't necessarily like them, but she goes to [the traditional high school] with her car and she loves to piss people off there because my sister's boyfriend can't park on the school grounds because he has it on his car. My sister can't park on the school grounds because she has it on her car. So my mom gets my sister, she picks my sister up and she makes sure she parks right in the lot where the school can see it. It is so funny. She loves pissing people off there. She hates that school.

I think [the traditional high school] doesn't like Jugaloes. Jugaloes, that's what I guess all the people are that like ICP. Jugaloes are guys, Jugalets are girls. I think they just did it like, jugaloe, like jugalet, your jugala jugular vein. [She shrugs.] Eminem and ICP have a controversy. The kids that like eminem and the kids that like ICP hate each other. [The traditional high school] doesn't let you wear ICP but they let you wear eminem, even though it was the fight against both of these people. Eminem is mainstream though. ICP is underground, they are not on MTV, and they are not on the radio.

I like ICP because they don't rap about the typical stuff that everybody else raps about. They rap about real stuff, like what's going on today. They rap about wars and how they don't like our president. They rapped about people being poor and the fact that there are people who are so rich and here are like people on the streets and you have all this money and you don't do shit. I like it cause they grew up in the really bad part of Michigan. They were in poverty and they didn't have any money. Their mom had to work three jobs to support them and one of the guys was abused when he was a kid. With all these struggles, they had to come up to where they are.

Their book is all about how they struggled to come up to where they are today. [She reaches for the book in her backpack and pulls it out.] It shows me that I am not high class and I haven't done good in my whole life. I know that I am a scrub and I don't care what people say about me. I will do what I want to do because I want to do it. That is what they did and this is how far they got. I guess if they can do it, then I can do it too. I don't think I'm low class, well I mean it's just that I can care less what other people

think. I am not here to impress anybody. I am not here to win a beauty pageant or popularity contests. I am here to just be me and to do what I need to do to.

The gathering of the Jugaloes last year in Ohio was pretty exciting. They have a big gathering every year where they rent out a campsite. They have a seven day concert for \$120. They give you free food there, like pancakes in the morning and hot dogs and hamburgers.

Two of my friends got beaten and put into hospitals because they like ICP. [She leans back in her chair.] Fifteen guys brought baseball bats and these two guys got hit in the head with a baseball bat. One of them got his head crashed in. The other had surgery on his jaw. He didn't have brain damage, but he is learning how to speak now. He is going to start speech therapy. [She shakes her head.]

I came here in November and then I did Disco. I only knew you couldn't go off campus, which is good for me because I used to ditch a lot at [the traditional high school]. I'd go to a friend's house, just walk around Old Town, or go to the mall. I would do anything to not be there because I hated it so much. I would come back for last period because that was the only period I really liked. My parents were like they aren't going to do anything because I was going to go to [the alternative high school] and the next orientation was two weeks away. I had to go to [the traditional high school] still, so I just didn't go. My parents said they weren't going to force me to go to the classes that I didn't like. [The traditional high school] gave me 6 credits. I left in the middle of a big project so I finished it here and then took it to [the traditional high school] and got credit for it.

Disco was a good experience. I had taken it before at [CLP]. They have the same program there and I took it there. I knew all the stuff. It's pretty fun. I mean I liked it but like when I set something that I want, I am not going to change the way I want it. So I had to change myself to work with Ed. [She leans forward and rests her forearms on the table.] He hates my guts. I almost got dropped because of too many absences. I got kicked out because my parents and I got into a fight. I left like for a week. I went to one of my friend's. [She motions to the south with her right hand.] She lives in Loveland. Or Longmont, one of those places. So I went over there and stayed for like a week and I was late because her mom had to drive me down here. There aren't even a lot of our kids that are here still from my Disco class. Only 12 of the 28 graduated and only 6 or 7 are here now.

I am in Tom's creative writing class right now and I'm writing a paper on all the people I don't like here at [the alternative high school]. I am going to list all the teachers I don't like and tell why I don't like them. [She pretends to scribble on a piece of paper on the table.] There are going to be a lot of them. [She nods.] Then I am going to list the people that I do like and why I like them. I was pretty pissed today because I was in shop class. I missed yesterday and I missed Wednesday when my friend was in the hospital because she lost her baby. She was kind of sad, but also 17 and not ready to have the baby. I was down there with her and I'm way behind. The student teacher is a real asshole. He's like "you need to come over here and learn this" [She wags her right index finger in front of her.] and I wasn't even to the part yet to like be ready to learn that. He told me that I had to go down to Ed's office because I wasn't going to go over

there. I gave him the finger and left. He is from Iowa. Jawny Dehp was telling me to write in my essay thing that IOWA means "idiots out wandering around."

I don't know what was wrong with me before, but I had a really bad attitude towards a lot of things. I was like screw this, screw that. But then I changed my attitude. My parents and I get a long now. My dad and my parents were more lenient on me. They let me have a better curfew, because I'm almost 17, my curfew's 9 o'clock to be inside. They changed it to 10 on the weekdays and 12 on the weekends. It works for me. We haven't been fighting for a long time. After I got kicked out the last time, we just stopped fighting after that. I don't see my dad a lot and I don't see my mom a lot. When I lived with them I got home from school, went to work, and then came home about 9,9:30 and went to sleep, and got up in the morning. I'd see my dad in the morning and then a little after school and before I'd go to bed and that's all.

I can't really remember why I get kicked out. [She leans forward and rests her forearms on the table.] Once me and my dad just argued about something and we were cussing at each other and yelling. He told me to take my things and get out. I was gone for like two days and then I came home. One night I got kicked out because I didn't come home. I hadn't called for the night. They knew where I was but I didn't come home. So my dad told me to leave because he needed time to be mad and calm himself, I guess, before I came home. I'll yell at my dad for spending too much money on stupid shit. Like we have three lap tops and he just bought another one. [She holds up three fingers and shakes her head.] I was like "why are you wasting your money on this? We are behind on bills and you're paying for laptops and we can't even pay the bills." He just gets really mad. He's obsessed with the band Rush and he'll buy every single thing he can

find on the internet. I'm like "I need lunch money. Come on." Me and my mom have fought before. She gets mad when I mouth off to her, which isn't often because me and my mom don't fight a lot. When we do, we get into slapping fights. She'll slap me and I'll slap her back.

My boyfriend and I have been dating three years. Since 8th grade. Three years like May 22nd. I think. No May, no not May 22nd, March 22nd. Is it March 22nd or April 22nd? I wrote it on my calendar but I don't remember when it is. We just moved in together with his mom. I think we will be fine. I just take care of myself. When my grandma died, she left us a savings account and so I can get money out of there if I need to buy things, but only if it's an emergency. I work 4 to 9 usually or 4 to 10, every day, almost every day. It should be enough. The bills aren't bad because we live in low income housing sort of stuff.

I moved out because I don't like living with my parents. I hate sharing rooms and I hate cleaning up after people. Cheryl's and I's room with my parents is way smaller than this and she has her stuff in a corner like this big of a corner [She motions to three feet square area near the corner of the room.] and it is just piled so high. [She motions above her head.] She has to crawl over it to get to her bed. Uch! It's horrible! It's gross. [She makes a disgusted face.] She'll eat pop tarts in her bed and there'd be crumbs everywhere. We have 8 cats, 3 birds, 2... I think they're hamsters, I don't know what they are. Like 12 fish. My mom wants to get a dog. I'm like "no, we're not getting a dog." It is really crowded. We have 4 bedrooms. My mom and dad share a room, my little brother has his own room, my sister has her own room, and then me and Cheryl

used to share a room. My sister, Shelley, is going to be moving out. So Cheryl can have either room that she wants cause she is the only one there.

Me and my boyfriend are alike but we are so different. We like the same things, but actually we don't like the same things. Everything that he likes, I hate and everything that he likes, I hate, except for ICP. That one thing we have in common. [She holds up her index finder.] We have one friend that we each like and she comes over and hangs out with us and that is the only friend that we like of each other's. We like the same food. He grew up in a Mexican family and I really like Mexican food. We don't do that much. Watch TV. We go to the movies sometimes. We are going to go get our pictures taken at Wal Mart. My mom's all "wear a dress." I'm like "not happening. I don't even have a dress in my closet."

Me and him are really honest with each other. If I do something that he doesn't like, he'll tell me. That's just how we are. [She smiles and giggles.] It is really funny because the other day he had just woke up and I got home and he's like do I look like shit right now and I was like "yeah, go brush your teeth because your breath stinks." [She smiles and giggles.] We have a playful relationship. We beat the crap out of each other. It is kind of fun. When we first started going out, we used to like smash each other's heads against the washing machine and stuff. It was so fun. [She smiles and giggles.]

Now I am at [the alternative high school] and we have two days of class left. My teacher piled work on us. I have a lot of work I need to get done in other classes, so I am not going to do an e-week. [She shakes her head and motions to the basement.] I am going to go downstairs and study. I only had three weeks to do this big project, because I was in somebody's class that I didn't want to be in. This is why I dropped the class. The

teacher said I wasn't paying attention. He was taking attendance at the beginning of the class and I was like writing some work out. He said that when he takes attendance you either say here or present. And I said "yeah, I'm here." He kicked me out into the hall and said that it wasn't formal. He cusses all the time and I was like "cussing isn't formal. How do you see that as formal?" He was like "well, you can't do that in my class." There were two girls in our class and both of us dropped it.

My mom thinks it's better that I am coming here because I need it to be me and the teacher doing things together. [She points to the air and then to herself.] In the schools I was in before, teachers didn't want to help you because they didn't care. You have to come to them and they'd take five minutes of their time to run through really fast. Here, you can go up to a teacher and they'll sit down with you right there and explain to you until you understand it all.

I want to be a journalist. Well, a journalist or a lawyer, I am not sure which one yet. Both of them include a lot of writing. I love to write creatively, like whatever comes and like just things that I do, just write about them. Sometime in the future I want to see my brother, but I don't really care about my mom. I just want to tell her "you know what? Fuck you. I did it without you." Like when I graduate, I want to be like "you know you didn't graduate so I just want to rub it into your face that you didn't help me get this far." Helen feels a lot more connected to her. She's like "I miss her so much." I'm like "how do you miss somebody who doesn't even try to keep in contact with you?" I'm always like "you're an idiot." I do have a picture of her. I look like her except she has more freckles than I do.

Reflection

When she is done, I smile and say “Molly, thank you so much for sharing your story. It was fascinating and we will all learn a lot from it. Would you like to stick around while I tell the committee about my experiences working with you?” I ask, assuming like the others her curiosity will compel her to sit and listen.

“Nah, I don’t care what you say or what you think of me,” she says flicking her wrist at me and looking the other direction. “I need to catch the bus anyway.”

“I can take you home when I am through,” I offer.

“Nah, I don’t need a ride. I can take the bus,” she says as she stands and throws her backpack over one shoulder. “See you later.”

“Ok,” I reply. “If you decide you want a ride, just wait for me in the hall. I will see you later, if not in a couple of minutes.” She lets herself out of the room and shuts the door quietly behind her. Before she shuts the door, I hear Adina ask her how it went. I hope they will chat for awhile and Molly will let me take her home. I turn to the committee and begin my reflections.

“As you can see, Molly is often conflicted by her feelings and her strong convictions of how she wants to be. She wants to ‘not care what others think of her,’ yet I believe part of her is curious and eager to defend herself, given whatever misjudgment I may make. She gets quiet and sullen when the two feelings she has conflict, like today when she was talking about her belief that apologies are not for her and yet she was unsure what she would say if she realized she did do something wrong.

“In general, though, Molly’s energy is intoxicating. She sat quite still during the interviews, but buzzed around the school the rest of the day. She was fun to chat with

and I enjoyed meeting with her. I once asked her what she thought of meeting with me. She said, *Pretty good. It was good just to have somebody hear my story. Because everybody else is just like 'oh she's insane.' They just ask me 'what's wrong with you, why do you have so much energy'.... It was fun. Some good laughs.... Yeah, I would do it again.* When we read her transcripts during the last two interviews, she said, *Wow, I have lived for a long time. It's just like it's really there, like all this stuff I've done and been through. It's a lot of stuff.... Just like now I realize that like, how I have transformed I guess like moved from where I used to be to like a better place now. Good stuff.*

“I found it interesting that Molly claimed to forget memorable parts of her life, like the times she had been kicked out of her house, times she had appeared in court, the date of her anniversary, or when her sister’s wedding was scheduled for. She seemed to forget items that I would have had a hard time not remembering. I found it hard to take her word for it, that she actually had forgotten those times in her life.

“There were also times when Molly explained her stories with two simultaneous, yet contradictory perspectives on the same topic, something I have come to call parallel stories. Parallel stories reveal how complex life is, that we can and do have simultaneously contradictory beliefs about the same circumstances. She says she and her family tried to contact her mother and have been unable to do so, but also she says she has received phone calls from her and been told not to talk to her when she was drunk. She claims to not want to talk to her mother, but also to want to tell her how she feels about her at the same time. It is not that one story is wrong and the other is truly how she

feels. She actually believes both. I and the other young women also have parallel stories, but we will get to those later.

“At our last meeting many things had changed for Molly. She expressed interest in being a parole officer, rather than a lawyer or a journalist. She was preparing to go to ‘cop’ school. She had moved back in with her parents because her parents’ trailer was closer to her work. Her boyfriend’s mother had moved into her apartment with her boyfriend. She said she liked living with her since they had so much in common. They have a three bedroom apartment together. One room for her and her boyfriend, one for her boyfriend’s mother, and one for storage, she said.

“Unlike the other young women, Molly did not want me to take her to coffee or ice cream or to buy her dinner after the project was over. She refused to take rides from me, but eventually allowed me to take her home twice. She lived with her parents just north of the city in a single-wide trailer home. The streets of trailer park in which she lived were riddled with garbage and large potholes. When she moved to live with her boyfriend, they moved into low-income housing right outside of the high school she hated. The apartment building was single story, with three or four homes to each building. Each had a large lawn and patio and the place looked well cared for. She mentioned that the people in the local jail were responsible for cleaning their neighborhood. They had just been through to pick up the leaves from last fall.

“Before we move on to our last guest, do you have any questions?” I ask.

“I do,” says Lisa. “Can you talk a little bit about the background of each woman so that we can get a better view of each side-by-side? I am not sure I gathered their social demographics from their stories.”

“Of course. Let me go through them in order, so that you can visualize which story goes with which young woman. Rose is of Hispanic decent. I am sure you could hear a bit of her ethnicity when she spoke. She does not know how to speak Spanish, but grew up with a Spanish-speaking family and in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. Her accent may be from being around others who have accents or may have been adopted to fit in with her community. Her family includes her mother, her father, an older brother who also attended the alternative high school, and a younger brother. She states that she ‘grew up with the Bible’ and attends church regularly with her family. They lives in a trailer park outside city limits. Her family is not wealthy, but she did not mention struggles of poverty in her story.

“Jawny Dehp is Caucasian. She grew up with her mother and brother, who both use pot regularly. Her mother is a nurse and her brother is a welder. They make enough money to survive, but if Jawny Dehp needs money for school, she knows it puts a strain on her mom and instead turns to her brother. She moved from city to city most of her life and spent at least some time in a shelter for battered women. She speaks English and nothing else. Her father lives in Nebraska and uses drugs regularly. His son was born with AIDS and addicted to cocaine, I believe.

“Molly is also Caucasian. After her father left her mother, her father remarried and she is now part of a large mixed family. She has one blood-related sister and two step sisters. She also has a step brother. The older brother she speaks of was her mother’s before her father and mother married and remained with her mother when her father left her mother. Molly and the other six members of her family lived in a single-wide trailer home in a poverty-stricken area of town. Her father delivers packages for a

carrier company and her step-mother works part-time as a secretary. She refers to her step-mother as her mom in this story. Her step-mother has many health issues that are not taken care of because of their financial burdens. She was expecting her step-mother to lose her job when I spoke to her last. She speaks English and nothing else.

“Adina, who you will meet in a couple minutes, is also Caucasian. She lives with her mother, her father, and her older brother outside the city limits in a single story house. She and her family lived with different sets of grandparents most of her life. Before moving to live with her paternal grandparents in California, she lived with her maternal grandparents in Colorado. Her father works in a guitar store south of Denver now, and her mother’s hours as an office manager had recently been cut when I talked to her last. She claims they were having a hard time paying their mortgage. She speaks English and nothing else.”

“Let’s meet the last young woman before we move on to other questions. I know we each have some for Becky, but these young women have been waiting,” says Lizzy.

“Ok,” says Mike. “Let’s talk to Becky later.”

I nod, push my chair back, and make my way to the door. I open it and ask Adina to join us. Molly has stuck around, I am glad to see. I smile and tell her we will be done in a few minutes. Adina walks past me. She smiles and says hi to each person in the room, giggling as she does. “Littlest ones always go last, huh? Saving the best for last, as I’ve always said,” she says smiling.

I laugh and tell her to sit anywhere she’d like. She takes the first seat to my left beside Lisa.

Adina

Adina claims to be four feet and eleven inches tall, although she looks much shorter. She is 15 years old and she talks a lot and animatedly. She is comfortable conversing and full of corny jokes. She has short beach blond hair that reaches to the bottom of her ears and curls outward slightly. Her light skin is accented with dark eye liner that encircles her small tapered eyes. She's wearing silver rimmed glasses. Her overly large light blue jeans run to the floor, a black shirt with silver holes pokes out from underneath a dark green velvet button down long sleeve shirt, and a faded black cotton coat reaches down to her knees. Her backpack is bright pink and black. She drops it off her shoulder and sits it on the large conference table on her left.

“Should I just tell you my story?” she asks, giggling.

“Sure,” I respond. “Go right ahead.”

The art of life is often lost in the pace of living. –Carl Hilty

I have been an artist all my life. My parents say that the first thing I gripped when I was a baby was a marker and I was drawing on my crib, like little squiggles. [She wiggles her right hand on the table, as if clutching a pen and writing.] My dad's an artist but he wastes his talent. He thinks it's a waste of time and he told me when I told him that I wanted to be an artist, he said, "Dude, if you want to starve, don't come to me." Yet my brother wants to be a rock star and they're saving up money for him to go to college to do that. So he can go to a music school to come up fresh - like an educated one. They won't send me to school at all. They're like, "we'll save for your brother but we don't have enough money for you." [She speaks with a high pitch and wags her right index finger in front of her.] He's the favorite and he's the oldest son.

I don't want their money anyways because then I'd owe them something. I'd have to go to dinner at their house. I'd have to go visit them during the holidays. "This way I don't have to see you." I can be like, "sorry I'm busy." [She shrugs her shoulders.] I can be like, "I'm staying at home, sorry." Because I'm paying my own way through college and they're not, I don't owe them anything, except for some pain killers for child birth. [She giggles.] I was the nice baby though! I only took four hours. He took twelve and she was in labor with him before for 24 hours. I was the nice baby. Never cried, slept through the night within two weeks of being home. That probably is because my brother throws a temper tantrum if his shoe gets dirty. I really don't care since I draw on my own shoes.

I feel mature because I had to grow up fast. I didn't have much of a childhood. About five years ago when I was 10, a lot of stuff happened. I moved out to California and got into a whole bunch of stuff and that stuff, it makes you grow up fast. I do regret it. [She looks down.] I do wish I'd had a childhood, but it'll make me a better person in the end. I don't freak over the big things. It's like "hey, it happened. It's in the past. Let's move on." Maybe I have an old soul. It is possible. I believe in that. Never had it checked on, but maybe I should.

I like black and old English text writing. I view it as sophisticated. A couple of years ago, I chose black because it makes me nothing and now because it makes me classy. It is a very classy color. I love the color black. It goes with everything. A couple of weeks ago I painted my nails black and neon green. I never paint just one color. [She points to her nails.] I dye my hair all the time. I haven't seen the real color in years.

I am a Wiccan. What I mainly like is that they don't focus on "Oh G-d, Jesus - you got to worship this one G-d, you can't worship anything else. You can't do anything bad." They're just like "if it doesn't harm anyone, do whatever in the heck you want." They're really open-minded. I like the fact that they're not pressuring you into "oh if you do this, you're going to go to hell." In most religions, they're all like "Oh, you have sex and you're going to go to hell because it's a sin." In their belief, if you love someone and you trust them and you're safe with it, your choice. I respect that because that's my view of me. I'm safe with it. I trust this person. I love this person. I don't like people telling me you can't do this because then you're going to go to the firey place downstairs.

I used to love to learn. [She looks down and shakes her head.] I loved knowing new things. If I found something interesting, I would do extensive research on it, so that I could know more than anyone else about it. This was back in the day, not even out of elementary school. I used to love learning. I lost it. [She speaks in a low volume, puts her head down, and shrugs her shoulders.] Because of [W] Elementary School, Ms. Weaser, my fifth grade teacher. She was someone who should not have been around kids. She told me I was nothing and would amount to being a crack addict. I was ten. I just didn't understand the homework. I had to go ask her for help and she's a very scary woman. Not someone you are going to want to go up to and say "I can't understand this, please help me." It's more like I want to run the other way. So two weeks before the end of my fifth grade year, she tells my mom "she hasn't been coming in for help." I couldn't make up that work in time.

I remember Mrs. Weaser screaming at me because we were learning about the Salem Witch trials and I did not agree with them at all. Did not like them. Did not want

to hear about witches screaming their heads off and being burned at the stake. [She shakes her head and waves her right index finger in front of her face.] She made us watch movies and I didn't want to hear this. I was arguing with her "are you sure you should be teaching 10 year old kids how the witches' screams sounded?" and she threw me out of her class. I think she was a little angry because in 5th grade we were learning about the holocaust. It was a little early, I'd say, to be learning about people being burned or gassed or whatever else they decided to do. [She giggles.] I had to make a 3D model of what happened to the Jews in the concentration camps. My diagram was sent to Washington where it went on display for the Holocaust Museum and I won 3rd place in a contest at the National History Museum. She seemed kind of angry about it. She was like "how did you do that?" I did it in like 5 minutes too. [She giggles and pretends to scribble quickly on the table.]

That frustrated me and my parents were sick of it. They were sick of having to pay the mortgage on their house. They were sick of my mom's mom getting in the way. They were sick of my school. So we moved to California to my dad's mom's house after my tenth birthday. We moved to El Segundo, then Mondale, then El Segundo again and then we moved around California 6 times trying to find a place. That was not easy and plus with all the moving, I didn't have time for homework. I didn't care. I was just like "when the hell am I going to use this?" I even said that once to my teacher. She looked at me like "go to the principal's office". As I was walking out the door, I flicked her off. [she shrugs her shoulders and giggles.]

I wasn't exactly the friendliest person. I used to chase around the younger kids and throw them into garbage cans. I used to shove kids. I am very strong for my size.

[She giggles.] *I don't do that any more. I'm weened off that. I was a very mean kid. I would say that I was angry.* [She giggles.]

The main problem was with my grandmother out in California. We did not get along at all. Let's just say if we ever see each other again, it will be too soon. My grandmother accused me of stealing. She wanted to put me in Juvee. I stopped eating, stayed in my room pacing around, got into drugs for awhile while I was out there, and got into cutting. I was in a bad place. Her maid was stealing a bunch of money from her and she thought it was me. This is the whole reason why I hate Christmas. One year on Christmas, she got my uncle a Gameboy Advanced. I hate video games, can't stand them, and never play them. My uncle left it in the diaper bag and no one knew it. So I was blamed for stealing it. [She puts her hands to her chest.] *Two weeks went by before they found it. During those two weeks, my grandmother called me "nothing" and told me I was the black sheep of the family and I needed to go to Juvee. She said I needed to be put in the safe house for girls. Meanwhile, my mom's trying to protect me and so is my brother and its getting really bad. I can't say anything in defense of myself or else we will get kicked out. So finally two weeks later, they find the Gameboy in the diaper bag and no one says sorry to me or my family. I gave up. I didn't do my homework. I never paid attention in class. I was too busy reading beneath the desk trying to escape into another world. I got into drugs and going to school just to get away from them. The teachers knew I wasn't paying attention. They just didn't know why. They never asked. They never cared. I was constantly alone.*

I didn't fit in, in California. That is until I met Grace and Brea. They are my two best friends in the entire world. [She smiles.] *They are still out in California. They are*

like my sisters to me. We all just kind of banded together and stuck together. We would always be at each other's houses. They are very much against drugs. I had other friends and I did heroin with them for a year during 6th grade. My parents were too busy with each other to notice and I was never home. It took me to another world. You just sit there forgetting everything. When you are off it, you are cold, you're sick, and you're angry. I am so glad I am off it. I do have symptoms from it now, from being on it so long. I get sick easy because my immune system sucks and I have to carry a jacket around, even on the hottest day of the year. [She points to her two layers of jackets.] I can still get chills.

I didn't want to move back to Colorado. I'm like "I just made friends and you are making me leave." I was angry about that and because we had to live with my mom's parents. When I got back to Colorado in the middle of 8th grade, I met some other people that weren't the greatest people to hang out with and got into pot. [She giggles.] I did pot every day. I was failing school. I never did my homework. I didn't understand it because I wasn't paying attention. I always thought my teachers were inferior to me. They didn't care about me and they never explained like when I would use this.

We are born into the world like a blank canvas and each person that crosses our path takes up the brush and makes his or her mark upon our surface. So it is that we develop. But we must realize there comes a day that we much take up the brush and finish the work, for only we can determine if we are to be just another painting or a masterpiece. –Unknown

After about eight and a half months of being here, I tried to commit suicide. Three days into my 9th grade school year, I took 150 painkillers, 355 milligrams each. It

was three different types of painkillers. I puked out most of them the night before. [She giggles.] I took them at 7 o'clock at night. My parents did not know until I told them in the morning and my mom didn't call the ambulance until 6:30 in the morning. [She giggles.] I had gone deaf by then. They knew I was sad. I just don't think they knew the extent. My dad was screaming at me, asking why I did that and I couldn't hear him. That morning is a little fuzzy because I was slipping in and out of consciousness. They sent me to [MC] for a week. [MC] Correctional Center is where they send suicidal kids or drug addicts. I loved it. I was away from people. No one could hurt me there. I was happy. I was like "don't make me go back to the real world." [She giggles.]

After that, me and my brother got really close. We used to fight like cats and dogs. We had gotten in fist fights. He had almost broken my nose once. Then I went to [MC] and he begged my mom to come visit me. He comes and he says to me, "you know you have always been the strongest? You will get through this." I cried. He was crying more than I was because his little sister is in [MC] and sad and everything. So I come home and he comes in my room as I am about to go to bed, and he gives me a hug and then we have been close ever since.

Having a near death experience really changes a person. [She nods.] I want to live. I want to travel the world. I don't want to die until I have seen Ireland. A couple of months later, I met Mark and I started loving school again. I started doing my homework and I nearly gave my teachers heart attacks. I was starting on the road to recovery when I met Mark and he just kind of pushed it along even more. I am so grateful for him. He really is my life line. He has helped me get through so many times when I just wanted to slit my wrists. I was taking Trazedon for sleep and then I was taking Lexipro for the

depression and they like had me on a bunch of pills before that. I still had those depressed thoughts. So I stopped taking the pills. I'd call Mark up and he would talk with me, we'd work it out, and he'd help me through it. Mark's been where I'd been. He has scars all up and down his arm from his depressed days and he knows what it is like. I honestly don't think I could live my life without him in it.

I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I'm tired of being sick and I'm sick of being tired. I want to get a better life. I want to get healthy again. I want to get happy again. Just that motivation in my mind brought me where I am now. I've also wanted to go here ever since I first heard about it. I heard good things about this school, like how everyone's so nice to each other and everyone just gets a long. The teachers are nice to you and they support you. I heard that and I'm just like "I want to come there. I want to be a part of that community. I want to have someone care about me." So I came here. I called Mark up the moment I got in and was like "I got in, I got in, I got in" [She speaks as if she is muffling a scream and then giggles.]

I was a little skeptical. I'm like "what if all those were lies?" I came to Disco. Everything was true. All the teachers are so supportive. You can go to them with your problems and they'll listen and help you. Everyone's friendly and you can just say hi to them and they will say hi back. Even if you hate the person, you can still tolerate 'em. They aren't horrible people. You don't have to like them. You can tolerate them. You know that was the biggest impact; I'm like "I want to feel like people know me. I want my teachers to remember me years from now." I hope these people will. [She giggles.]

In Disco, I had to write my autobiography. It was hard to write about some things. I started crying at some parts. Sometimes it's harder to write things down than it

is to speak them. I came here still in a bad place. I wasn't completely sure of myself. All that changed. I got As and Bs for the first time in my life. I actually loved school now. I actually want to come here. I just like to stand like in this building. There is positive energy all around this place. I just feel like "I can do it."

Before going to [the alternative high school], Ed and Ryan wanted me to try out the regular high school. I was there for 6 weeks. [The traditional high school] was lonely and horrible. I was really really tiny and there were huge people all around me, bumping into me, knocking me into the ground. I had eight classes a day and all of them gave me 4 hours of homework. I did all the homework and was totally exhausted. I was at the point of passing out and never waking up again by the time I got here. [She giggles.] My brother's friends made fun of me while he did the same thing. There were a couple people I liked, but I couldn't really relate to them. Then there was the fact that I had a sexist P.E. teacher.

I actually found a big group of friends. It was just that some of them didn't like me. This one kid who was like "I have a problem with you" and I'm like "good for you. I am not going to change myself just because you have a problem with me meowing." I make random animal noises sometimes. [She giggles.] And then there everything is focused around sports, which I think are barbaric and idiotic to all man kind. You always knew when there was going to be a game, because all the cheerleaders were wearing their cheerleading uniforms, and you just wanted to look at them and be like, "can I puke on you?" They were always like [She makes high pitched indiscriminate speaking noises.] and their short skirts came up to like here [She points to her butt.] They were uber-short. You could see their asses, and you're like "oh g-d my eyes." [She

makes high pitched indiscriminate speaking noises.] *The boys wearing their football jerseys smelt so rank.* [She giggles.] *I was like “dude, do you ever wash that jersey?”*
[She giggles.] *All the jocks were so stupid.*

I mainly left because I was picked on. My parents were saying “it’s the way you dress; it’s the way you look when you walk into the school.” I’m like “no. It’s the way I am.” They were always telling me “you need to change. You need to wear more color. You need to wear a happier smile.” I’m like “when do I not have a smile on my face?”
[She giggles.] *It is not the way I dress. No one cares about that. It’s just the way I am. I am just different.*

At [the alternative high school], during Disco you do a lot of things. You learn how to work in groups and about anger management. You learn about the psyche. You just learn about a bunch of different things. Basically, you learn how to interact with other human beings without being totally put off by them. It teaches you some drug stuff, like how to stay away from drugs. It gives you support and it gets you used to [the alternative high school]. The first couple of weeks it was kind of awkward and weird, like every time somebody looked at me I was like, “what?” They’d talk to me and I’d be like, “are you talking to me? Who are you talking to? Is there somebody else around here?” [She smiles, points at herself, and shrugs her shoulders.] *And no, they would be talking to me and I’d just think, “huh? Are you sure? You sure you don’t want someone else?”*

My mom was indifferent about me coming here. She didn’t have cared either way, although she’d rather I go to [the traditional high school], so she can save gas money. My dad had the same opinion my brother did, like “you want to go to school with

a bunch of fuckers. That's such a gay school. What if you turn into a drug addict?"

[She speaks with a deep guttural voice.] *I'd say, "can you just spend a day there before you judge it?" They're just like "no thanks. I have something to do."* [She speaks with a deep guttural voice.]

I am very happy here. I have never loved school more than when I have been in here. In the other school, you're like just another face in an endless sea for teachers. No one even knows you exist. Here I think teachers go out of their way to talk to you. I would not say that [the alternative high school] is like absolutely perfect because nothing's perfect. I would say the school lunches need to improve. The macaroni and cheese, you think is going to eat you, instead of you eating it. [She smiles and giggles.] *Also, I really think the Disco kids should interact more with the community. They should have them be in community times. I'd also like to see more of electives being like shown; we don't get a whole lot of elective-like choices, except during elective-week.*

I don't have any homework. I study my notes. [She smiles and giggles.] *I get all As. You know I was all pissed because for one of my labs for microbiology, I got a C, so I redid it this morning. I have done great in math, all because of my math teacher.* [She smiles and giggles.] *Kim is the funniest math teacher ever. A couple of weeks ago, she got into an argument with some of the other females over who Brad Pitt loved more.* [She smiles and giggles.] *She keeps you on your toes and you are always associating the lessons with her jokes. At least I do. She's really creative on concepts. I don't even have to think about it now and I can do math. I think it is her way of teaching. She is definitely the alternative school teacher. Her teaching's way different. It is a lot more relaxed.*

Here, everybody goes by their first names. I think that's great because when you are calling a teacher by their first name instead of their surname, I think I feel like you can talk to them more. I feel like it is more of a friend talking to another friend trying to learn something. Instead of, if you have to call a teacher by their surname, you kind of feel like "I'm the little kid, you're the big kid. Please don't hurt me." I will go up to Tom and say "hey Tom, what's up? How's your day going?" I will tell him something that happened to me last night, like my cat attacking my face. See I wasn't going to tell my other teachers that. [She smiles and giggles.]

The hexter's are shorter but you learn a lot more. It's way more intense. Like Microbiology, I think I have done a total of 12 labs already and that is just for 5 weeks, and I don't think you do that many in an entire school year of biology. You get your credits faster. I have been told that I will actually graduate early, with the way I am going. I'm going to try to hold some of my credits back so that I can do the house bill thing and go to Front Range Community College. House Bill 1244 is when you are enrolled in high school, you can take college classes and the state will pay for it.

When I met Mark, I think he really was a contribution to my wanting to stay at school. He was always teaching me things, helping me study, and making sure I was doing my homework. Now I just do it and I forget I do it. [She smiles and giggles.] [The alternative high school] contributes to me wanting to stay at school. The teacher relations were totally different. Classes are smaller, so I can't fall asleep in class. [She smiles and giggles.] I used to fall asleep in every single class period. [She hangs her head and muffles her speaking into her hands.] There is only just like ten of you, so you feel a lot more connected with the teachers. The atmosphere here is just so much better.

I don't have to see people putting their fingers in crosses at me saying, "Oh g-d, get away from me you devil". That is how it was for me. I was their created devil. I walked into school one day, dressed as I usually do in all black and looking relatively normal actually. I walked down the halls and I would hear, "let's burn her at the stake. Let's stone her in the back." The people here are awesome.

In some way we are all different from the majority of those schools. Some of us had Mohawks; other of us had tattoos all over us. Some of us had piercings in any place you could find. Or sometimes we were just too smart for everyone else and so we were picked on for that. In some way we were all different and somehow that's what makes our community here so great. We all know what its like not to be accepted. We come here and we are.

I want to get eight tattoos soon. The first one I'm going to get is going to be on the back of my neck and its going to be of the word "life" in old English text and there is going to be a white rose behind it. I am doing it sometime this year, after my sixteenth birthday when I can without parent consent. First I am going to do the tongue piercing and then the tattoo. Then I am going to have one on my chest of a crouching wolf. Me and my sister love wolves. Grace is a big wolf fan and she means a lot to me, so I figure if I always have this wolf here, then she will always be with me. She is going to get one too. Brea's going to get one too. We are all going to have this wolf tattoo somewhere on our bodies. Then I am going to get a skull with flames around it on my stomach with a rose in its teeth because I think that's cool. [She smiles and giggles.] Then there is going to be a dagger on my thigh because it's just funny. It is going to be pointing up and it's going to be bloody. [She laughs.] I am going to be like grossing out everyone because

it's symbolic to cramps and periods. [She smiles and giggles.] I designed all of my tattoos. I have them all pictured out and everything, except for the dragon and the unicorn thing. That's the one on the small of my back. Its white and its kind of worm-like, entwined around the black unicorn that's rearing up. Then I want a vampirism on my shoulder blade right here. Then on my ankle, I want my zodiac sign of a Leo.

My dad has three tattoos but they're fading. He is going through a mid-life crisis, so he's getting another one and he wants my mom to get one with him. As usual, they are not getting along so that may not happen. My parents fight all the time. They are having a lot of financial problems. My dad works at a guitar center and my mom has a part time job as a secretary. We are not making a whole lot of money. It has gotten worse because he's drinkin, and now that we've bought a house, it is bad because they couldn't really afford it. Since I am always home, I am the easiest target. They yell at me about stupid things. "Oh your hair looks weird. Your pants are too baggy. Get a job. You're fuckin' ugly. You're fat; lose some weight." I think the main problem is really, since you are living with your parents, you can't use your Disco skills a lot of the time. You live with them and they are your parents. They are your support system. You have to sit through it and wait until you move out, and then you can deal with it. Then you can take them to court.

I think me and my dad's relationship is the worst, because I am actually afraid of him. My dad's a pretty buff guy, he gets angry pretty easy and he's a scary person. I will admit that. My dad's a very scary person. Every time my dad yells and points his finger at me, it is in critical parent mode where everything I do is wrong. I revert back to this child-like state, where I am cowering in the corner. That is one of the things we learn in

Disco. My dad's critical parent pretty much all of the time. My mom's a nurturing parent when she can be; sometimes she goes into critical parent mode. Adam's the ok... not ok child. When I was seven and he was eight years old, he got mad at me for something and he grabbed the back of my head and slammed my face into the stairwell. He nearly broke my nose in three places. I have a lot of issues with my brother because my dad just yelled at him and didn't ground him, while I'm like gushing blood here. Mainly he just does it emotionally, like he calls me a slut and makes fun of my weight. All that like constant mental abuse eventually gets to you. I am constantly trying to go on diets.

My family is just dysfunctional to all hell. I love them, but I'm starting to really hate them. [She smiles and giggles.] I am sure that after I move out, I will be able to deal with them on holidays, but then I am going to have to fly in to see them because I am moving to France with Mark. I'll tell them, "I'm really sick and tired of you all picking on me, taking out your frustrations on me. Do this when I leave for college. So when you're ready to treat me like your loving daughter, I'll come back, but until then don't try to contact me."

We haven't had family dinners since I was born. My mom cooks the meal and we fix up our plates and go to our respective rooms. We all have TVs in our rooms. I go to my room, Adam goes to his room, dad goes down to the studio, and mom goes to the living room. They never ask about my life, friends, or school, and I never feel like it's their business to tell them. I love them and everything but hey I am not going to tell them "yeah, we went driving around all night, eating jelly beans, and pigging out on chocolate

and we loved it," because they are just going to be looking at me like, "why aren't you hanging out with girls?"

When I go out with my friends, we stay up all night and just drive around. We listen to music, drive around, walk around Old Town, go to someone's house, munch of food, watch movies, play video games. I did try playing Halo and I blew myself up with my grenade. I am really bad at it, but everyone was having fun trying to tell me what to do and I'm just sitting there like "this controller is too big". [She smiles and giggles.] I come home every night pretty much because my parents think that society will look down on me if I spend the night at one of my guy friends' house.

I don't hang out with any females. I just get a long with boys better because I am a tom boy. I hate skirts, I hate like painting my nails, or like doing my hair. I paint my nails. I do, I do, I do, because during the summer time, I got really bored and I just painted them every day. They got dependent on the nail polish, so every time I take it off, it hurts. There are some girls that I do get a long with here but really I don't know how to start out the conversation. I can talk to guys fine.

I've got to do jogging tomorrow with Mark. Tuesday, Thursday, and Fridays, he's jogging and I'm riding a bike beside him because that's the only way I can keep up. I don't like it, but I'm not going to leave him. He asked me to do it and I promised him I would. I don't break my word. He wants to get in shape and my answer to that was "round is a shape. A very nice shape, it's perfect." [She smiles and giggles.] But he's like "no, I want to lose the pooch." I'm like, "so I have to lose my pooch?" [She smiles and giggles.] Oh well, it will probably be good in the aftermath. Mark's probably the most gentle person I've ever met. If I don't want to do something, all I have to say is

“Mark, I don’t want to” and he’ll release me immediately. “Let’s watch some TV, play a board game. Play some cards. Have a tickle fight.” Sometimes he just has to look at me and then I burst out laughing. The other Friday, I had this total giggle thing because he just kept looking at me. I was laughing for like an hour -- just unusually helpless. Oh, he just loves it. He’s graduating next hexter. He’s leaving me like in two weeks.

I was in a really abusive relationship once with another guy years ago and he raped me. I was eleven or twelve and he was only fifteen. It made me weak. I was scared of everyone. I was like “touch me and I’ll kill you.” [She smiles and giggles.] I got into drugs and became paranoid, constantly looking over my shoulder. Then I realized I am not going to live my life scared. “You did this to me”. I’m going to make sure that he doesn’t do it to anyone else. I didn’t prosecute. I did something worse. My friend, who I was really close to, died of leukemia. Before she did, she told me he was attracted to one of her friends who had recently been diagnosed with AIDS. She went out with him and had a relationship with him. They got really intimate and he got AIDS. He shot himself in the head when he found out. I feel guilty for it. I don’t feel like I did it, but I don’t feel that he deserved it.

It’s also why I want to be a lawyer because if I know that they did something and I’m defending them. I’m not going to say that I’m not going to do as good a job as I would if I knew they were innocent, but it’s just going to subconsciously happen. It’s like “you did that and you’re admitting it. OK, I’ll defend you.” Not revenge, but if I don’t defend them well enough and they go to jail, I’m not going to feel guilty. I’m just going to be like “sorry” - and if they want to post bail, and they want me to defend them again, I’m not going to do it. I’m going to say “you can stay in there,” because honestly it

happened to me and I don't want it to happen to anyone else. There are also the innocent ones. These other people are just hurting them and making their lives miserable. They need someone to defend them and I am willing to be that person. I will defend the guilty but if I know they're innocent, then I will work my ass off to get them out of jail. If you're innocent, you don't deserve to be in a place like that. If you're guilty, get the fuck in there and don't ever come out.

I can do a lot. I want to go to Harvard now and I am going to try to go into Harvard law. Shoot for the moon and if you miss you still land on the stars. My friend first told me that and I was like, "wow that is going to hurt your butt." [She smiles and giggles.] I am going to specialize in juvenile and adult law at least until I retire, and then I am going to become an art teacher.

I am trying to get a job for right now. I am going to tell them I am a very friendly person, I get along with people excellently, I have very large vocabulary skills, I am very understanding, I will listen to someone if they talk to me, and I am very good at typing. Right now, though, I'm working on getting my permit. I'm a better driver than my brother and he has a license. He thinks he has to speed everywhere and me, I'm just like, "OK, I'm going 25, this better be the speed limit. I hope there's no one behind me because I don't want to use my blinker," just because it confuses me.

Reflection

After a lengthy silence, I realize she is done and say "Thanks for sharing with us, Adina. I appreciate you coming here today."

“Oh no problem,” she says. “It is not like I have anything else to do. I thought you’d want to hear my story from me anyway.” She giggles.

“Yeah, we did,” I say, smiling. “Would you like to stick around while I reflect on my experience talking to you?”

“Oh sure,” she says giggling. “I AM kind of curious.”

“Well,” I begin. “Adina is the youngest of the four young women I talked to. She is also the young woman who wanted to spend the most time with me. She bent over backwards to find time to meet with me and never missed a meeting.”

She giggles and leans back in her chair. “Well, I had nothing better to do and you said you wanted to talk to young women and I am the youngest there.”

“I know. I will get to that.” I smile and continue, “There were days when I felt she would probably have enjoyed several more interviews, but I was done with my line of questioning with her. When I was talking to other people, I would feel her presence behind me. She was waiting to talk to me. Not too long after I finished interviewing Adina, she and her boyfriend, Mark, broke up. Although she looked sad and expressed frustration at his lack of communication, she did not seem devastated. Her description of their relationship throughout these interviews led me to believe that she really couldn’t live without him. Unbeknownst to me, there was a parallel story occurring. Adina was actually unhappy and unfulfilled in her relationship with Mark and felt some relief in it being over.” She nods and pushes out her lips in a pout, then giggles at her own silliness.

“Parallel stories are common in Adina’s story. At once, two simultaneous perspectives of the same circumstances are true for Adina. Although this is not true only of Adina’s story, her parallel stories show up more often. Simultaneously, she expresses

that she and her brother are best friends and that she and her brother fight, he has anger issues, and he is mean to her. She expresses feeling tiny and weak, at the same time she feels strong for her size and just the right height. She dislikes jocks and cheerleaders, but if they came 'here', she would accept them. She hates doing what could be called 'feminine' activities, and yet paints her nails, colors her hair, and prepares lunch for her and her boyfriend.

"Adina's story was fascinating in that it stood as an example of how complex and multi-faceted the human experience is. She shares a variety of different stories, different feelings, and different ideas about her life and life in general. Each contributes to what and how she thinks about herself." She looks at me and tilts her head, as if confused.

I smile at her. "It will make sense to you in a minute," I say. "My story engaged with hers on several levels. Her warmth, vitality, and willingness to participate were a wonderful gift. She was the first young woman to approach me about participating, the first to complete all four interviews, and always the first to approach me when I arrived at the school. At the time of the interviews last spring, I was struggling in my relationship with Todd and my roommates, feeling lost in my studies and commitments, and beginning to feel like I might be depressed. I welcomed Adina's enthusiasm, but also felt strained by her need for attention from me. My parallel story is related in my notes: *I am antsy. Life feels overwhelming and I have this urge to tell everyone I meet to listen to all that is on my plate. It is hard.... There is a part of me that feels like unloading this all on Adina, which is not going to help me meet my goal.* I did not feel a need to express my struggles to any of the other girls in the same way. I can imagine that it was her open, conversational style that drew me in. Perhaps, I too felt she was a good listener.

“Realizing that I had my own story happening while I was learning about hers alerted my sense of intersubjectivity. I began to understand that while I was interviewing these young women, all of them, not just Adina, my experiences, thoughts, and feelings impacted how I related to them each time we met. I realized that their stories, while their own words and thoughts, were created in the space we shared together. I interacted with them as they spoke, framed responses and questions from wherever I was at that moment, and they told me their story in response. Adina helped me see that although these stories are theirs, they are also ours. We created them together.

“I asked Adina why she decided to participate. Her response was interesting. She said: *I figured since you are interviewing young women, that you’d... uh... want the youngest’s point of view.* She felt unique as the youngest and presumed I would want to talk to the unique people at the alternative high school. I wonder also if there was some part of her that was curious what it would be like and maybe a more subconscious part that needed to feel needed. I asked her in the last interview how she felt about being interviewed. She said: *I felt egotistical. I’m like WOW, I’m special. People want to hear what I have to say. Oh, I am Goddess, bow to me. My ego goes up really easily. So I’m like trying to do like “OK, bring yourself down somehow. Your hair looks bad.” It felt good. You know, I didn’t think it was awkward at all. I thought it was easy. I’m just like - why do people have trouble talking about themselves? Come on, it’s your soul. Something you know more about than anything. I like talking about myself. I’m like ‘look at me.’* Her response is interesting. She felt like her ego bloomed and then that she should cut her ego back down. She felt good talking about herself and wanted people to

look at her, but cut herself down internally I presume and obviously with sarcasm and jokes at her own expense throughout her interviews.

“The only time Adina felt it was hard to talk was when she talked about her heroin use. She said: *I try not to remember it. It was a bad time. You know, I learned from it. I’ll remember the lesson but I don’t want to remember the feeling. I don’t even remember how I got started into it. I don’t even remember how I got my money for it. I don’t know, that’s how high I was. You know, it’s a huge gap in my life, really, most of the time. And you know, it’s a bad place to be, it’s a bad place to remember. I like to remember happy things. Happy things are good to remember.* Again, my own story interacted with hers here. I heard myself asking myself, where is she coming from? Is she lying to me? How could she have done so many drugs at that age and not become addicted? If she really liked to remember happy things, why is her story not filled with them? I understood later that it was immensely difficult to listen to another person’s story, when my own was creating another reality.

“Her final request of me was a copy of her transcripts. We talked about the opportunity to have transcripts or to wait until I wrote her story. She said: *My Mom’s like “we should get a copy of that.” It’s just like, “you can read it when I’m far, far away...”* So I am going to cut out a piece of the wall and put it in. [She laughs.] *If it’s found then it’ll be found and I’ll deal with it then, but until then, no looking! I’ll deal with you when its time for me to tell you. Fuck off.* Again, there are two stories: one where Adina wants the story and believes her mother is right in asking her to get her story and another where she will hide and guard the story.

“Adina really liked the idea of publishing some articles about her stories together. I reminded her that these are her stories and I am not the sole author on anything that contains her story. I will give her credit as well. She was planning to attend college and work towards a JD. I think she believed publishing with me would help her career.”

“Yeah, I’d like that,” she says nodding. “That will be really great. I hid the story you gave me where no one will ever find it.” She pushes up her shoulders, lowers her head, and taps her fingers together in unison in front of her mouth. She giggles, as she tries to look devious.

I smile. “I am sure you did. Again, thanks for coming.”

“You’re welcome,” she replies. “I will go wait outside for you now. I need a ride home.”

“It will be awhile for us and then I will come find you,” I say. “Tell Molly I can take her too, if she wants.”

She pushes her chair back, says good bye to each person individually and they in turn thank her and wish her good luck. She smiles, nods, and exits the room. As she closes the door, my anxiety rises. Oh boy, I think. Now this is the hard part. Now they are going to want to know what I think. Oye vey. How am I going to explain that I worked on it and then just had to find a place to stop? I could have looked at these stories and looked at these stories, each time in a completely different way and come up with completely different things to write. I can feel my heart race, as I take a sip of water from my purple Nalgene bottle. A couple beads of water drip down my chin and onto my shirt. Great, Becky, I think. That was classy. I giggle to myself.

“What’s so funny?” asks Kate, as Lizzy turns to me and smiles.

“Oh nothing,” I respond. “Just forgotten how to drink without spilling on myself. My brain is so wrapped up in my defense I can’t remember how to stay clean.” I smile and twist the top back on the bottle before setting it down.

“So, what’s next?” I ask.

CHAPTER IV: THE DEFENSE

And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasure, all the good and the evil, all of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. –Herman Hesse, in *Sidhartha*

Research Questions

“That’s exactly what I want to ask you,” says Lizzy. “So what? Now that we have heard the ‘what?’ of the story. So what does it all mean? What have you learned?”

“That is a great question,” I say pulling my notes towards me on the table and leafing through them to find the parts about my defense. I begin before I find them, “The idea with narrative inquiry is to retell the story of someone’s life and to explore the ways that person made sense of their life through the stories he or she told. The stories you have heard have given you an idea of who each of these young women are. They have explained to you how they were before and how they are now, how and where they felt connections in their lives before and how and where they feel connections in their lives now. They have made sense of their lives by telling these stories and our job is to look more closely at how they made sense of their lives, the sense-making process, and what it tells us about their educational experiences.

“My goal was to tell the stories of young women and examine them more closely in the hopes of revealing how complex their lives are and how the term ‘at-risk’ fails to describe their experiences fully. They are not simply students lacking a quality that would help them be successful. They are students who made connections in their lives

like every other person, who found that the way they were and the actions they took were not working for them, and who made profound changes in their lives while attending an alternative high school.

“When I proposed this research project, I went into the study with the following research questions:

- What are their stories?
- What are their experiences?
- What are the taken for granted aspects of traditional and alternative schools?
- What motivates women to continue their education in an alternative school?
- How does the culture of alternative high schools enrich their lives? In what ways does it harm them?
- What meaning do they give their experiences?
- What meaning do they give alternative high schools?
- In what ways do they rebel against their experiences and in what ways do they embrace them?

“As I read and reread their stories and studied what narrative researchers do with their research, I found that what I was asking of my research was not what I wanted or needed to ask. After many conversations with Todd, my mom, other PhD students, and you, what I wanted to ask became murkier and murkier. I was not at all sure what I was doing with these stories. I was stuck, day in and day out. I could not figure out what to explore or write about. Then one day, after several days of trying to help and getting bombarded by my refusals, Todd asked ‘what was it that you wanted to know from this research? Don’t look at what you were supposed to do; instead, look for what you

wanted to explore. What were you interested in? What stands out for you now?’ He actually asked me those questions several times as I wrote this dissertation and each time I was reminded of my focus and steered in a better direction.

“I wanted to ask different questions of the data. I narrowed my focus and found three questions I wanted to ask the data. I began my research looking for stories of personal transformation, wondering how the young women I met before and through this research make sense of the changes they have made in their lives. I was also interested in the stories they told about their disconnection from the traditional school and their reconnection to education through an alternative setting. Additionally, I was curious about the role our educational system played in their disconnection and reconnection.

“Therefore, my questions became:

- How did these young women make sense of their transformation? What can we learn from how they tell their stories of transformation?
- How did these young women make sense of their disconnection from traditional forms of education and their reconnection to education through an alternative high school? What can we learn about disconnection and reconnection from their sense making?
- How did the educational system contribute to their disconnection and reconnection? What can we learn about the educational system from these stories?

If you want to know the past, to know what has caused you, look at yourself in the PRESENT, for that is the past's effect. If you want to know your future, then look at yourself in the PRESENT, for that is the cause of the future. -Majjhima Nikaya

Stories of Transformation

“The first area of their stories I would like to explore today is their stories of transformation. Particularly, I want to explore how they constructed their ideas of who they were before and who they are now, how they made sense of that transformation, and what we can learn from their transformation stories.”

“So basically, let me see if I get this straight, Becky. You are looking at how they made sense of their personal transformation?” asks Mike.

“Yes, exactly. But before I do, I want to clarify what I mean when I say ‘making sense’. Each young woman told us a story that she believed would explain how she got to be the way she is. It is not just a chronology of events, but instead in many cases she provided us with the reasons why she was who she was and is now who she is. When I say ‘making sense,’ I am referring not only to the places where she justified her actions or others’ actions, but also where she provided us with the ‘reasons why’ the story unfolded the way it did. By ‘making sense’ of their lived experiences, the young women claimed to know what caused the effect they felt or experienced. By telling the story and making sense of their experiences, their lives became understandable; it was no longer a mystery why things happened the way they did. It all began to make sense.

“Each young woman could identify the reasons why she was the way she was before, she could identify how her life worked for her less and less over time, and then she could identify a pivotal moment and the reasons why she is who she is now. It is

almost as if there were three women in their stories: who I was before, who I was becoming as my life began to work for me less and less, and who I am now. When I said I was going to look for stories of transformation, I thought I would find something that revealed gradual change and realization over time. Instead, what I got was a clear picture of who they were, how their lives worked less over time, a pivotal event, and who they are today and why. It is not that the stories did not flow or tell us the chronology of events that took place before a pivotal event and after a pivotal event; it is that the transformation appeared suddenly after the event. In at least one case the pivotal event was Disco, which lends credibility to the power of the Disco orientation program. In the other cases, school was not mentioned. Let's look at how each young woman made sense of her transformation in this way in order of her appearance today.

“Rose told us about how mean she used to be and how low her tolerance was for annoying boys in her classes. She told us that there were bad things that happened to her when she was *a little little girl and those made me hate guys, like bad, hate them. I mean like any guys that got on my nerves, I just would fight 'em. Beat 'em up.* Who she was when she was younger was someone who hated boys and beat them up, because she was raped twice when she was five years old.

“She described that over time her behavior and attitude worsened. She beat up a couple more students, she stopped attending her classes, she told her parents she was expelled, and she started using pot regularly. Her identity was that of a rebel. She said: *I just was in a point in my life that I was just like I don't care about anything. Why do I need all this stuff for? I want to do what I want and I don't care. You know, how sometimes you want to rebel? That's what I did.* She also used to not take care of herself

or do what she needed to do to be successful because she was rebelling. She claimed she used to be a rebel and that explains her poor performance in school and her increasingly 'bad' behavior. *You know, how sometimes you want to rebel?*

“Now, Rose sees her identity completely differently after having attended Disco. She feels like her life now is a *dream world* because she is doing so well, managing so many responsibilities, taking care of herself, and enjoying her life. She is getting good grades and doing well at work because she is motivated by g-d's desire for her to be something in this world. She realizes now that she has to *take care of business* as she learned in Disco because g-d has a plan for her. She has always had an instinct to fight and therefore, still does have that instinct. She believes she is morally good because she keeps secrets that she is asked to keep, unlike her immoral friends. She also claims to be a writer and a singer. Her identity has transformed from one of a fighter and a rebel to one of a successful young woman with the instinct to fight, to be moral, and to live the life g-d wants for her.

“Jawny Dehp told us, *I was happy, but I was unhappy because of the drugs.* In her story, who she was and how she used to be were a result of her drug use. She told us that she used drugs because her family introduced her to them. The identity she created of her younger self is that of a curious young girl, whose family uses drugs.

“She described that over time she started using a variety of drugs more often because she hung out with an older crowd that suddenly started using more and more drugs. She continued to use drugs because she had so much fun using them. She also told us *I used to not do my homework and slack off in school because it was cool. I guess I was trying to look cool. If you are all brain, you are not as cool.... I was trying to*

make an impression on the boys. She claimed to have been a social butterfly, both because she used drugs and acted cool and because that is how she always had been. As she grew up, she became a heavy drug and alcohol user and a social butterfly who did not attend school unless she was high.

“Now, who she is has changed. She claimed she is not using drugs so that she can pass her UAs and BAs and because she never wants to go back to jail. However, she also claimed she may start using again because *you never know what will happen.* She can think clearly now because she is not using drugs. She chooses to talk to people that she finds interesting, but she will not *take crap from anyone* because she is *sick of taking crap from Matt*, her mother’s ex-boyfriend. She is no longer interested in talking to a lot of people because she is on ADHD medicines that slow her down and because some of the people at school do not interest her. She is no longer cool or a social butterfly because she does not talk to everyone like she used to. Her identity has changed ever since she stopped using drugs; she is no longer a social butterfly and drug/alcohol addict. She is now a woman avoiding jail, picking her friends, thinking clearly, and standing up for herself.”

“Becky, before you continue, I have a question,” says Mike. “It sounds to me like her identity as a recovering addict has not yet taken hold and yet you are claiming that these were quick transformations from one way of being to another, where these young women claimed one identity and are now claiming another. Can you talk a little bit about Jawny Dehp’s fit in that analysis? What would you say about her identity now as a recovering addict?”

“Mike, your point is interesting and pertinent. First, I am not claiming that there was only one way these young women made sense of their transformation. I am only saying that this is one way that they did use to tell the story of their transformation. On the other hand, your question presumes that Jawny Dehp’s new identity is one of a recovering addict. I am not sure it is. I think what her story revealed is her continued struggle with drug and alcohol use. Her identity right now has not become one of a recovering addict. She talked as if she may use again at any time. She likes some of the things she experiences now that she is not using, but also looks back fondly at her experiences as a drug user. Her identity now is a story of someone who is avoiding *messing up* and getting thrown back in jail. Who she is and what she does now as an expression of who she is are a reflection of that story. She is someone avoiding the experience of jail and we have heard the reasons why she wants to avoid jail at all costs. She hated the short showers, the lack of hygiene products, and the minimal amount of food.

“There were some cases when the young women claimed to have been a certain way or to be a certain way without also stating the reasons why. In those cases I assumed that they did not want to tell me how they made sense of that identity, had not yet made sense of that area of their life, or felt no need to self-reflect in that area. For example, Rose claimed *I’ve always had that like instinct - if someone really makes me mad, I just take them on*, without telling us a story that would reveal why she developed or kept that instinct. Instead, she just claimed that she had always had that instinct. Molly claimed to be against apologizing and not afraid of getting in trouble at school. Instead of providing reasons for either belief, she provided us with further description of that belief. She also

did not like being told what to do and yet she told no story that would provide us with an indication of why she would not like being told what to do. She also claimed to like writing, but did not explain why she likes writing. Adina claimed that she *doesn't break [her] word*. She followed through with what she said she would do, but she gave no explanation of why she believed that or why she behaved that way.

“Stories of transformation reveal how a person has changed over time. Sometimes those changes are gradual and marked by descriptions and stories at specific intervals. Other times, like in most of these cases, the stories are revealed as this is how I used to be, here is how I progressed over time, and this is how I am now after some pivotal moment.”

“Becky, can you continue with your explanation of how the other two women made sense of their transformations from who they were to who they are now? I am curious to hear what else you found,” says Kate, smiling and writing some notes in her binder.

“Sure.” I respond. “Let’s move to Molly next. Molly described herself by saying *I mean before I don’t know what was wrong with me before, but I had a really bad attitude towards a lot of things. I was like screw this, screw that*. This was one of those times when she did not tell us where her bad attitude came from. She knew she had a bad attitude because she would say *screw this, screw that*. Her story of identity began in the ‘progression’ section of the transformation story. She did not portray herself before she got into trouble in much detail. She gave us very little indication of who she thought she was before she started getting into trouble. She said she started getting into trouble in junior high school because she started talking back to the adults in the school. She hated

them because they did not let her be who she was, which meant being loud, they did not let her wear the clothes she wanted to wear, and they did not let her express her affinity for ICP. She loved making the adults in the school crazy because they were mean to her, she explained.

“As time went by, she got in several fights with both her parents and other students because of her bad attitude. She got suspended for fighting and for wearing ICP paraphernalia. She got kicked out of the house and made at least one appearance in court to defend herself against charges she could not remember. She described that she had a fight at school and the assistant principal asked her to leave because she was *corrupting the school*. That is when she chose to go to an alternative high school.

“Molly’s identity changed recently. As you could hear, she explained that she used to have a bad attitude but then that changed when her parents became more lenient with her curfew. She said she learned a lot in Disco, but had taken the course several years ago at the junior high school. Her transformation happened when she was allowed to wear ICP at the alternative high school and when her parents set more lenient rules for her curfew. She believes she is a *scrub* because she does not care what others think of her. She is going to do what she wants because she wants to do it. She is not at school to win a beauty pageant. She now is proud of herself for taking care of herself. She gets good grades and works hard in school. Her identity has transformed from being a young woman with a bad attitude, to being a young woman who will do what she wants, take care of herself, and be successful in school, so that she can be a parole officer.

“Adina’s identity used to be of someone who *wanted to be nothing*, she said. She chose to wear black because *it made her nothing*. She said this was because she gave up.

Her 5th grade teacher was mean to her and told her she would be nothing. Her paternal grandmother told her she would be nothing and criticized her daily when she lived with her. She also felt alone and like she did not fit in. Those three reasons explain why she wanted to hurt herself, become nothing, and give up on school and life. Her fifth grade teacher's reactions to her led her to *lose* her love for learning, which contributed to her giving up on school. She said she had to grow up fast because of the bad things that happened to her when she was a child, which kept her from having *much of a childhood*. She also said she was mean and threw other children in garbage bins because *I would say that I was angry*.

“Adina described her life progressing and not working for her when she tried to take her own life. She felt so alone, so hurt by the world, and so hopeless that she attempted suicide. Her feelings progressed and grew over time until she was hurting herself, in an attempt to escape, she said.

“Adina told a different story of her present life. She is more determined to be happy and healthy because *a near death experience really changes a person*. She does well at the alternative high school because the school exudes *a positive feeling* and she believes now *I can do it*. She also loves school now because of the atmosphere there and her ex-boyfriend's support. She is *constantly on a diet* because *all that constant mental abuse eventually gets to you*. She now wears black and *learns to write old English text* because she wants to be sophisticated and classy, which she believes they both are. She is mature because of her hard experiences and her attempted suicide. She is a Wiccan because of the freedom the religion gives her to have sex with the person she loves. Adina used to identify herself as troubled, self-injurious, and insignificant. She described

herself as angry and distraught. Now she does what she wants to do, she is successful, she loves to learn, and she is determined to be happy and healthy.”

I pause a moment as I finish my stories of these young women’s transformation sense making, thinking that what I have said is not the whole story. How can I phrase the rest of this story? I wonder. What I found was a progression happening before an event that caused them to have one identity, then an event, and then an entire different idea of themselves and their lives. After hesitating, looking at my notes, and reminding myself of the direction I wanted to go, I look up to see everyone at the table looking at me. My heart races, I flush, and begin to explain my next thought.

“What I found in their stories was an explanation of how things got to be bad for them, how their life began not working for them. Then they tell about an event, very quickly, and explain how their lives are different now and why. The stories of transformation are dichotomous, demonstrating who I was becoming and how I am now. I wondered after finding these dichotomous stories consistent across each woman’s story if I too had two different stories of myself, for example the story that explains who I was becoming before I finished my Ph.D. and the story that explains who I will be after I finish my Ph.D.

“I took some time to look back through my life the day I recognized this dichotomous storyline running through each story and I realized that I did not have vastly different views of my life over time. I wondered if that had something to do with the age I am at now where life appears to change a lot but my personality only gradually develops and changes, the lack of recent trauma in my life to spur similar life struggles, or the act of internal self-reflection rather than external sense making. Perhaps if I were

to tell my story to others I would make sense of the changes in my understanding of myself over time differently, making sense of the changes with dichotomous stories of this is how I was becoming and why and this is who I am now and why.

“I recently had a conversation with my supervisor at the Research and Development Center for the Advancement of Student Learning. She explained to me that after reading a book on the power of thought to change physical structures, she began to see her life in a totally different way. She began to realize how she could control her feelings both emotionally and physically by thinking differently and now she uses those skills daily. Although she did not give me a full story of how she used to interact with her internal dialogue before she read the book, she explained that she has changed how she interacts with her internal dialogue because she read a book. She is different now because she read a book. The story of transformation was this was a pivotal moment in my life, this is who I am now and this is why.

“After remembering that conversation, I began to think that perhaps stories of ‘transformation’ are that simple in some cases. They are stories of how I used to be and why and how I am now and why, or stories only of this is how I am now and why. In other cases, though, the stories are of gradual small changes over long periods of time where no single event changed someone’s identity completely. For example, in Jawny Dehp’s story she recounted her motivation after going to jail the first time never to go to jail again. She took actions daily trying to keep herself out of jail and yet she said *I didn’t want to go to jail, so I’d try to be good, but then like, something always messes things up*. Her story of transformation was of a long struggle over time, using and not using, being motivated to avoid jail, and something messing things up.

“There was not one construction pattern for stories of transformation. I learned there are many ways to construct a story about personal transformation. Sometimes the story contains a middle section that explains the back and forth present before the transformation ‘took hold’ and the person ‘changed’ and sometimes it does not contain a middle section. Sometimes an event is just described as the catalyst and their lives were changed from then on. Although there are a variety of ways to construct a story of transformation, what I have found most often with these young women’s stories was a dichotomous story of before and after.”

I pause to find my place in my notes, and Lisa asks, “so what? What did you learn from finding this dichotomous storyline for stories of transformation? What does it mean? What does it tell us about their experiences?”

I smile, realizing she thought I was done with that analysis. “I was just about to get that,” I say. “Thanks for asking.

“So what does it mean that they made sense of their lives by telling a dichotomous story of transformation? What can we learn from identifying that they told us who they were, how they were progressing in a way that was not working for them, and then how they are now?” I pause again, looking down at my notes and trying to remember how my mom said I explained it best. Memories of long thoughtful conversations with my mother reel through my mind. There were so many conversations, but I think I remember when she said she really got what I was learning.

I smile and begin my explanation by saying, “what I learned was that they constructed their stories of transformation using a good/bad binary. They described who they were before, using words like ‘bad,’ ‘rebel,’ and ‘nothing’ to describe themselves.

They used stories of receiving negative attention, fighting, and getting in trouble to describe their experiences. They continued that story describing how life began to work for them less and less over time then. They got into more trouble, used more drugs, got into more fights, got suspended or kicked out more, were reprimanded more, or enjoyed their circumstances less over time. On the flip side, something happened and they made sense of themselves and their experiences differently after that pivotal moment. They made sense of their transformation by saying I was bad then and I am good now. They claimed to be successful, responsible, hard-working, 'taking care of business,' friendly, intelligent, social, doing what g-d wants them to do, and moral after that event.

“For each of them there was a pivotal moment in their lives, which they used to demarcate who they were from who they are. For Rose, that moment was Disco where she learned to *take care of business* and to avoid *fuck you, fuck me*. Jawny Dehp’s pivotal moment was being sober. After being sober, who she understood herself to be changed. For Molly, that moment was when her parents gave her a curfew that worked for her and for Adina, that moment was in the correctional facility after attempting suicide. Each pivotal moment was different and each was described only briefly.

“What was similar for each young woman was that their identity of being good and having a life that worked for them happened in and was supported by the context of the alternative high school. Each of them talked about how good the alternative school was for them and how much it was helping them in their life.

“Rose said, *I visited and I liked the way everyone just got treated with respect here. That is what this school is all about is respect. They don't care who you are, they'll just talk to you.... here every teacher knows every student, personally. I mean they*

have a one-to-one friendship basis.... every teacher tries to have a friendship with all the students. That's a lot better because they're trying to keep you in here, doing anything to help you understand and to help you pass the class. She also said, I love it here at [the alternative high school], man. This is the best school. I learned a lot, mostly just from the six weeks of Disco. For Rose, the alternative high school created a caring environment of teachers that tried to help her succeed, respected her, and taught her a lot. In this context, Rose described herself as successful, hard working, moral, and doing the work she is meant to do.

“Jawny Dehp said *I chose this school because I felt like it would help me get through this whole thing and the teachers. I love the teachers. They are so great. I chose to come here.* She also said, ... *I just wanted to come here because basically, when I came here, since I was in drug court, I needed help and support. This school had it. If I needed someone to talk to, like an adult figure or something, they were there. It just clicked in me, this is the school for me.* Jawny Dehp valued the supportive environment of the alternative high school. She chose to come here because she knew that the environment would help her. It is in the alternative high school context that she could say, *Since I have been trying now I get straight As and stuff.* She identified herself in the alternative school context as drug-free, successful, social, taking care of herself, and clearer.

“Molly said *I only knew you couldn't go off campus which is good for me because I used to ditch a lot at [the traditional high school].* She also said, *My mom thinks its better that I am coming here because I need it to be me and the teacher doing things together... you can go up to a teacher and they'll sit down with you right there and*

explain it to you until you understand it all. The alternative high school provided Molly with opportunities to be successful by limiting her off-campus privileges, compromising with her, allowing her to wear ICP clothing, and providing teachers who would take the time to help her understand. It is in the alternative school context that she now sees herself as successful, capable, taking care of herself, and free to be herself.

“Adina said, All the teachers are so supportive. You can go to them with your problems and they’ll listen and help you. Everyone’s friendly and you can just say hi to them and they will say hi back. The alternative school community welcomed Adina and the teachers supported her. Her identity as a happier and healthier successful student was created in the context of the alternative school. She said, I got As and Bs for the first time in my life. I actually loved school now. I actually want to come here. I just like to stand like in this building. There is positive energy all around this place. I just feel like I can do it. She also said, I am very happy here. I have never loved school more than when I have been in here.

“By exploring these young women’s stories of transformation, we have learned that they identified themselves presently on a path of success and they identified that path of success occurring in the context of their alternative high school. There was a strict demarcation between who they used to be, who they were becoming, and who they are now in their stories of transformation. Now they see themselves as successful, hardworking, moral, happy, healthy, enjoying school, smart, free to be themselves, accepted, social, and capable of more. When they made sense of who they are now, they made sense in the context of the alternative high school. That is not to say that the alternative high school caused their transformation to who they are now; it is to say that

who they are now is supported, accepted, and encouraged in the alternative high school setting.”

“Very interesting, Becky,” says Mike. “So what you are saying is that by looking at their stories of transformation and exploring how they made sense of themselves, you were able to find how, why, and in what context they made sense of themselves as transformed and doing well?”

“Yes,” I say, nervously looking straight at Mike. I wonder where he is going with this. I hope I did not miss something. Did I do something wrong?

“So for these young women they made sense of their transformation by telling us why they were the way they were, how they were progressively getting more negative feedback in their lives, and who they became and why after a pivotal moment. You also realized that they distinguished who they were and who they are with words depicting a good/bad binary and then you found the good part of the transformation happened in and was supported by their experiences in the alternative high school,” summarized Mike.

“Yes, but I also have other thoughts about this story of transformation. Another realization I made was one I have made countless times before I began my research and countless times throughout my research process. That realization was that the stories we tell each other and hear others tell us are partial, temporary, and local. Their stories were true for them at that moment this morning. If told again, their stories would change given the context, new realizations, or new perspectives they gain over time. In that way, the stories are temporary. Their stories did not include all the pieces that were a part of their lives; they were partial. I am sure you could identify questions you would have liked to have asked about pieces they left out of their story. Their stories of transformation are

not the complete, final, ultimate truth of their experience. They are the stories that worked for them today, in this time and context.

“With that realization, I wondered if the stories I reflected upon of my own transformations looked differently because I had just examined theirs. Perhaps given a different time in my life and a different context of reflection or storytelling, I would also paint a dichotomous story of transformation and relate that transformation to a specific context.”

How empty is theory in the presence of fact. –Mark Twain

Literature & Theory

“Becky, I’d like to interrupt your reflection,” says Mike, leaning back in his chair.

“No problem,” I say. “What would you like me to talk about?”

“I was wondering... when I spoke to you several weeks ago about your project, we talked about different reflections you were having about these young women and your own experiences with school. We talked about the idea of learned helplessness and learned optimism. Can you tell us a little bit about what you found in that area and what you learned?” He speaks looking off to his right and twirling his pencil. Before he finishes, he looks back in my direction.

“Sure,” I say, glad I knew in advance Mike would want to revisit this idea. “I remember that conversation. I came to you because I was not sure I was doing my analysis ‘right’. I had read and reread the interviews, and then sat and read and reread the interviews again. I told you I thought it was supposed to just jump out at me.” I laugh. Mike smiles, nods, and leans back in his chair, crossing his legs and still playing with his pencil. “Whoever said that must have had a sixth sense,” I say, giggling.

“As I talked with you I realized that all people have trauma of some sort or another in their lives that makes going to school, concentrating, and being successful a challenge. We all have stories that to us feel disastrous. We all have had at least one bad teacher or one bad experience in our lives while we attended school. And yet, some of us have been fine. We have persevered in our own way, ‘successfully’ completing school through the traditional system. Others, like these young women, have disconnected from education. They have lost interest and begun to fail. The question I asked myself was ‘why did I do fine and stay connected to education and they did not?’

“You heard this and told me about the ideas of learned helplessness and learned optimism, a theory first explored by Martin Seligman in the 1980s. In his book, *Learned Optimism*, Seligman (1991) states that ‘helplessness is the state of affairs in which nothing you choose to do affects what happens to you’ (pp. 5). In this state, you believe that you can do nothing to change your life circumstances and that ‘very thought “Nothing I do matters” prevents us from acting’ (pp. 7). Learning optimism is a matter of learning that what you do matters. Learning what you do matters can prevent learned helplessness.

“I looked at his work and several other pieces on the same topic after our conversation and then looked for stories of learned helplessness and learned optimism in the stories these young women told. I looked for stories that depicted when they felt like there was nothing they could do to change their lives and when they learned that their actions did matter. At first what I found was that when they told the stories of their lives getting worse before their pivotal life-changing event, they told their stories as if they did not care anymore about being successful. They were not stories of trying time and time

again to change their lives and learning that they could not change them. They were stories of them making choices to fight and to change their lives or to give up and take their lives. Either way they believed they could change their lives.

“In Rose’s story, she fought other students to make her life better or to protect herself or others. She made a choice to fight these students because she thought she would improve her life. She liked the feeling she got after a fight when her family and friends congratulated her. She did feel like she could not do anything and life was hopeless when her boyfriend ended their relationship and he would not talk to her. She tried to take her own life, knowing that doing so would change her circumstances.

“In Jawny Dehp’s story, she used drugs to make her life better as well. She did not study and used drugs because those actions elevated her socially in the circles of people that were important to her. She chose to continue to use drugs to look cool, to feel good, and to have fun. She described her life as great when she used drugs. When control of her life was taken away from her, she knew what she needed to do. She needed to get sober to stay out of jail, in order to take back control of her own life.

“In Molly’s story, she fought the school that consistently told her she could not express her affinity for ICP. She fought the school that told her she could not be loud and the school that told her she could not stand up for herself. She wore ICP clothes to school against the rules, she argued with the judicial bodies about their policies, and she decided staying at the traditional school was not giving her an opportunity to be who she wanted to be. When she was told she could not change the system, she left to attend a school that would let her be herself. She was able to change her circumstances and make her life better and she took that opportunity.

“Adina’s story may have been the only one that fit the theory of learned helplessness and learned optimism, but even her story was not a complete fit. She told her story depicting a scene where she did nothing wrong and was told she would amount to nothing by her fifth grade teacher and her paternal grandmother. She said because of those experiences she decided to give up on life, to give up on school and learning, and to escape life by doing drugs, cutting herself, and reading. She did take her life into her own hands and try to kill herself, knowing that her actions would change the course of her life. She also chose to go to an alternative school because she wanted to join their community. In both those instances, she believed what she did would make a difference. I did not find a clear indication of when she learned to take her life in her own hands, or in other words when she learned optimism, but there were obvious times when she felt that nothing she did mattered and so she did nothing.

“I felt that, even when the women turned their lives around, learned optimism did not fit their stories completely either. In Jawny Dehp’s story, she continued to feel like she might not be successful remaining sober. Her story is not truly optimistic in that she did not feel like she could keep herself sober. There may be sometime in the future when she uses drugs again.

“The other thought I had about Seligman’s theory is that even if I did find evidence of learned helplessness and learned optimism, I was hesitant to apply theory as the explanation for their experiences. With theories such as this one, we assume that normalcy aligns with the theory’s suggested pattern and abnormalcy applies when the patterns do not fit. Instead of allowing the young women to claim their stories and make sense of their lives they way they did, I would apply a theory of what was happening for

them and then describe when they fit the theory and when they did not, like I just did. The difference would have been an evaluation of what the alignment or misalignment meant about these young women. They were no more normal when they fit the theory than they were abnormal when they did not. Their stories should not be subjected to that evaluation.”

“Are you saying that we should never use theory to explain personal or social phenomenon, so that no one ever feels like they are different or abnormal?” asks Lisa.

“No, I am not presuming to tell researchers, educators, or anyone else reading this what they should or should not do with theory,” I say, thinking quickly how I can respond authentically to this question. “Instead, what I am doing is what I proposed to do, which is to listen to and retell these stories as these young women’s personal truth, to depict them as learning opportunities for audiences to hear their complexity, and to let them stand on their own. I do not feel like my job is to relate to the audience how normal or abnormal these young women are in comparison to a psychological theory. That is not what I intended to do with this research and not what I will do with it now.

“That is not to say that the theories of learned helplessness and learned optimism are not interesting or valid observations of people’s experiences. It is to say that I want to stick with my plan. I intended to locate stories of transformation and stories of disconnection and reconnection, in order to tell others how these young women made sense of those experiences.”

“So Becky, what literature did you use to inform your research?” asks Kate, as she flips through her binder looking for my literature review. “I see something like a literature review in the appendix.”

“Yes, that is my literature review, in its entirety. Although that section reveals all I reviewed about alternative schools, the students who attend them, and women’s experiences in alternative schools, not all that information informed my research. Instead of reviewing all the information here, I decided to review only that which I found applicable today.

“I read several pieces of literature when I was preparing my proposal for this project that helped me understand the experiences of alternative high school students. I learned that ‘disconnection [from education] occurred over time in reaction to teacher actions, school culture, and pedagogies that “othered” them’ (Loutzenheiser, 2002, pp. 446). Neumann suggests that alternative schools are for disaffected teenagers, the ones ‘sitting in the back of classrooms in other schools, often sullen and distracted, sometimes confrontational and disruptive’ (2003, pp. 5). I learned that the images portrayed of these students suggested that they were unhappy, aggressive, and othered in their traditional school experience.

“I learned that connections are important to a student’s educational experience. Throughout the educational experiences of students, those that fit in and succeed in traditional education tend to bond to their peers, teachers, and schools better than those who do not fit in and succeed. Those students who do not fit in or succeed find themselves disconnected from traditional education and in need of something different. One quote I read said, ‘If students do not experience a secure sense of belongingness and affiliation in their life... they can have particularly high needs for connection, inclusion, and belongingness in the classroom itself. Sadly, their lack of emotional nurturance outside of school can lead to troubled behavior in the classroom that may in fact diminish

their opportunities for experiencing inclusion there' (Ellis, Hart, & Small-McGinley, 1998, pp. 144). Alternative schools offer a common place for students who have similar experiences and similar needs for connection. '...It is the alienated student for whom alternative programs have made the greatest significant difference' (Brown, 1978, pp. 70).

"When I read more about alternative schools, I learned how they were designed to help students. A major characteristic and benefit alternative schools provide is a community of support to students who attend them. They have '...created a supportive environment that helped students overcome impediments to membership and engagement' (Wehlage, 1991, pp. 15). It is harder for students who have not been a part of a family or community who values education to feel connected to educational achievement in general. Where is the payoff for academic success? These students need to find a personal reason for learning and for being educationally engaged. For this, students need to feel connected to their peers, teachers, and school. Alternative schools attempt to envelope all their students in a community, in order to make education important to them.

"These are just a few of the things I learned in the literature. To tell you all of the things I learned about would take a good chunk of time. I have placed my literature review in the appendix, so that you can reference it if you'd like and so that you know I 'did my homework,'" I say smiling. "For now, I'd like to continue through my notes, so that we have enough time to get to everything I have learned. Is that okay?"

This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century -- solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair. It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others. –Elie Wiesel

Disconnection & Reconnection

“Go ahead, Becky,” says Lizzy smiling. “I am sure we have all read your literature review and know that you have been thorough with your research.” She looks around the room and nods at each person, who in turn nods at her. “Let’s hear more about what you learned. This research is so exciting and so fascinating.” I smile and look around the room for the same nod she just received.

“Armed with the understandings I came to given this literature, I wanted to know how students made sense of their experiences of connection to school and to education. Which leads us to the next topic,” I say, turning to the appropriate page in my notes and then looking up. “The next way that I examined these stories was by asking the question ‘how did these young women make sense of their experience disconnecting from the traditional school and reconnecting to the alternative school?’ When I looked for places in Rose’s, Jawny Dehp’s, and Molly’s stories where they described disconnection and reconnection, I found there were none. Instead, what I found were consistent connections over time. Rose, Jawny Dehp, and Molly told stories of being connected to different people and communities throughout their lives, but only more recently being connected to their education and an educational community. At no time did they describe disconnection from their traditional schools and reconnection to the alternative school.

“Rose, Jawny Dehp, and Molly described the areas in their lives they felt connected to and the ways they felt drawn towards those areas. The educational community in the traditional school was described as something they did not participate in or did not want to participate in. Not as something they were once connected to and were no longer connected to. They described the tone, the teachers, and the students of the alternative school as accepting, supporting, and encouraging. They described the educational community of the alternative high school as something they connected to, appreciated, and felt a part of. Let’s look at each story individually, before looking at Adina’s story. Again, I will review their stories in order of their appearance today in order for you to connect the stories you hear with the faces you saw.

“Rose spent the ‘bad’ part of her life connected to her boyfriend and her boyfriend’s aunt. She felt drawn to spend time with the people in her life who made her feel valued, listened to, and accepted. Her boyfriend loved her. She felt appreciated and valued in that relationship, even through the rough points in their relationship. She told us that she loved him and that working through those times was what you do when you love each other. She also talked about her boyfriend’s aunt and why she spent a lot of time with her. She said, *My boyfriend, his aunt and I used to spend time together and we used to talk about life and things. I know a lot more things about her than my boyfriend does and that’s his family. A lot of things that had happened to me, happened to her also. She and I were really able to connect, and we used to smoke a lot of pot all the time.* Her boyfriend’s aunt had similar experiences as she did. She felt a connection with her and was accepted by her. Her attention was drawn to the connection she shared with her boyfriend and with her boyfriend’s aunt.

“When she attended the alternative high school her connections shifted to include her educational community. She said, *I visited and I liked the way everyone just got treated with respect here. That is what this school is all about is respect. They don't care who you are, they'll just talk to you. I mean the teachers over there at the other school are just doing a job and going home. They just didn't care if I was there or not. They don't know all the students there, but here every teacher knows every student, personally. I mean they have a one-to-one friendship basis. Maybe a couple teachers don't have that basis. But every teacher tries to have a friendship with all the students. That's a lot better because they're trying to keep you in here, doing anything to help you understand and to help you pass the class.* She explained that she did not feel supported at the traditional high school and that the reason she felt connected to the alternative school was because the teachers cared about her and wanted her to be successful. They recognized her and made her feel like a valuable part of their community. She did not talk about being connected to the traditional school at one point and disconnecting from it. She talked about how she made sense of her connection to the alternative school.

“Jawny Dehp's story was similar. Jawny Dehp loved to be part of a community of people. She did not do her homework or succeed in school because she wanted to feel cool and accepted by her peers, especially boys. She did drugs with her family and felt like she shared that experience with them. She got high and exhibited a number of risky behaviors with her friends. She felt connected to them. Her experience was similar to theirs, they used drugs together, and she felt part of a community of drug users. She felt valued and accepted in that community of people.

“When the negative outcomes of using drugs, namely jail, outweighed her acceptance in the community she was a part of, she stopped using drugs and alcohol and she looked around for a community to connect to. In her story, she said, *I know it is not just Joe, but he is the main reason I am here. I chose this school because I felt like it would help me get through this whole thing and the teachers. I love the teachers. They are so great.* She also said, *I just wanted to come here because basically, when I came here, since I was in drug court, I needed help and support. This school had it. If I needed someone to talk to, like an adult figure or something, they were there.* She connected to the supportive community that the alternative high school had to offer her. She found a community of teachers who would not only accept her and how she was trying to change her life, but who would also support and encourage her on her new path. She felt like she was a part of the alternative school community and like she was valued, endorsed, and strengthened in that community.

“Molly’s connection was a little different. She described her connection to the band, ICP. She said, *I like ICP because they don’t rap about the typical stuff that everybody else raps about. They rap about real stuff, like what’s going on today.... I like it cause they grew up in the really bad part of Michigan. They were in poverty and they didn’t have any money. Their mom had to work three jobs to support them and one of the guys was abused when he was a kid. With all these struggles, they had to come up to where they are. Their book is all about how they struggled to come up to where they are today. It shows me that I am not high class and I haven’t done good in my whole life. I know that I am a scrub and I don’t care what people say about me. I will do what I want to do because I want to do it. That is what they did and this is how far they got. I*

guess if they can do it, then I can do it too. She felt connected to ICP because she saw herself in their experiences. She believed that if she followed their lead and did what she wanted to do, she too would be successful. For her, the music was not gang music. It was the music that told her who she was was ok and that everything would work out if she continued to be true to herself. That support and encouragement connected her to the band.

“She also connected to the other people that adore ICP, the Jugaloos, which included all of her friends, her boyfriend, and her sisters. They liked the same band that she did and they faced similar hardships because they liked ICP. Her attention went to listening to ICP, talking and reading about ICP, hanging out with other people that like ICP, and demonstrating her affinity towards ICP by wearing their clothing and paraphernalia. Her connection to ICP was not celebrated, understood, or tolerated at the traditional high school. Instead, she explained that she was told not to wear the clothing or to display the music she connected to. She explained that she was kicked out of one school for demonstrating her affinity and suspended on many other occasions from two other schools for doing the same thing. She could not connect to the school environments that did not accept or support what she valued or who she thought she was. Her connection to ICP and the other fans of ICP helped her feel she was okay and everything would work out. That was denied and devalued in the traditional school. She did not explain having once been connected to an educational community. Instead, she explained what she was connected to and how she did not feel connected to the traditional schools.

“Molly’s connection shifted like Rose’s and Jawny Dehp’s. She described how she loved to attend the alternative high school because they allowed her to wear ICP

clothing. Her connection to ICP was valued and accepted. She described how she told people to read the ICP book and she has given many students and teachers CDs to listen to and song lyrics to read. In the alternative school, she also felt like her needs were being met so that she could learn and be successful. She felt the environment, rules, and teachers would help her be successful. She connected to the alternative school community.

“Any questions?” I ask. “I haven’t given you many opportunities to ask me questions. I feel like I have moved through this quickly and I want to make sure I am addressing your questions or concerns.”

“I don’t have any, Becky. I have been asking them along the way,” says Mike. “Do any of you have anything for Becky to address?”

“No, I am just curious about Adina’s story,” says Lizzy.

“Kate, you look like you have some,” says Lisa.

“I do, but I think I will wait until after you have gone through your analysis. I have this feeling you might address them as you go,” Kate responds, turning to talk directly to me.

“Ok,” I say, shifting my papers once more to find the notes I have for Adina’s story. “On to Adina’s story.” I shift in my chair and feel the tightness in my muscles from having sat for so long. “But first, can I call a stretch break?” I ask.

“Sure,” says Lizzy, giggling. “I’d love one.” She pushes her chair back, puts her hands on her knees, and then stands up. She reaches over her head, to the right and then to the left. Then she twists her torso to her right and then to her left. She shakes her arms, forearms, and wrists and lets her arms fall to her side.

“Becky,” says Lisa, who also laughs, pushes her chair back, and stands up. As she stretches, Kate makes a few more notes in her binder before standing up as well. I push my chair back and join the stretching. Mike looks at me and the rest of the group, pushes his chair back, and stands up. He turns towards the window behind him and looks out at the scenery below.

“The trees have almost lost all of their leaves. You should see the colors in Sante Fe,” he says.

“Becky, how much more do you think you have to present?” asks Kate.

“Oh, not much,” I say, thinking why is she asking me this question. “Am I taking too much time?”

“No, I just am curious where you decided to stop analyzing. There is so much you could have done with this research. I hope you didn’t try to do it all,” she says.

“Nope, I didn’t. I have Adina’s story, then an analysis of my third question, my reflection, and then my review of the quality of this research. It shouldn’t take long, but actually why don’t we get started now?” I say, as everyone finds their seats and sits down.

“Adina told stories of disconnection and reconnection. She told us she once *loved learning* and she *lost it* after several trying experiences. She once connected to learning and education, exploring topics she was interested in until she knew everything about them. She explained that her fifth grade teacher changed all that for her, and her many moves and experiences with her grandmother made her disconnection from education even stronger. She lost interest in school and in learning. She felt like she was not accepted and like she did not care about her educational community. She had no friends

and no connections to school until she met Grace and Brea. Grace and Brea cared about her, accepted her, and shared similar experiences with her. She felt strongly connected to them. She said, *They are my two best friends in the entire world. They are still out in California. They are like my sisters to me. We all just kind of banded together and stuck together. We would always be at each other's houses.*

“When her family moved again, she moved away from them. She came to Colorado where the students in the traditional school ostracized and ridiculed her. She described the alternative school as a place where she did not have to have those experiences: *I don't have to see people putting their fingers in crosses at me saying “oh g-d, get away from me you devil”. That is how it was for me. I was there created devil. I walked into school one day, dressed as I usually do in all black and looking relatively normal actually. I walked down the halls and I would hear “lets burn her at the stake. Let's stone her in the back.”* She also said, *My brother's friends made fun of me while he did the same thing. There were a couple people I liked, but I couldn't really relate to them. Then there was the fact that I had a sexist P.E. teacher. She was not accepted by her brother, his friends, the other students, or her teacher. She explained her experience even more when she said, I mainly left because I was picked on. My parents were saying “it's the way you dress, it's the way you look when you walk into the school.” I'm like “no. It's the way I am.” They were always telling me “you need to change. You need to wear more color. You need to where a happier smile.”...It is not the way I dress. No one cares about that. It's just the way I am. I am just different.*

“Adina disconnected from her education and educational community over time. She felt discouraged from learning because of her experiences with her fifth grade

teacher, her successive moves, and her grandmother. She felt she did not belong in her educational community when she made no friends and she experienced being ostracized and ridiculed. She disconnected from the traditional schools over time.

“Adina told her story of reconnection as if it happened the instant she learned about the alternative school. She explained that she knew she wanted to be part of the alternative school community from the moment she heard about it. She wanted to be supported and accepted by her teachers, she wanted to find a place where other people like her attended, and she wanted to feel she was a part of a larger community. She said, *I heard good things about this school, like how everyone’s so nice to each other and everyone just gets a long. The teachers are nice to you and they support you. I heard that and I’m just like “I want to come there. I want to be a part of that community. I want to have someone care about me.” So I came here.*

“She also explained how she became part of the community of learners. She said, *In some way we are all different from the majority of those schools. Some of us had Mohawks, other of us had tattoos all over us. Some of us had piercings in any place you could find. Or sometimes we were just too smart for everyone else, and so we were picked on for that. In some way we were all different and somehow that’s what makes our community here so great. We all know what its like not to be accepted. We come here and we are.* Adina reconnected to education the moment she heard what the alternative school had to offer. The process was enhanced after finding that the teachers really were supportive and accepting. They valued her and wanted her to do well as part of their community. She also felt like part of the community of learners who attended the alternative school. She shared similar experiences of being different from the norm with

them and felt that because they were all different they were all accepted by one another. She found a home in the community of the alternative school.”

I pause, turn the page in my notes, and look up. “So what can we learn from these stories of connection, disconnection and reconnection? First, we reinforce what we already know; feeling connected is vital to each young woman and to their success as students and community members. Three of the young women told us stories of being connected throughout their lives to different people and communities, but not of being connected to education. For all four, their connection to education came when they felt accepted, supported, and listened to in the alternative school setting and when they felt who they were was valued and important to the educational community. Three of the stories did not portray a time when they were once connected to education and then when that connection diminished. Instead, what we heard was that they had consistently connected to others. Being connected to their educational community happened in the alternative school setting for a number of reasons.

“We also learned that Adina’s connection to education shrunk over time. She lost interest in education over time and felt shunned from her educational communities on many occasions. However, her connection to education also flourished in the alternative school setting. At the alternate school, she felt like she was accepted, a part of a larger community of ‘misfits’, cared for, listened to, and supported. When she heard about the alternative school, she knew she wanted to attend there.

“From these four stories, we learn that connections to education and educational communities occurred because of the environment and community of the alternative

school. We learn what they attribute their connection to and begin to understand the value of the alternative school to provide that opportunity to these four young women.

“When we look at their stories of connection and their stories of transformation simultaneously, we can see that the alternative high school was not only the context in which they described their lives in a more positive light, but it was also the place where they connected to their education and their educational community. It was not clear if their transformation happened first and that contributed to their ability to connect to the educational community of the alternative school, or if they connected to the alternative school community first and that connection spurred their transformation to who they are now. What was clear was that both the stories of transformation to who I am now and the stories of connection to education happened in the context of the alternative school. For these young women, the alternative school provided them the opportunities to be ‘better’ and to be interested in and feel a part of their education and educational community.”

“So Becky, what you are saying is that the alternative school helped them connect to education and helped support their positive life changes?” asks Mike.

“Yes,” I say. “I believe these stories act as testaments to the positive impact the alternative school has had on their lives. Their stories revealed that they were able to maintain their transformations to having ‘good’ lives and form connections to their education within the alternative high school. Their lives are better for having attended the alternative high school. Not only were they successfully completing high school, but also they were maintaining positive changes in their lives and connecting to their education, their educational community, and the opportunities available in both.

“I made another realization while looking more closely at these stories. I realized that although these stories were similar in their experience of the alternative high school as the site for their connection to education and the site within which their ‘good’ selves were flourishing, they were also unique stories. Each woman’s experiences were different. Each connected to or disconnected from different people or communities in her life. Each made different choices, focused on different reasons to make sense of her experiences, and used different language. Each understood her transformation and connection/disconnection differently. Each had different life experiences, different challenges to face, different depictions of good and bad, and different plans for the future. Yet, they shared an important similarity, which was that they had very similar understandings of the ways the alternative high school had helped them. Each found value in the alternative high school’s community. Each said that the alternative high school helped them maintain their ‘good’ transformation and helped them develop interest in education and the educational community.”

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. –Paulo Friere

Sociology of Education

“So given that, Becky, what about our educational system contributes to, encourages, or perpetuates a lack of connection to traditional high schools?” asks Lisa.

“What about the traditional educational system contributes to them being ‘at-risk’ before attending the alternative high school? I get how the alternative high school helped them be successful and turn their lives around, but I don’t understand what you are then saying about the rest of the educational system and specifically the traditional school.”

“Their stories of transformation and of connection are so dissimilar that addressing a contributing factor is difficult,” I say. “What I saw as similar in their experience was they each felt they received little or no attention to their individual experiences from their educational communities. Each felt the teachers, students, or administrators did not care what was happening to them or did not know what was going on with them because they did not care, except Jawny Dehp, who rarely mentions teachers or other students. However, this lack of attention was not what the young women attribute to their ‘bad’ periods to. Their stories did not state a single reason why they were ‘bad’ at one time, were failing school, or were getting into trouble. In most cases, their stories report a number of experiences or ideas that contributed to their ‘bad’ periods. In some cases, their school or educational community was mentioned, but it was not the sole perpetuator of their ‘bad’ behavior and attitudes.

“Identifying a failure in the educational system to maintain a connection with these students through their stories was difficult. As an outsider looking in, I could have taken the argument many ways and disregarded their reasoning. Before even beginning my analysis, I thought about what I believed to be true about education and found that I could argue this perspective several ways. First, I could have said that our educational system is meant to divvy out the successful, bright students from the unsuccessful, dim students and through that process some students must inevitably be left behind. This is

what our society needs to recreate the social structures we have now and reward the most intelligent and promising students with better paying jobs, more opportunities, and fulfilling lives. 'At-risk' students are a necessary casualty of that system. If we believe Social Darwinism, then we could say they are not cut out for a better education or a productive future and the educational system is working when some students fail.

"The idea here would then be that 'at-risk' students could be more successful in traditional schools if they were different. It is their fault they do not survive in the traditional system. In this model, we would look to see what characteristic in these young women is missing that successful traditional students have and try to teach 'at-risk' students to develop or use that characteristic in traditional schools. I would look for evidence of this in their stories. I would look to find places where they were divvied out and were left to fail and where they were lacking a quality that 'successful' traditional school students have. Their stories revealed neither of these experiences.

"We could argue the opposite, which is that our educational system does not divvy out success and opportunities fairly, that all students should be given an opportunity to be successful, and that education is responsible for reaching all students and helping them be good citizens. In this model we would look to analyze the system, the structure in place that has 'let' some students fail in traditional education settings. With this argument we assume that the best model of education would meet the needs of all students. We would say that the system is failing if some students do not succeed in the traditional school setting. However, I do not believe this about education and there is no evidence of a system 'letting' these students become 'at-risk' in their stories.

“In general, no matter how hard we try, I believe we will never meet the needs of all students in one school. There is no ‘one size fits all’ for education. There will never be and there should not be. We are all unique, we all learn differently, we all make different choices, and we all have different experiences. Finding a ‘one size fits all’ approach that would help every student be successful is a waste of time. What we should be doing is trying to meet the needs of as many students as possible in each school, but also providing options for students for whom those schools do not work. We must create a fairer system that meets the needs of most of the students. I believe strongly that there are some students for whom the traditional high schools are not going to work, but I also believe that we can learn from the systems that can connect these students to education and we can emulate what we learn in traditional schools to help them be more inclusive. They are, however, never a substitution for alternative schools; we must maintain alternatives in our educational system as well.

“The stories we have heard speak of the educational system favorably from this perspective. The educational system had in place an alternative to the traditional when the students decided that the traditional school was not working for them. The alternative school was there as an option for their education. The alternative school did aid them in connecting to education and in being successful in their endeavors to ‘better’ their lives.

“From these young women’s perspectives, the educational system was not working on them, as if they were passive actors in stories lived within oppressive systems. They portrayed themselves as active agents in the creation of their lives. Rose’s, Jawny Dehp’s, and Molly’s stories did not depict the ways they were victims of their circumstances in education. Adina did depict herself as a victim, but all four

described acting in her life, choosing to act, choosing to come to the alternative high school, and choosing to make their lives ‘better’.

“What these stories tell us is not about the ways educational systems perpetuated their disinterest in school or connection to other people or communities, but about how the educational system had another option that was more effective for them, supported their transformations, and encouraged them to connect to education. When you listen to their stories, what you hear is that the system worked. The traditional school was not able to help them as it had countless other students. They recognized they were not successful in the traditional school and were not interested in attending the traditional school. They had a choice. They heard about and visited the alternative school and found a home there. By attending the alternative high school, they found they were supported, accepted, and encouraged to have ‘better’ lives, they were maintaining the positive changes they have made in their lives, and they were connected to education and their educational communities. They were successful, happy, and healthy in the alternative high school setting.

“In my view, there can not be one school that meets the needs of all students and there should not be; students are far more diverse in needs, abilities, and backgrounds than one school can accommodate. These stories are testaments to the fact that alternative schools work for some students, the system that includes alternatives for students works for some students, and these young women are successful, happy, and healthy in their alternative high school. Sure, there are parts of these stories that testify to the harsh realities they faced at traditional schools. In a couple of cases the women took those realities to mean that they were not accepted or were treated unfairly. They each

chose to leave and to attend an alternative. That option was there for them. Now they see themselves and their experiences differently, they feel connected to education, and they have goals for their futures. They are hardworking, intelligent, caring, cared for, social, listened to, successful, friendly, supportive, supported, accepting, and accepted. These stories tell us that our educational system worked for them. Their lives are working for them in the alternative school setting.”

I pause, look around the room, and ask, “Do you have any questions?”

Quality in a product or service is not what the supplier puts in. It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for. A product is not quality because it is hard to make and costs a lot of money, as manufacturers typically believe. This is incompetence. Customers pay only for what is of use to them and gives them value. Nothing else constitutes quality. –Peter F. Drucker

Methods & Quality Qualitative Research

Lizzy smiles and congratulates me on doing good work. “I love what you have done with this research. I love that you claim that this is what happened for these young women and for them the system worked. You allow them to claim their truths, hold their experience as valuable knowledge, and find that ‘there is nothing wrong here.’ Your work is positive, affirming, and fascinating. Thanks for sharing it.

“I have been holding back as you speak, listening to what you found to be important and relevant. I wanted to talk about what you learned through this process and what you think contributes to the greater body of knowledge we hold to understand about education, but I am not sure this is the right time to do that. I think we should talk more

about your process and the ‘research’ end of this before we move on. What do you think, Mike?”

“I agree,” he says. “We have all read your methods and I see that you placed your methods section in the appendix. Can you talk to us about the changes you made to your proposed methods plan as you went about this research?”

“Sure,” I say. I do not need my notes to answer this question, so I look up confidently and respond. “First, I gained access to the school a little differently than I had planned. Todd knew a teacher at the high school, who he introduced me to. I met with this teacher and he and I hit it off. We had similar ideas about education and about the importance of the stories alternative school students have to tell. He let me attend his community time every week the semester before I started my research. While attending the community time and getting to know the students every week, I realized that the principal of the school had been my classmate at one point. I met with her and we discussed my ideas. She agreed to let me have access to her students. After I put my fliers up asking students to contact me if they were interested in participating, I got no responses and I talked to her about it. She suggested I make announcements during the announcement periods in every class and then spend time around the school at every lunch period for two weeks, so that students would get used to seeing me. I did that and four women agreed to participate in my study as a result.

“I built rapport with each of the four young women differently. I took two of them to get beverages at a coffee shop before we met. I asked one young woman what she would like earlier in the day and brought her a drink from a coffee shop at our first meeting. One young woman did not want me to buy anything for her. The first

interviews were very casual. I wanted to build trust between us before I asked questions about the areas of their lives I was interested in. Although they led the direction of most of the meetings, during the first meeting their direction played the largest part. In the others, I would return every once in awhile to the questions I was interested in. I would visit them at lunch periods frequently throughout the weeks between our visits and chat with them casually each time.

“I transcribed all of my tapes myself, which took a lot of time. For the last tapes, the ones where we went over their stories together, I only transcribed the places where they changed their stories, asked for something to be removed, made additional comments, or had an emotional reaction to their stories. Those four tapes were filled with the recounting of their stories, which was not useful for this research.

“As you can see, I abandoned my proposed use of Barbara Pamphilon’s work. As I read and reread the transcripts and began to write the stories, I found that using her work did not fit for me. It was uncomfortable and hard to use for me in this circumstance. I read Ellis’ (2004) *The Ethnographic I* and thought about another way of presenting my research. That way was through story and that story involved you, who became an integral part of my analysis.

“Other than that, I think I followed my planned methodology.”

“I think you did too, Becky,” says Kate. “But I am curious about my part in this as the stickler for good research. Where is your discussion of your research in relation to the quality indicators for qualitative research?”

“Here,” I say. “As you all know, part of my methodology section includes my discussion of Eisner’s (personal conversation at AERA, 2004) quality standards and

Lincoln & Guba's (1985) means for establishing trustworthiness. Eisner's standards include illuminating effect, referential adequacy, generativity, incisiveness, and applicability. When I gave Lizzy and Mike my first draft of this dissertation, I asked them to respond to five questions, which would help me relate my research to Eisner's ideas for quality standards as one measure of the quality of my research. Although I had my own thoughts about my research, I wanted to get committee member perspectives as well. Unfortunately, answering the questions did not fit into their timelines before this meeting."

"You were going to use their responses in your dissertation?" asks Kate.

"Yes," I respond. "My understanding of Eisner's (personal conversation at AERA, 2004) quality standards is that they are meant as questions you can ask of your work or someone else's work. I wanted to know what others thought of my research in these areas and so I asked Lizzy and Mike to reflect on five questions to help me reflect on and modify my work. I wanted to present quality research and one way of doing that was asking others to respond to my research and taking their responses into consideration as I make changes. Reflection from a response community, a community of people who understand what you are trying to do and what qualitative research is, can help qualitative researchers communicate powerful, relevant findings to others."

"Okay, I think I get it. In qualitative research, the researcher and sometimes the participants are the instruments of data collection and analysis. So it only makes sense that responses from others, other people, would help you measure the quality of your research," says Kate.

“Sure, that is one way of looking at it. I think you will find this section interesting,” I respond. “I didn’t get an opportunity to use Lizzy’s and Mike’s responses as I would have liked, but I did go through each question on my own. Let’s go through them and if you have any questions, we can stop and go into any one of the areas in more detail.

“First, Eisner proposes looking at the research’s illuminating effect to assure that the final product brings new light on an area and clarifies it more. I asked Lizzy and Mike to respond to the question, what new light does my research bring to education that helps to clarify it more? Before asking that question of you,” I say, looking at Lizzy and Mike. “I reviewed my own feelings about the illuminating effect of my research. For me, the stories themselves shed new light onto the lived experiences of young women who attend alternative high schools. This area is rarely discussed in the literature and their stories are rarely heard or told in education circles. This research clarifies their experiences more by examining how they made sense of their experiences of transformation and connection. I feel like new light was shown on this area through this research.

“Next, Eisner suggests we look at the referential adequacy of our work, which means looking to see if our work resonates with other understandings we have in the area. The question I asked Lizzy and Mike was, in what way does this research resonate with what you understand about young women and alternative high schools? Before asking this question, I looked at my own research and asked the same question. My research resembles the work I read by Loutzenheiser (2002) that talks about the experiences of young women who attend alternative high schools and how they feel ‘othered’. It reflects

Neumann's (2003) work that depicts students who attend alternative schools as depressed, aggressive, and distracted in traditional schools. My research resonates with all the articles of research on alternative schools that tell us how and why alternative schools work for some students. Finally, this work resonates with what I hold to understand about education, that connections within schools help students find their way in education, be successful, and dream of other possibilities.

“The quality of having generativity assures that the work generates new ideas for research and practice. There is no question that this research has spurred ideas for future research for me, but did it help Lizzy and Mike generate new ideas for research and practice? I asked them that question. In my final chapter, Reflection, I outlined the number of ideas for research this project has provided me.

“The fourth standard, incisiveness, relates to the sharpness of the findings. I asked Lizzy and Mike to reflect on the question, how sharp are my findings? I was not sure what it meant to have sharp findings. I found several definitions on dictionary.com (October 16, 2005) that I provided to them with the question to help them answer it. Those definitions were: ‘Clearly and distinctly set forth... Intellectually penetrating... Marked by keenness and accuracy of perception.’

“I found it difficult to answer this question of my own research. I found my work to be set forth clearly and distinctly, to be intellectually penetrating, and to be marked by sound perception, but that may be because I understood what I was trying to say and do. I had to rely on Mike's responses during our last meeting, as well as Todd's feedback, for a better understanding of my research's incisiveness.

“The last of Eisner’s standards is applicability, which means that the work is useful in the field. I asked Lizzy and Mike how they thought this work might be useful in the field. As someone aspiring to be an effective educator, I found this research applicable in several ways. I could apply this to my own classroom and students, realizing that I need to listen to each student, form connections with each student, and support and accept each student in an effort to help them be successful in my class and in their education. I learned that each student brings a lifetime of experiences to the classroom that impact how they interact with me, other students, and their education. Those experiences are unique and grouping them under one label ineffectually limits my understanding of who they are, what they need from me, and what I can do to help them connect to their educational experience.”

“So,” Kate says, interrupting my train of thought. “What you are saying is that by these standards you think you did quality research?”

“Yes,” I answer. “I believe by Eisner’s standards my research is sound. Lizzy and Mike were not able to respond to the five questions as I would have liked, but I think I answered my own questions well. If you don’t mind, I’d like to suggest that you ask yourselves these questions when you do your final evaluation of this project:

“First, what new light does my research bring to education that helps to clarify it more? Two, in what way does this research resonate with what you understand about young women and alternative high schools? Three, how did this research help you generate new ideas for research and practice? Four, how sharp are my findings? How
'Clearly and distinctly set forth... Intellectually penetrating... Marked by keenness and

accuracy of perception' is this research and the findings? Five, how do you think this work might be useful in the field?"

"Very interesting," says Kate. "I have never heard of measuring the quality of research this way."

"Well," I say. "This is not the only way to do it. I chose to look at my research this way, because I found the five different areas compelling and a good measure of the quality of other research I had read. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest another way. Let's look at that way before we get to more questions.

"Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of trustworthiness to assure a similar sense of quality. Assuring credibility is supported through specific activities the researcher should consider engaging in during her study. I used peer debriefing to 'test out' my findings and prolonged engagement 'to build the trust necessary to uncover constructions' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 237). I continually asked other Ph.D. students, you, my mom, and Todd to consider the ideas I was constructing about my research. That debriefing helped me formulate and make sense of my own thoughts and concerns in a way that made writing this dissertation easier. I also spent several hours a week with these students over a 9-month period. I did not interview them until January, but I started interacting with them and the alternative school community the September before. My data gathering ended the last week in May. That prolonged engagement helped me understand the women and their community better and helped us build a trusting relationship in which to share experiences and feelings.

"I continually evaluated my own subjectivity in this research as well. I used a method called 'progressive subjectivity' in which I continually reflected on my

construction in this study. I hope I illuminated that process in this dissertation. I also have a stack of memos I wrote reflecting on my experience beginning in September and ending in May. I used those notes to construct this story.”

“Becky, before you go on. I also see that you could have used member checking to validate your research’s credibility. Can you tell us what you did with member checking?” asks Kate, pointing to the words in my methodology section where I mentioned member checking.

“Sure,” I respond, tiredly. I am exhausted. I can not wait for this process to be over. How much more can I say about this topic? I smile, thinking also about all the free time I will have once this project is over. At this point, I just read from my notes. My enthusiasm and spirited style are diminishing quickly. “To increase my credibility, I also used member checking throughout the process, asking the young women to check my data and the findings I constructed. Together, we went through their stories and corrected anything that I may have gotten incorrect. We shaped their stories the way they wanted them shaped, specifically without the ums and likes. I took out a couple of stories they asked not be shared. Additionally, I told them what I was thinking at the end of each interview and gave them an opportunity to respond to my thoughts.

“Does that answer your question?” I ask.

“Sure does. Thanks Becky,” says Kate. “Please review the last three quickly for us. We are all getting tired.”

“No problem,” I respond, thinking I too could use a nap. “Transferability requires thick, rich descriptions to establish context and possible applicability in other settings. I used the women’s words to tell their stories, so the description was as thick and rich as

they provided it to me. I am sure there could have been thicker, richer description, but I wanted to keep the stories as authentic to their renditions as possible. I hope this dissertation adds to the thick, rich description providing more context and applicability in other settings.

“The next one is dependability. It illuminates the stability of data over time. I used story to track the changes that occurred in my research over time. You could say my audit trail is this story. It should help you and others follow my judgment calls throughout this process. My notes and memos will also provide you with an audit trail, as I took notes about most of the experiences, thoughts, and feelings I had doing this research.

“And finally, confirmability is concerned ‘with assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator’s imagination’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, pp. 243). Again, my story should act as my audit trail and will help illuminate the decisions I made and the directions I chose to follow.

“Phew! We are done with that,” I say. “What questions do you have?”

“Becky, I loved that you wanted to include the responses we could have gave you,” says Lizzy. “It really helped me see how I could have been a part of your process. It does illuminate your decision making process and your story really could act as your audit trail. Nicely done.”

“Thanks,” I say, smiling.

“But you are not done yet,” she says, giggling.

“That’s right,” I say, lowering my shoulders and head to demonstrate how tired I am. “Can we do another stretch break?” I look around and everyone nods, almost reluctantly. I am sure they just want to get out of here. Each of us stands. Lisa stretches her legs, drawing each up behind her and holding them to her backside. Lizzy smiles and stretches both arms over her head, first straight up, then right, and then left. Kate twists her torso from left to right and then rubs her hands together. She has been writing an awful lot, I think. Her hands must hurt. Mike makes his way to the window again and looks out. I stretch my arms over head and then twist my torso from side to side. I bend my knees, hear my joints crack, roll my shoulders in circles, bend my head side to side, and then sit back down.

How do people make it through this LONG process? I think. And reading all these dissertations, how do advisors handle it? What a lot of work! How am I ever going to thank them adequately? I will have to talk to my mom about what gifts feel meaningful after a process like this. She has done so many, I am sure she has some good ideas. Lizzy, Mike, Kate, and Lisa find their seats again. They are ready for the ‘grand finale’.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTIONS

Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for awhile and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never the same.

-Unknown

Young Women and Alternative Schools

“Are you ready for the ‘grande finale’?” I say smiling.

“Absolutely,” says Lizzy. “This is my part. I want to know what you learned.”

“The weekend before I finished writing this dissertation Todd and I took a long bike ride from Thornton down to Downtown Denver to meet some of our friends for breakfast. We have been trying to do something outdoors and physical as often as possible in order to take advantage of the wonderful fall weather and also to take advantage of my able-ness before I have surgery. Most of the winter, I expect to be off my feet, which does not excite me at all. The couple we met walked several miles from their loft to the restaurant and along their way they passed a sheriff’s department van sitting along side the road. They explained to us later that they saw the van with the words, ‘juvenile offenders’ on the side and then a sign that said something like, ‘juvenile offender community trash detail’ on the side of the road. Jenny explained that ‘Paul took one look at the van and the sign and said “I’d hate to be on that bus” really loudly.’ He giggled as she told the story. She went on to explain that she turned around to look at what he was talking about and right behind them was a group of teenagers in orange jumpsuits with a sheriff’s deputy.

“I listened to the story she told and realized that although they recognized the comment as rude, it did not touch them the same way it touched me. I realized at that moment that I had a different understanding of the complexities of teenagers’ lives after doing this research. Although I only knew the stories of these four young women, I could imagine that each ‘juvenile offender’ also had a compelling, complex story. They too had a variety of life experiences that led them to their current incarceration. I wondered what their stories of transformation would look like and if they would have stories of connection or disconnection as well. My sense of compassion has been heightened by this research. My understandings of young people have changed as result of my experiences with this research.

“I have also learned a great deal about alternative schools and options in education. I have learned how beneficial they can be for some students. I have learned that options provide opportunities to students who do not like, do not connect to, or do not feel a part of traditional schools, and that that opportunity is a success of the educational system. I have learned that these young women transformed their lives, are supported in that transformation inside the alternative school setting, and feel connected to their education and their educational community in the alternative school. All three of these characteristics depict success for the young women who made those changes and for the educational system that provided them that opportunity. I applaud them, their determination, and the positive experiences they have had in alternative schools.

“I learned that these young women’s lives and stories are complex. That labeling them does not provide an opportunity to understand and hear their experiences. I learned that I am sensitive to their stories and want to hear more about what is happening for

them. I learned that there are innumerable ways to look at their stories. I could have examined:

- Their relationships to their parents and their families
- Their construction of community
- Their parallel stories
- Their sense of self
- Their experience in the Disco program
- Their relationships to their peers
- What education means to them
- How they see their future
- What ways they still see room for improvement in their lives
- Their relationships to men, romantic or otherwise
- Their relationships to adults
- Their constructions of pivotal moments
- Their relationship to me
- The impact of this project on their lives and their stories

“And so much more,” I say. “I could have done so much with this research, but I had to stop at some point and write. I had to find a perspective that I had enough data to support.”

“So this is where you referenced us to see your generativity?” asks Kate.

“Yes,” I reply. “These are all the areas I can see doing future research, with this data and these young women, or with other young women and other data. I am curious also about the stories of other young women, how do they construct their stories, how do

they depict their experiences and their choice of an alternative school. I can see doing more educational life histories with a different group of young women.”

Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. Wisdom must be learned through experience. –Herman Hesse, in *Sidhartha*

Qualitative Research & Narrative

“I also learned about qualitative research, narrative, and the realities of each in practice,” I say. “These learnings, I hope, will help me do better research in the future.

“My goal as a researcher was to ‘search... for truths unique in their particularity, grounded in firsthand experience, in order to extend and enhance conceptualization and/or to sensitize practitioners to their occurrence’ (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 259-260). I wanted to retell the storied lives of the young women in alternative high schools, with the hope that their stories would engage the reader in their struggles and transformations. I hoped these stories would touch readers and invoke their emotional reactions to inequalities or injustices revealed in the texts.

“‘Telling a life story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the informed formed and the confusing clear’ (Atkinson, 2002, pp. 125). In the process of telling their stories, these young women provided in-depth, firsthand knowledge of schooling and life as young women. Their stories gave ‘us a vantage point from which to see how one person experiences and understands life, his or her own especially, over time’ (Atkinson, 2002, pp. 126). Their stories helped us understand how they made sense of their experiences, the complexities, and the subtleties, as well as how they constructed meanings of schooling and self (Chase, 2003).”

“Great, Becky, but what did you learn about qualitative research and narrative inquiry, specifically, that will help you do better research in the future?” asks Mike.

“Well,” I say. “I learned that qualitative research in practice does not look like it does on paper. Although I tried to follow my proposal, I found that the circumstances of the school, of these young women’s lives, or of my life interfered with an exact practice. Research in the field is not an exact practice. I wanted my research to unfold a certain way and it did not. I had trouble getting young women to agree to participate. I had to change my tactics and add an addendum to my human subjects application. I had to maneuver around the school’s, the students’, and my own idiosyncrasies to complete the interviews. There were many days I would come to the school believing I had a meeting with a young woman at that time, only to find that she had left for the day or that the school was not in normal session that day.

“I also found that the stories young women tell sometimes do not make sense, sometimes occur concurrently with a contradictory story, and sometimes emerge in absence of any obvious connection to our discussion. I learned that my own life experiences, thoughts, and feelings impacted the interviews and how I interacted with them greatly. As I read the transcripts, I could see where I asked certain questions because of the experiences, thoughts, or feelings I was having. I probably would have asked different questions if my experiences, thoughts, and feelings were different.

“I also learned that transcribing takes a lot more time than I ever imagined, but the experience of reliving the interview while listening to their voices was beneficial to my analysis and writing. And speaking of writing and analysis, I learned that findings do not ‘jump out at you’. They take time to develop and they develop smoothly in conversation

with others, at least for me. I learned that there are a variety of ways to approach stories and their analysis and that finding the way that works for me is as simple as listening to myself when I ask, ‘what stands out for me?’ and ‘what is a meaningful approach for me?’

“I also learned that narrative is about stories and the way we make sense of our experiences through stories. I think I knew this before I started my research, but it became even clearer as I prepared for and implemented my research and analysis. Stories tell us how people construct meanings for themselves. Exploring those meanings can tell us a lot about the storytellers and their experiences.

“I learned that gathering stories through interviews involves luck. You may ask for students to tell you more about their experience or to tell you how it happened, and you may get a one or two line response with no story. I was lucky that the young women responded with stories on most occasions. Although the way I asked my questions may have impacted their responses, my questions did not determine the types of responses I received. I could use the same prompt and get one or two line responses to one question and a long several minute story in response to another.

“Finally, I learned that narrative inquiry was the methodology best suited to retell the stories of young women in alternative schools. The stories I heard from young women were both triumphant and challenging. Students once seen as troubled or destructive are ‘successfully’ completing their high school degrees and finding connections with other students and teachers in an alternative school setting. Their stories revealed the complexities of their lives and their stories more than generating themes would have. I am glad I chose this methodology.”

“Great, Becky,” says Lizzy. “But what did you learn about yourself through this research?”

It is in identifying yourself with the hopes, dreams, fears, and longings of others that you may understand them and help them. –Wilfred A. Peterson
About Myself

I smile and wonder to myself what I have learned. What do I know differently about myself now that I have done this research? Out of all the questions they have asked today, this one feels the most difficult to answer. I think about my confusion for a moment and then realize speaking my thoughts will probably help reveal my learnings.

“Todd asked me one afternoon if he could present a completely different idea to me,” I begin. “Of course, I responded, ‘yes’. I love hearing his ideas. He postulated that perhaps my need for ‘interconnectedness’ with the young women during my interviews mirrored how they wanted an ‘interconnectedness’ with their school community. Perhaps, when I felt compelled to tell them what was happening in my life, I began to feel how they felt when they needed or wanted to tell their story in their school community.

“It dawned on me, during that conversation, that connection was what I was looking for too. I wanted to feel heard and understood and if that is how they felt in school, I could imagine what they felt when no one listened. I too felt discouraged, distant, and lonely when I was unable to tell my story to them.

“As I talk about this realization, I am beginning to see another reason why I chose to write my dissertation in this format. I wanted to tell my story. I wanted you to hear my experience with this project. I wanted to be heard and understood by the people that

make up my educational community. I am beginning to realize that through this process of storytelling I feel more connected to my education, you, and the future of this work. Telling my story fulfills my need for connection with you and others.

“I also am learning as I speak this to you that I learn, or organize my understandings, better in communication with others. I spent a lot of time talking to you, my mom, my friends, and Todd about this research. Each time I did, a new understanding unfolded for me. I grasped my learnings more clearly, and yet I longed to talk about my experience and my learnings more. Not only because they helped connect me to you, my education, and my community, but also because I realized how truly valuable those conversations were in helping me make sense of these stories, my thoughts, and my experiences. I learned I learn best in communication.

“And finally, I learned through this project that I enjoy and believe in narrative inquiry. I felt attached to this research methodology before I started this project, recognizing that the tenets of this research ‘ring true’ for me. As I completed my project and felt the ‘findings’ unfold, I realized how valuable storytelling is, how it helps us make sense of our experiences, as well as the experiences of others, and how it helps us feel connected to the people around us. We all want to feel connected, accepted, and understood. Stories not only teach us about ourselves and each other, but they also help us feel connected to our communities.”

“Very interesting, Becky” says Lizzy. “I loved hearing about the realizations you had.”

“Becky, I am assuming this is the end of your presentation, am I right?” asks Mike.

“Almost, just one more thing,” I say, smiling with relief that I am almost done.

EPILOGUE

I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious Ambiguity. –Gilda Radner

“Before I leave the room so that you can conference about my research and dissertation,” I say. “I want to thank you for all you have done to help me be successful, to help me finish, and to help me find my way.

“Mike, thank you for taking the time to work with me whenever I needed your advice. Thank you for participating in my clearness committee, acting advisor for my dissertation, and providing me opportunities to teach with you and learn from you. I appreciate you, your kindness and openness, and your wealth of knowledge about qualitative research. I also appreciate the effort you put forth to encourage me to look at my own story. Your recommendation to read Ellis’ work propelled this research in innumerable and invaluable ways. Thank you.

“Lizzy, thank you for supporting and encouraging me throughout this process. Every time I am asked why I chose the committee that I did, I recount my feelings that my dissertation committee had to be supportive and encouraging of me and my ideas. Although all of you support me, Lizzy, you triumph my thoughts and feelings, making me feel like you understand, support, and accept me every step of the way. Your way

with students, and especially me, makes each of us feel loved, valued, and understood.
Thank you.

“Kate, thank you for pushing me along as well. Your support, both with my dissertation and with my job search, has been incredible. I know you are busy with your new job and your family, and nevertheless you open your door to me every time I come looking for advice and guidance. You believe in me and want the best for me and I appreciate all the ways you show me that. Thank you for choosing to join my committee and for working with me throughout the year. Thank you.

“Lisa, your insights have shed light on my life and my research throughout the last three years. I appreciate your intelligence and thoughtfulness, and your ability to tell me what I need to hear even when I do not want to hear it. You have shown me unwavering respect and support throughout my education and this process and I appreciate that enormously. Thank you for taking the time to ask me how I am doing, to listen to my stories, and for sharing your own. You have been a wonderful addition to my committee. Thank you.

“Now, I am done, Mike,” I say smiling.

“Thank you Becky,” replies Mike. “Are we ready?” he asks, looking at Lizzy, Kate, and Lisa.

“I think so,” says Kate.

“I’m ready,” says Lizzy, giving me her most supportive and enthusiastic smile yet. I return the smile and turn to Lisa, who nods in agreement.

“Ok,” I say. “I will be right outside.”

“Thank you Becky” says Mike, as I push my chair back, grab my Nalgene bottle, and stand up. “Don’t go too far.”

“I won’t,” I say, opening the door and thinking, oh boy, the moment of truth.

As I walk out the door and shut the door, I see Molly flailing wildly and talking animatedly to Adina, who is sitting in a chair in front of her. Adina sees me and smiles. I walk over to them, thinking about how exhausted and nervous I feel. I hope they like what I have done. I sit down and Adina puts her arm over my shoulder, which fits only awkwardly because of our height difference.

“How’d it go?” she asks, ignoring the end of Molly’s story.

“I don’t know, but we will find out soon,” I say, smiling nervously.

“Oh, it will be okay,” she says, removing her arm from my shoulder, nodding, and smiling. I faintly hear her giggle and say, “well, it might not be, but who cares, right?” Her statement “it will be okay” reminds me of my mom who has always told me, “EGBOK, Becky... everything’s gonna be O K.” I smile as a tear comes to my eye. I wonder what she is going to say when I call her to tell her I am all done. I smile again, thinking she will probably scream and tell me how proud she is of me. My brothers won’t know what to say, and Todd and my friends will tell how wonderful it is that I have finished this part of my life. Wow, it feels good to be this close, I think, listening to Molly and Adina’s animated conversation. I lean back in my chair, cross my legs, and settle in for the wait.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

My goal as a researcher was to “search... for truths unique in their particularity, grounded in firsthand experience, in order to extend and enhance conceptualization and/or to sensitize practitioners to their occurrence” (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 259-260). I wanted explore the stories of young women in alternative high schools. My hope was to create “stories... [that] enlarge our capacity to cope with life’s challenges , deepen our ability to empathize with others, and expand our sense of community” (Tilmann-Healy, 2001, pp. 12). My plan was to retell the storied lives of the young women in alternative high schools. I hoped their stories would engage the reader in their struggles and transformations. I hoped that these writings touched readers and invoked their emotional reactions to inequalities or injustices revealed in the texts. I wanted my “texts... [to be] sites of political empowerment and resistance” (pp. 12). The desires I had for my research suggested the use of narrative methodology.

Theoretical Framework

The theories I planned to use to understand the experiences of young women who attend alternative high schools were a building block from which I explored alternative high schools and the experiences of women within them. They “open the inquiry, not narrow and focus it” (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 263). They provided me with a way of approaching my work and the work the women and I did together, but they were not able to concretely reveal what I would discover. I began by exploring their

experiences with the understanding that meanings of those experiences were socially created within interactions (symbolic interactionism). What comes to have meaning for a group of people has been created through their collective interactions with a topic, their colleagues, and the greater social and historical context. Additionally, I approached my inquiry from a postmodern/transformationist perspective that problematizes scientific rationality and the notion of universal truth. Additionally, radical theories led me through a critical analysis of the experiences of the young women with whom I worked.

Postmodern/Transformationism. “The circularity of the relationship between social knowledge and social realities, the fact that social knowledge constitutes a resource which unavoidably, and unpredictably, contributes to the transformation of the social contexts analyzed, has meant that knowledge is of necessity continually subject to revision, and in consequence no longer to be characterized by certainty” (Smart, p. 422). From the postmodern perspective, knowledge is not certain, nor is it stable. Knowledge is a social creation that is examined and altered continually. Reflective practices are important for the re-creation of social knowledge. Unlike modernism, postmodernism embraces the disorder and complexity of knowledge and knowledge creation.

“The postmodern world, however, is one that rejects the positivist definition of ‘objectivity’ or that one singular ‘truth’ exists that awaits to be discovered... postmodernists focus on difference and conflict where competing interpretations of reality are inevitable” (Tierney, 1994, pp. 99). Postmodernism also disrupts the scientific method as the only form of knowledge discovery. “In continuing to remove the possibility of any ultimate knowledge, postmodernism confuses the traditional distinction between the subject of knowledge (the knower) and the object of knowledge (the thing

being known). Man does not sit back and passively receive knowledge about the world; rather, man's interpretation is, ultimately, the way the world actually is, as it is revealed to him, or to a culture" (Fields, 1995, p. 5). Postmodern research, then, is a process of creation with all the people involved in the research, especially the "subject" and the "researcher." It is a process of co-creation; both "researcher" and "subject" inform the content of the narrative.

In the research I conducted, postmodernism grounded my understanding of social "realities". The narratives I created with the young women were partial and temporary truths. Each individual, in their own context, had their own version of reality, which was continually revised and constructed. The young women and I tried to come to the best depiction of their truths in a way that acknowledged the local and contextual nature of those realities. However, the pragmatist in me looked to abandon all that was not useful for the field of education (McKee, P., 2003, p. 170). Pragmatists see the need for utility in research and, while postmodernism can be a useful tool to acknowledge the variety of experiences and knowledge in the world, it can also deconstruct every piece of those experiences and knowledge. Stories can be disconnected and fragmented, which can mean they are not useful for others or for the reformation of educational systems. I wanted my stories to raise awareness of the local truths and be useful for future researchers, students, teachers, and policy makers. This viewpoint led me to the transformationism Howe (2003) describes.

Postmodernists and transformationists reject the traditional quest for "truth"; "there exists no acontextualized criterion of knowledge toward which science must move" (Howe, 2003, p. 69). Transformationists, however, seek to find "defensible

conceptions of knowledge and rationality that have contingent human experience as their basis” (p. 68). In that way, I believe they do not abandon all knowledge claims as linguistic constructions. Individuals are given freedom to claim that they know without having to deconstruct and thus dismantle every part of their worldview. Doing so can be important and enlightening in some circumstances, but in a process of story telling it can be disheartening and dis-empowering. Transformationists maintain that knowledge is constructed and changing, but also realize that knowledge claims are valid when supported by human experience. I did not want to deconstruct every story that I was told in the process of my research, taking authority to say what was and was not happening. I want the leeway to be able to report a story and belief without having to tell my audience what was “really” happening by dissecting a young woman’s beliefs about her life.

I also agreed with Howe’s (2003) claim that postmodernity is troubling because of its “inability of radical deconstruction to make sense out of oppression... its inability to provide any guidance regarding how to educate persons so that they will be moral agents who can, among other things, recognize oppression and work against it” (p.75-76). I wanted my research to inform educators and policy makers who can change what students learn so that they are actively breaking down inequalities. With a postmodern view, I could not claim that oppression exists other than that which is created through linguistics. I liked the freedom transformationists have to claim the knowledge that oppression exists.

Symbolic Interactionism. “The reality of school life is continuously produced by our meaningful interaction” (Apple & Weis, 1986, 18). An additional tool for my research was the theory of symbolic interactionism, which fit nicely with my

postmodern/transformationist understandings. A key concern for Symbolic Interactionism is the way in which people come to construct meaning through interaction with others and “how these meanings are handled, modified, transformed, and hence evolve through encounters” (Plummer, 1996, p. 224). For Interactionists, meaning emerges out of social interaction, through a negotiation of social participants. As people interact with one another they construct and reconstruct meanings in their lives. For example, in the research I conducted, the meaning of students’ experiences in alternative schools was constructed through the interaction between students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members. What each of us comes to understand as knowledge has been created in the social context and through various forms of interaction in a community of people. Throughout our lives, we are actively creating our understanding of the world around us. We are not passive observers.

Radical theories. Beyer and Liston (1996) state that radicals hold “...a concern for the subordination of others; a recognition that this subordination is a patterned, structured reality; and an understanding that class, gender, and racial dynamics are frequently intertwined” (p.101). I, too, am concerned about the forms of subordination and domination in our society and the way socially constructed and maintained systems alter a person’s aspirations, abilities, and potentials. In particular, I am concerned about public education and the future of children. I do not want education to prepare children for their inevitable “roles in an economically limited, racially divided, and gender-biased future” (p.101). I, too, “...envision an education that empowers individuals to overcome the deleterious effects of oppression and to critique the set of constraints and rules that support those oppressive systems” (p.104). I want education to be transformative and

enlightening, something that brings fruition to the promise of a fulfilling life to all that seek one. I am saddened by the state of our educational system, which seems to squelch those dreams and perpetually stifle human potential and dignity into small containers of despair and indigence.

Society looks to public education as the breaking off point, the point of equality that will fairly section off individuals, and sometimes groups, into deserved classes of good students and bad students. In a fair and equitable manner, then, those deserved classes of good and bad students become the “haves” and the “have nots” in the larger society. I see this social system differently. Education is not leveling or equalizing. I see it as actually perpetuating social inequality and injustice, especially when misunderstood as a level playing field that can be overlooked in times of reformation. The connection between school and society necessitates analysis and requires us to transform the ways in which it recreates social domination of one people by another.

Radical theories disrupt the systems that maintain social inequalities. They focus on racial, gender, and social class dynamics that sustain the domination of one group of people by another. With racial inequality, radical theories focus on the ways individuals of ethnic minorities are subordinated and ethnic majorities, mostly Caucasians, maintain their power through racially biased or racist systems and structures. For gender inequality, radicals attempt to demonstrate the way women are objectified and alienated from their sexuality through sexist and patriarchal systems. Inequalities of social class are maintained through systems that put capitalistic profit above individual survival. In many ways, these systems are hidden and I expect them to be revealed through narrative analysis. Although I expect my research to acknowledge and raise awareness about all

three of these dynamics, my main interest focuses on the social class dynamics within educational structures. School systems dramatically influence social realities, as demonstrated by Anyon (1981), Burch (2004), and Apple (2001, 1979).

According to Anyon (1981), schools are economically stratified and this stratification dictates the quality of education available to students. The economics of the area in which the school is located determine the quality of education. "...Students of different social class backgrounds are still likely to be exposed to qualitatively different types of educational knowledge" (p. 3). Students in low-income areas receive a qualitatively substandard education, especially when compared to the education offered in high-income areas. "Despite curricular similarities, there were substantial differences in the knowledge among the schools" (Anyon, 1981, p. 6). The differences among schools are not random.

Burch (2004) also informs my conviction. He claims that the education in economically disadvantaged areas lacks Eros, or "a hopeful desire for connection: to others, to an object of knowledge, to truth, and to a vision of a perceived good" (p. 86), while schools in wealthier areas are enlightened with hope and connection. "... It can be seen that the Eros of affluent citizens, their emotional and civic potential, is positively cultivated, while the Eros of poor citizens, their emotional and civic potential, is institutionally suppressed" (p. 86). The public education system, which allocates different forms of education on the basis of economic stratification, is harmful to students in economically disadvantaged areas. Those students' "...human potential is so blatantly squandered..." (p. 96). By this, Burch suggests that poorer area schools are not providing the same access to opportunity through knowledge that richer schools are

offering. Children caught in the education granted in poorer areas are robbed of the hopes and dreams that richer area students receive. In that way, they are excluded from active participation in a society that proclaims “their ‘inalienable right’ to the pursuit of happiness – defined here as an equal opportunity to develop one’s civic self-hood” (p. 94).

Michael Apple also delved into the “hidden curriculum” of public education in poorer areas that has been part of the educational system the “right” believe has “...led to declining economic productivity, unemployment, poverty,” (2001, p. 35). The way in which Apple sees the harm of education in poorer areas is similar to Burch’s notion of lack of Eros. However, according to Apple, the harm is in the internalized norms associated with the curriculum in those areas. He claims that the curriculum encourages acceptance of “often personally meaningless work, acceptance of our basic political and economic institutions as stable and always beneficent, a belief structure resting on consensus, and a positivistic and technical logic” (Apple, 1979, p. 102). The education received by students in economically disadvantaged areas suggests acceptance of their positions in the world and legitimates them on the basis of the skills they are provided (p. 103). Students’ potential to excel beyond their “destinies” is lost when they are taught to accept their place in the economically stratified world in which they live. They are not taught to question or to seek alternatives, nor are they taught the skills necessary to find alternate possibilities. Students in these areas have little hope for change, because they are taught the way the world “really is”.

Theoretical combination. Combining postmodernism/transformationism, symbolic interactionism, and radical theories was meant to provide me with a theoretical

perspective to explore the dynamics of young women's experiences in an alternative high school. I wanted to use postmodernism and transformationism to help guide my methodology, so that I was co-creating a partial understanding with the young women I studied that reflects on the process of knowledge creation. I wanted to use symbolic interactionism to ground my understanding of how they come to make meaning of their experiences through interaction. I wanted to use radical perspectives to explore the race, class, and gender dynamics behind experiences in alternative high schools and who benefits from those experiences. Together, these perspectives were to provide me with a place to start from when I delved into the information before me and a place to reflect on how the process of my research was going. As I engaged more with research and developed my understandings of the young women's experiences, these theories adjusted. I expected that my theoretical grounding would grow with my research.

It was important to recognize that these theories fit together well in some parts and conflict in others. With that in mind, I acknowledged that these theories are only guides and not the construction of my reality when I entered the research field. My understanding of alternative schools and women's experiences in school was evolving. By exploring the stories of these young women, I was able to gain a better understanding of their perspective and create a better understanding of their experiences for myself.

Design

With narrative methodology, I co-created with female students their stories and experiences in alternative high schools. I conducted interviews, examined the ideas produced from those interviews, and examined the interview process. The stories I

recount were a creation of our interactions and the process we used to come to our understandings of their experiences. "...Narrative provides shape, order, coherence, to events beyond our control. Narrative is more than a simple chronological rendering of events... [They help us] develop an understanding of why things happen, their consequences, their material results in the present" (Robillard, 2003, pp. 76). I listened, transcribed, examined, and tried to recount the lives of the women I studied. Narrative inquiry helped these stories be opportunities to teach, instead of lists of events. I hoped the stories we constructed would have "the power to teach, to validate, and to embody a collective wisdom" (Cooper, Benham, Collay, Martinez-Aleman, & Scherr, 1999, pp. 2). I believed there was much to be learned from listening to these voices. They have rarely been heard before and probably will provide insight into what is necessary for our current state of education to reconnect to students in similar positions as theirs. It is important to note, however, that these stories are only some of the stories and the truths that cross the doors of alternative high schools. There are many others.

Narratives "serve to educate both teller and listener (Cooper, Benham, Collay, Martinez-Aleman, & Scherr, 1999, pp. 5). Through our process of interviewing, reviewing transcripts, and correcting written retellings, I hoped I was not the only one learning from their experiences. I hoped the young women heard their own voices and learned as well. Their stories could "assist in expanding what it means to be knowledgeable and aid in redistributing the power that knowledge affords" (Givens, 1999, pp. 55). In the end, I hoped these young women saw themselves as our teachers and understood that they too have much to offer research and public education. "In this

respect, the informant would be a kind of teacher and the interviewer a student...”
(Johnson, 2002, pp. 106).

The process we embarked on with narrative methodology was life story. “Telling a life story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the informed formed and the confusing clear” (Atkinson, 2002, pp. 125). In the process of telling their stories, they revealed what is often taken for granted and assumed. Their stories provided in-depth, firsthand knowledge of schooling and life as a teenage girl. Their stories gave “us a vantage point from which to see how one person experiences and understands life, his or her own especially, over time” (Atkinson, 2002, pp. 126). Their stories helped us understand how they made sense of their experiences, the complexities, and the subtleties, as well as how they constructed meanings of schooling and self (Chase, 2003).

Although their stories were their own, I recognized that my questions and reactions influenced the stories being told. “...The narrator tells her story to a particular person, who may shape the telling of the story by encouraging, empathizing with, interrupting, or resisting it” (Chase, 2003, pp. 80). The stories we created had the “the capacity for reinterpretation and change” (Cooper, Benham, Collay, Martinez-Aleman, & Scherr, 1999, pp. 4). Each story changed when told and heard, will look different to different readers, and will be understood differently in a different social and historical context. This is true of all stories and theirs were no different. The stories these young women told were social constructions, influenced by their perspectives, the influences of those around them, social and historical understandings, my approach, and interactions with others. This does not invalidate the stories. Instead, I hoped it would help them be

“socially recognizable” and reflect on the context, including “social, cultural, ideological, and historical conditions in which they get told and get heard” (Chase, 2003, pp. 80).

These women’s lives did not happen in isolation and that should be recognized by exploring the personal, social, and historical contexts revolving around them. Narrative inquiry is “not merely *telling* their stories as if I had no influence upon them, but (re)telling them through my own experiences and instrumentality” (Louzthenheiser, 2002, pp. 445, emphasis in original). The stories are not untouched, pure truths. They are touched by the perspectives of the students telling them and by my own perspectives in retelling them. I heard their stories through my own lens of experience, which impacted the stories’ retelling. Additionally, “the meanings of life events are not fixed or constant; rather, they evolve, influenced by subsequent life events” (Riessman, 2002, pp. 705). “Narrative analysis assumes not objectivity but, instead, positionality and subjectivity” (pp. 704). The stories we created were influenced by many meaning-making events and are not the sum total of all truths of alternative high schools. They are partial, local, and subjective recountings of the lived experiences of young women in alternative high schools.

Participant Nomination and Selection Process

I conducted my research at a local alternative high school. The alternative high school had a history of being open to research. I posted fliers in the girl’s bathrooms asking for young women to contact me if they were interested in talking to me about their educational and life stories. I made announcements in every third period class, during regular class announcements, explaining this opportunity to participate in research for

female students. The students interested in participating were asked to contact me; however, I spent several days chatting with students for a two week period waiting for students to contact me. During these conversations, I told them what I was doing there and asked them if they would like to participate. Four young women agreed to participate. I did not tell the school staff which students had agreed to participate. That information remained confidential; although, with such a small school, it was easy to recognize who went into the conference room with me and who did not. The young women chose pseudonyms.

I chose to study young women, instead of a sampling of all students that attend alternative high schools, because research on young women is scarce. Throughout my studies of alternative high schools, I was dismayed by the minimal attention given to women and their experiences in alternative high schools. Women comprise more than half the students in alternative high schools and yet their stories are not sought to inform educators, policy makers, and the voting public about their experiences. I believe their stories are a valuable source of information about disconnection and reconnection to public education. I hoped my research could shed light on their experiences.

My sampling was both convenience and purposive. I implemented initial interviews with each of the four young women who agreed to participate. I asked that young women who have been enrolled in traditional high schools, had felt disconnected from that school, and had transferred, willingly or unwillingly, to the alternative high school come forward to participate. I wanted to interview young women who felt they were successful or would be successful in the alternative high school. Additionally, I wanted to talk to students who had experienced transformation since enrollment in the

alternative school, whether personally, academically, or socially. After the initial interview, I selected each young woman for further in-depth interviews. These women were chosen because they demonstrated ease in conversation, ability to tell stories of their lives, and articulate speaking abilities. This was important because the purpose of my research was to construct narratives of a few young women in alternative high schools. If the women who came forward were not willing to tell their stories or are not able to tell their stories, I would not have been able to collect the data I needed to write their narratives.

Interviews

The interviews I conducted were personal, in-depth, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews. I hoped that several female students would volunteer, who wanted to tell their stories and who saw the value in having their stories told. I proposed to interview all the female students who would like to be interviewed. This initial interview was short and concerned mostly with collecting initial demographic and educational data. They were asked to briefly tell me about themselves and their interests in this study, to briefly tell me their experience with education, and why they chose to attend the local alternative high school. Those women who demonstrated ease in conversation, ability to tell stories of their lives, and articulate speaking abilities were chosen for in-depth interviews. I was looking to choose women who represented a diversity of information rich stories. I choose not more than 10 female students for further interviews based on their initial interview. These in-depth interviews lasted one

to two hours and happened as many times as they agreed to meet with me. I used the proposed interview schedule outlined below.

The interview environment I hoped to establish exhibited “the equality between participants, the caring situation, and the feelings of connectedness” that narrative research hopes for (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, pp. 4). I wanted to conduct semi-structured interviews that engaged the young women in open-ended conversations about their experiences and the path that had led them to alternative high schools, as well as their experiences while in the alternative high school. I wanted to find a place of conversational positioning that was friendly and comfortable, where the students and I felt comfortable sharing and exploring ideas and experiences. The majority of my initial interactions with each student were used to create this place and my feeling is that each student needed a different place to converse with me. Eventually, my hope was that we would be able to explore our ideas and experiences, as well as the interview process itself.

When safe spaces had been created, I began by asking each woman to “tell me about your first memory of school.” I used probes to explore their stories in-depth, such as: “what do you mean? Would you explain that? What happened then? Give me an example. Tell me about it. Take me through the experience.” I continued by asking questions about their school experiences chronologically and what their perspectives have been about school and the life experiences that have impacted their education.

Eventually, I asked them to retell the story of them leaving traditional public education. What was that experience like? How did they make sense of their disconnection from school? This led to questions about the alternative school and their

experiences there. Although I did have a plan for our interviews, I let the young women guide where the interviews went. I assumed that there was meaning in what they chose to tell me and what parts they left out. I said very little, acting primarily as an attentive listener. However, if asked for my experiences, I shared to a level I felt comfortable sharing. I did not want them to feel like the experience was unnecessarily one-sided, although it did focus on them. I continued gathering stories and experiences until I felt “saturated” (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 267). Saturation is a point at which a researcher sees information confirming and reconfirming the same stories. At that point, I felt comfortable with the partial and temporary truth that we had developed together. I transcribed the taped interviews and read and reread them until I located the story.

Ethics

An important consideration in this process was the creation of a safe place and the protection of my participants and me. The reflexive nature of this inquiry process was helpful in establishing a conversational position that felt safe for me and the students. However, the protection of my participants and I needed to be addressed with additional measures. In order to protect myself, I was aware of my own needs in process and continued to reflect and adjust for them. I followed through with the Human Subjects Review Board recommendations and gained their approval before moving on, which also protected the students. In addition, to protecting the participants, I discussed with them the nature of the study and potential discovery of identity, even with pseudonyms. I asked for their approval for the publication of our work before I began the study. I consulted them as I went and I honored their requests to conceal or exclude sensitive

information. When what is private may become public, it may be hard to protect the individual students from discovery or harmful personal reactions to the stories. I did my best to ask for their permission, use pseudonyms, and empathize with and support them along the way.

Although my intention was not to exploit them or their experiences for my own benefit, the reality is that I benefited from this experience and the question was how could they benefit. In some ways, my research freed the participants by allowing them a chance to voice their feelings about their lives and their experiences. Additionally, though, I hoped that the texts I disseminate will encourage further investigation of inequalities and potential changes to school structures to alleviate those inequalities. I hoped my texts were empowering for the students participating and for others around the nation. “The desire to (re)tell these tales is not an attempt to empower or “give voice” to the students if this means a dependence on a while or unitary consciousness or voice. By presenting as much of the students’ words as possible, I invite readers to interrogate my analyses and judgments as well as those of the students” (Loutzenheiser, 2002, pp. 445). I did not want to create a situation where their feeling of empowerment was something they feel I had given them. I wanted the students to learn with me through this process. When our interview relationship was over, I expected to stay in contact with the participants. How much contact, I am still not sure.

I expected that the interview process would affect the young women I spoke to. “Researchers who interview women should thus understand the possibly radical impact of the interview on the woman herself. She may discover her thoughts, learn who she is, and “find her voice”. At the same time,... women who have never had an opportunity to

express themselves may not know what to do when given that opportunity” (Reinharz & Chase, 2002, pp. 225). Before I began my research, I located a therapist who offered to help the young women in case our interviews brought something up with which I could not help.

Approach to Analysis

With the understanding that “researchers cannot know at the outset what they will find” (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, pp. 260) and “qualitative research based on narrative material is inherently inductive” (pp. 261), I planned to analyze my data as it revealed itself. I tried to “figure out the taken-for-grantedness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 78) and continued to explore the theory, literature, and questions as I proceeded. The goal was to construct my “livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings” (pp. 70) of the process we undertook to explore the experiences of young women in alternative high schools, “allowing for growth and change” as we go (pp. 71). Additionally, I hoped to have a “response community” to share my findings with (pp. 73), who would help me reflect on my experiences in this process and the information we discovered, in order to “make sense of life as lived” (pp. 78) by these students.

I planned to “enable those with whom [I am] engaged to develop voice and to develop a sense of... ‘hope’” (Tierney, 1994, pp. 98). This research was meant to transform lives, theirs and mine. In that way, it was important to me that the students were active participants in the discovery of their storied lives. I negotiated between the data and my observations and analysis, while continually asking them to read and correct what I had written. The “research process [is] one in which all participants see

themselves as participants in the community, which has value for both researcher and practitioner, theory and practice” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, pp. 4). I wanted the students to feel like equal parts of this project with me and as valuable contributors to the analysis. “We need the advice and suggestions of those specific people in our research” (Tierney, 1994, pp. 110).

To begin my analysis process I followed the guidelines set up by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) in their chapter on coding and analysis. I began analyzing my data by reviewing all of the documents I had. I read them once to ground myself in my research and then used open coding, reading the notes again “line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate” (p. 143). This allowed me to take in all that will happen in my experience in a relatively concentrated period of time (p. 145). I typed my open codes into a list and then looked for themes within those codes. After integrating the codes and themes, I asked the question “what is happening here?” (p. 147). I wrote integrative memos about the stories, which helped me begin to see what happened or was happening in the lives of these students. These themes helped me locate their stories. I then wrote their stories using mostly their own words.

After going through this process, I used Nvivo, coded the documents again, and moved the stories around so that I could quickly copy and paste the stories I wanted to use as examples. Nvivo helped me manage the stories and quickly refer to the parts I was trying to understand.

Assuring Quality Research

I used both Elliot Eisner's proposed standards for qualitative analysis and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) means for establishing trustworthiness to guide the quality of my research. Eisner's standards include illuminating effect, referential adequacy, generativity, incisiveness, and applicability, to make sure I retold their story to the best of my ability (personal conversation at AERA, 2004). Eisner proposes that illuminating effect assures that the final product brings new light on an area and clarifies it more. Referential adequacy means that the work will seem to resonate with other understandings we have in the area. Generativity assures that the work generates new ideas for research and practice and incisiveness relates to the sharpness of the findings. Applicability means that the work is useful in the field. These criteria were not accompanied by activities for quality assurance. However, I think they can be used as a guide to producing quality work. I asked myself how well I felt I met these criteria and asked those in my study and advising my study to ask the same questions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of trustworthiness to assure a similar sense of quality. They claim four criterion areas that must be addressed. The first is credibility, which is supported through specific activities the researcher should consider engaging in during her study. I used peer debriefing to "test out" my findings and prolonged engagement "to build the trust necessary to uncover constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 237). I continually evaluated my own subjectivity in this research, through a method called "progressive subjectivity" in which I continually reflected on my construction in this study. I also conducted member checking throughout the process, asking the young women to check the stories and the findings I constructed. The second

criterion is transferability, which requires thick, rich descriptions to establish context and possible applicability in other settings. The third criterion, dependability, marks the stability of data over time. I used an audit trail to track the changes that occurred in my research over time. Documenting the process and method of my study will help others understand my judgment calls. The fourth criterion is confirmability, which is concerned “with assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator’s imagination” (pp. 243). Again, my audit trail will help illuminate the decisions I made and the directions I chose to follow.

After engaging in the activities outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1989), I consulted peers and advisors about Eisner’s standards to examine how well my research met those criteria. With their help, I asked myself how well I met Eisner’s standards and what ways I think I could correct problem areas.

APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review literature on alternative schools, with particular attention on the stories of the women within them. That attention, however, will be quite brief because gender in the literature of alternative schooling is often overlooked. In some articles, the young women in alternative schools are compared to the young men, maintaining an illusion that male equates with normal and female with other. In another article about young women in alternative schools, gender is a category of people briefly talked about as another segment of the school's population. I wanted to find research that spoke about the stories of these young women, that explored their experiences with them, and that embraced all of who they are. Young women in these schools are not only on the margin of education by attending alternative schools, but also the forgotten students in the literature of alternative school students and alternative schooling. Although I am thrilled about the discovery of any substantive stories about the women in public alternative schools, I am dismayed at the lack of research in this area. Why don't we want to know more about these students and what makes them successful? Why don't we wonder what they have to say? Who benefits from not hearing their stories? Someone has to.

In light of my dismal display of research in the area of women in alternative high schools, I will outline what we know and do not know about options in education, alternative education, students who choose to attend these schools, and the little we know about women in alternative high schools. I will attempt to dismantle the assumptions we

hold about the labels “at-risk” and “drop-outs”, and to demonstrate the need for further research studies on women in alternative high schools.

The History of Alternative Secondary Education

The first secondary school was established in 1635 in Boston. Like many of the schools in the early times of American education, the Boston Latin Grammar School only taught male students who were preparing for college (Collins, 2004). Throughout the beginning of American education, schooling was considered a luxury for those who did not have to work to help support the family. Not many children fit that definition. Those who did not worked beside their parents or found apprenticeships to learn specific trades. In 1642, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring parents to ensure their children were literate (Collins, 2004). The first law establishing public schooling in communities was passed 5 years later. Benjamin Franklin made it possible for females to attend school in the 1750s, but only through early elementary years before they needed to return home to learn domestic skills. Public funding was not secure until the early 1820s, but it continued to grow as more and more secondary schools were established. In 1874, the Supreme Court made it mandatory that every community maintain a secondary school (Collins, 2004). “The first vocational high school started in St. Louis in 1881, providing an alternative to the academic and a replacement for the apprenticeship, which was no longer widely available” (Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976, pp. 7).

Alternatives in education have been around since the beginning of American education (Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976). Before the late 1800s when schooling became compulsory, children could choose between attending a secondary school, receiving

lessons from their parents, learning on the job, or working and learning in an apprenticeship. With the industrialization of the late 1800s and the advent of child safety and fair treatment advocates, children were no longer needed or wanted in the workforce. The unions of the time also helped spur compulsory education. Without the competition with children in the workforce, adults would not have to compete for jobs where companies chose to pay lower wages to child workers. “The industrialization of the United States coupled with the moral and economic arguments for removing children from the factories demanded a system of compulsory education” (Goodman, 1999, pp. 11).

The late 1800s and early 1900s brought another big change in education. The progressive movement, inspired by John Dewey, focused on six central tenets. They include the ideas that: all children are different, we learn best by doing what we are interested in doing, education should teach about living, the classroom should act like a democracy, both social and intellectual learning goals are important, and children need to think critically (Nathan, 1981, pp. 9). The impact these ideas had on education were short lived during the time of Dewey and the progressive era. It was not until the alternative schools movement emerged in the 1960s in an attempt to “create diversity and choice in public education” that Dewey’s ideas were sought and implemented in educational settings (Neumann, 2003, pp. 2; Fantini, 1973). The progressive era embraced democratic, humane, small and learner-centered classrooms. This also became the themes for the 1960s alternative schools movement. “Beginning with the progressive movement that was inspired by John Dewey, the alternative school movement took

intellectual form. However, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that alternative schools began to gain acceptance” (Goodman, 1999, pp. 12).

Throughout the early 1900s public education was a hot bed for experimentation. Sometimes this experimentation occurred with Dewey’s focus. Other times traditional “basics” of arithmetic, reading, and writing became the schools’ focus. Research, particularly the Eight Year Study, in the 1930s demonstrated the benefits of experimental schools. The Eight Year Study, published in 1942, is still considered valuable research on alternative schools. It is “considered by many educational researchers to be one of the best program evaluation studies ever conducted, [it] followed the students from more than 30 experimental high schools during the 1930's” and found that students from experimental schools did as well or better than students from traditional schools in college on a variety of measures (Brooks, Muir, & Hayward, 2000). By the 1940s many schools were attempting to adopt or replicate the educational perspectives of the experimental schools. “Universal compulsory secondary education, or mass secondary education, was firmly established by 1940....” (Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976, pp. 7). The experimental methods of the early secondary schools did not last long.

Most progressive era ideas were eliminated in the 1950s in an attempt to compete with other nations trying to reach space and in order to make curriculums “teacher proof.” Education across the nation was standardized. The public schools of the 1950s focused on arithmetic, reading, writing, and science. The students of the time were given no choices and mostly told to memorize the “basics,” presented to them by their teachers. American education of the 1950s was preparing students to compete with the Russians. In response to the launch of Sputnik, the American people were convinced that students

needed to learn the basics in order to outsmart other nations and to pull ahead of Russia in the race to space. However, the focus on standardized one-size-fits-all education was lost in the 1960s.

Many energies came together in the sixties to make the emergence of the alternative education movement so successful. The Civil Rights movement was a major influential force in the sixties. Not only were Civil Rights activists seeking liberation for Blacks during this time, but they were also seeking equity in education for all people. In an attempt to build momentum for the Civil Rights movement, community members started “freedom schools” to teach Black children the skills they would need to survive and to carry on the movement for liberation. The “freedom schools” also created activists by getting parents involved. Parents became advocates for their children’s education, both by teaching students’ survival skills for Black children and by demanding a better education for their children publicly. The Civil Rights movement and the alternative schools movement both sought options in education and social justice for school-age children. The women’s liberation movement, the election of President John F. Kennedy, the legacy of the United Farm Workers, the Free speech movement, and reactions to the Vietnam War also contributed the liberal tone of the 1960s.

Before the 1960s, public education sought to promote excellence. Those that do well should be rewarded and those that do not will suffer joblessness and poverty. This meritocracy, however, was challenged in the 1960s when protesters, lawyers, parents, and students pointed out that every person and every school were not given a fair chance to be successful. They wanted education to level the playing field, so that all people could prove themselves and achieve the American dream. Upset by the injustices of society,

the community took control of what was deemed an “oppressive” educational system (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Several alternative schools were developed inside and outside the public school system. The departure from conservative/traditional values fed the alternative school movements’ liberal agenda and the creation of options in education that were democratically run, student-centered, and humane for all who participated in them.

“The turmoil of the sixties produced cries for more community involvement and relevant curriculum as students and parents became increasingly concerned about student failures, absenteeism, and suspensions.” (Brown, 1978, pp. 78). The community not only took over development of the freedom schools, but other community schools as well. The development of free schools coincided with the increase of antiwar protesting and white involvement in the Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s (Neumann, 2003). Free schools were also being formed by active community members seeking to build reactive, humane, and democratic schools. They felt that students could reach self-fulfillment and liberation. Their focus, however, was on using the community as educational sites, such as museums and parks, and doing social service projects to learn about the realities of living in a community (Neumann, 2003).

Another form of alternative school was the Open School, which was non-competitive, child-centered, and individually paced (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Students in open schools were in charge of pacing their own education. Teachers were resources and guides, but did not “teach” students. Students’ learning experiences were based on their own lived experiences. As seen within each of these different models of alternative schools are the values of the alternative schools movement (freedom, liberation, community-based, and student-centered). These values were also themes of the time and

of the Civil Rights, Antiwar, and Women's Liberation movements. These ideals helped propel the development of new alternative schools throughout the 1960s.

In 1970, the first Alternative Schools conference took place. As the momentum gained behind the alternative schools movement, so did the attention and the subsequent critiques of alternative schools. Neumann notes that during the 1970s the movement was influenced by the "popular dissatisfaction with schooling, numerous reports of school ineffectiveness, recommendations for alternatives by leading educational organizations and governmental commissions, financial support from governmental and corporate/foundation sources, encouragement from state departments or education, and support from universities in network construction and advice on school development and operation" (2003, pp. 106). The federal government replaced local communities and corporations as the strongest financial support for alternatives in public education. By the mid-1970s, the federal government had published many reports recommending the development of alternative schools. Many books were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s, some commending public alternative schools and others condemning them. After the mid-1970s, accountability and standardized education moved back into the picture. "Alternative views on schooling, particularly those that concerned discovery of personal identity, construction of personal meaning, and quality of school life, were brushed aside as education for economic utility became... the dominant narrative" (Neumann, 2003, pp. 196).

The restoration of conservative educational values slowed down the once active alternative schools movement. Many conventional schools also "experienced reductions in elective courses..." (Neumann, 2003, pp. 200). By the 1980s alternative schools were

increasingly geared towards educating disenfranchised and disruptive students who were sent there as punishment (Young, 1990). With the conservative nature of the 1980s, it is no surprise the alternative school values transformed from a liberal mission of democratic and student-centered education into a more conservative mission of reforming at-risk and disruptive students. Today alternative schools are used more and more often to “house students with disciplinary problems” (Gregg, 1999, p. 107). They are also schools of choice for social “deviants” and often associated with the “counterculture” of the time.

The alternative schools movement slowed down in the 1980s, but several areas of education still show its effects. First, community members are often still involved in public education and the directions it goes. Second, public education continues to offer options to students who do not like or do not succeed in conventional education settings. Third, charter schools have created another place for diversity of education, autonomy for schools, and choice for students. Fourth, alternative schools are still offered as an option in most districts in the United States.

A Detailed Description of Alternative Education Today

What is an alternative school today? The U.S. Department of Education defines an alternative education school as “a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 55). Smith defines an alternative school as “any school that provides alternative learning experiences to those provided by the conventional schools within its community

and that is available by choice to every family within its community at no extra cost” (1974, pp. 14-15). He explains that they have made a commitment to be more responsive to the needs of the students and the community. Fizzell and Raywid claim that “Alternative school has come to mean so many different things that it is fast approaching meaning nothing” (1997, pp. 7). However, I believe the label still has meaning.

Alternative schools mentioned and studied in this dissertation are schools of choice. Enrollment in these schools is a choice students make. They are options in education that do not teach the conventional way and are not managed the traditional way. Students in these schools usually have a voice in their own education. They can choose when to attend classes, what classes they would like to attend, how the school should be governed, and how they should be taught. They continue to learn the standards and must meet graduation requirements for their school in order to earn a diploma, but in most cases their voices are taken more seriously than they would be in traditional schools.

“Assigning all children in the community to one school forces students to ‘fit’ the school. Providing alternative schools or environments creates opportunities for making schools fit the students” (Smith, Bar, & Burke, 1976, pp. 15). Alternative schools tend to attract students who do not fit the mainstream image of the students in the district in which they are located. Students that fit the mainstream perception of a student usually choose to attend the traditional schools in which their needs are met and other students similar to them are their peers. Alternative school students choose alternative schools for a variety of reasons, as will be discussed below; however, they usually fit an “alternative” to the mainstream look, personality, and/or learning style. These schools are meant to

provide a community to students that would not find one in the mainstream of society for whatever the reason.

Purpose of alternative education. The purpose of alternative schools is to provide options. “The development of optional alternative public schools offers a potential strategy for making schools responsive to the needs of the students and communities they serve” (Smith, 1974, pp. 8). Options in education are necessary because not all students learn the same way, act and look the same way, or have the same experiences. Not all students will succeed with the one conventional method of education. Not all learners learn the same way and not all teachers teach the same way (Barr, 1981; Smith, 1974; Neumann, 2003). “In a society as diverse and complex as ours, no institution can effectively serve all people” (Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976, pp. 13). For those that do not succeed in traditional settings, there are “alternatives”. Alternative schools may better meet the needs of some students. They may provide a better community to students that do not fit the mainstream. They may provide a place to fit in and feel accepted for those students who need such a place. Alternative schools are meant to be more “humane, responsive, challenging, and compelling for all involved” (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997, pp. 7). In that way, they are meant to meet the needs some students do not find met in traditional educational settings.

The alternative school philosophy is “primarily psychosocial in nature” (Goodman, 1999, pp. 19). “The focus is upon the individual and his or her development as an authentic self...reflect a positive valuing of the student and his or her culture...build a positive relationship between the student, their family, and the school personnel” (pp. 19). The students who choose alternative high schools usually must find

a connection to their school and a personal reason to learn, most often maintained through their relationships with other students and their teachers. Goodman suggests the importance of the psychosocial for students in alternative schools noting that “alternative education students carry considerable frustration. They are angry to have failed in the traditional system, and they are unsure of their ability to succeed. The result is confusion about where to place blame; on themselves or on the system that did this to them” (pp. 36). Students are failed by the one-size-fits-all educational mentality of traditional schools and the blame for that frustration is often misplaced on themselves. Although they are a part of their own disconnection from school, they are also given very few choices to remedy the situation. Often times they are labeled as disaffected and forgotten. “The development of feelings of support and trust between the students and the faculty is the single most significant component in the change process for the alternative education student” (pp. 39).

Neumann suggests that alternative schools are for disaffected teenagers, the ones “sitting in the back of classrooms in other schools, often sullen and distracted, sometimes confrontational and disruptive” (2003, pp. 5). Throughout the educational experiences of students, those who fit in and succeed in traditional education tend to bond to their peers, teachers, and schools better than those who do not fit in and succeed. Those students who do not fit in or succeed find themselves disconnected from traditional education and in need of something different. “If students do not experience a secure sense of belongingness and affiliation in their life... they can have particularly high needs for connection, inclusion, and belongingness in the classroom itself. Sadly, their lack of emotional nurturance outside of school can lead to troubled behavior in the classroom

that may in fact diminish their opportunities for experiencing inclusion there” (Ellis, Hart, & Small-McGinley, 1998, pp. 144). Alternative schools offer a common place for students who have similar experiences and similar needs of connection. “...It is the alienated student for whom alternative programs have made the greatest significant difference” (Brown, 1978, pp. 70).

“A stigma is attached to alternative schools in some areas because the first alternative school in the community was a school for those who were the rejected – the dropout, the potential dropout, the pregnant, or the disruptive” (Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976, pp. 24). It is important to recognize that these students are not the only students who attend alternative schools. Some students choose alternative schools because they find themselves and their experiences better matched by the students and teachers of the alternative schools. Others just do not fit in or like the conventional school and choose to attend an alternative. Public alternative schools give students, parents, and teachers options within a prescribed system. “...The majority of children and youth are deprived of equal educational opportunity when they are assigned without choice to a standard public school. Equality of educational opportunity would require varied learning environments to meet the needs of different students” (pp. 108).

Characteristics of alternative education today. Generally, alternative education schools: “maintain small size, emphasize one-on-one interaction between teachers and students, create a supportive environment, allow opportunities for student success relevant to the students’ future, allow flexibility in structure, and emphasize student decision-making” (Lange & Sletten, 2002, pp. 6). Other characteristics include: flexibility and student decision-making (Barr, 1981; Griffin, 1993; McDonald, 2002;

Arnové & Strout, 1980), “innovation and creativity in both practice and organization” (Raywid, 1994, pp. 26), a feeling of belonging and social bonding (Raywid, 1994; Wehlage, 1991; McDonald, 2002; Arnove & Strout, 1980), active learning through discussion and hands-on activities (Boss, 1998), genuinely concerned and respectful teachers (Griffen, 1993; McDonald, 2002, Arnove & Strout, 1980), low teacher-student ratio (Arnové & Strout, 1980), and a “positive learning environment” (Civil Rights Project, 2000, pp. viii).

Smith, Barr, and Burke (1976) suggest eight essential characteristics of alternative schools. They include the following characteristics:

1. “...provides an option for students...” (pp. 28)
2. “...commitment to be more responsive than the standard schools to some perceived educational need within its community” (pp. 29)
3. “...population reflects the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the entire community...” (pp. 29)
4. “...opportunities for students...in decision making... program and on their individual roles within the school.” (pp. 29)
5. “...a comprehensive statement of goals and objectives...concerned with improving self-concepts; developing individual talent, creativity, and uniqueness; understanding and encouraging cultural plurality and diversity; and preparing students for various roles in society – consumer, voter, critic, parent, and spouse.” (pp. 29)
6. flexible
7. smaller

8. "...fewer rules and fewer bureaucratic constraints" (pp. 30)

Pascal and Miller (1975) also have a list of characteristics that include: voluntary enrollment, locally developed, well-defined goals, representative enrollment, build relationships to educational system, teach basic skills, develop talents and interests, personalize learning, and meet graduation requirements. Each of these characteristics listed by Smith, Barr, and Burke and Pascal and Miller substantiate the ideal foundation for alternative schools. Although they maintain some similarities to conventional high schools, they are managed more collegially, chosen by their students, and focused on individual student achievement more than conventional schools. They provide students with different environments in which to learn and a different culture in which to develop connections.

Hopson suggests that alternative schools are "...organized to provide core requirements for a high school diploma through flexible delivery systems... [which] include independent study, flexible scheduling, accelerated learning, and computer-assisted instruction...career preparation, school-to-work programs, and advanced classes" (2002, pp. 48). They also offer "individualized learning, small-group instruction, and personally designed curricular projects" (pp. 49). Alternative schools offer students a variety of ways to fulfill the requirements for a high school diploma. These different options are meant to meet the needs of students at the time of their enrollment. Students are given options and can choose the situation that would best meet their needs.

Types of alternative education. There are many different types of alternative schools in public and private education. They vary considerably in terms of student

demographics, student learning styles, student achievement, teaching styles, curriculums, and administrative leadership. Several authors over the years have tried to develop taxonomies that would encompass the many varieties. In 1974, Vernon Smith recognized seven different types of alternative schools, including open schools, schools-without-walls, learning centers, continuation schools, multicultural schools, free schools, and schools-within-schools. Two years later, in 1976, Smith, Barr, and Burke developed a much longer list of alternative education types. Their list includes:

1. Open schools: individual and small group learning activities in school resource centers, classrooms within building
2. Continuation schools: for students who may not or have not finished their high school requirements, include store-front schools and street academies, reentry programs, pregnancy-maternity centers
3. Free schools: no constraints on students or teachers, free to be creative and plan own learning/teaching
4. Magnet schools: aim to attract students with different types of curriculum
5. Environmental schools: attract students with interest in environmental issues
6. Multicultural schools: based on cultural pluralism
7. Fundamental schools: back to basics curriculum
8. Learning Centers: special resource centers
9. Schools without walls: learning happens in community sites
10. Educational parks: variety of programs and grades on one campus
11. Mini schools: offer small size for few students
12. Schools within schools: special programs offered within an existing school

13. Satellite schools: special programs that branch off the main campus high school
14. Freedom schools: aimed to teach survival skills to young black children
15. Religious academies: centered around a religious doctrine as well as a formal curriculum
16. Commune schools: housed within, supported by, and organized for students on a commune
17. High school-college credit programs: programs for students in high school who want to take college courses

Each of these alternative schools was derived with a specific philosophy in mind.

Raywid (1994) developed a typology of alternative education schools that identified schools by their main philosophy of education. The three types, he identifies, are:

1. Themed/magnet schools, which are schools of choice that focus on a innovative curricular approach to attract students to specific topics
2. “Last chance” schools. These schools are called “last chance” because students are sent to them as a last attempt to modify their behavior before they are expelled.
3. Remedial schools, which are designed to meld academic and emotional support. These programs often include counseling and special programs, like drug addiction rehabilitation programs.

Raywid (1994) acknowledges that these types can also be mingled. Schools can have a remedial purpose and remedial counseling services, and maintain the open, flexible structure of the magnet/themed approach. He suggests that a variety of purposes, services, and structures make up today’s alternative education schools. Throughout my

study of alternative schools, Raywid's research and typology was well-cited; however, I believe that some programs may not be included in this philosophical typology. Continuation schools and high school-college credit programs, identified by Smith, Barr, and Burke (1976), do not seem to fit in Raywid's typology. It would be a stretch to call them magnet/themed programs or to refer to them as mandatory "last chance" programs. I also do not think the remedial description fits them well. In order to include all schools that might be considered alternative schools, I think it is best to use Smith, Barr, & Burke's (1976) alternative school type list. It includes programs that would not be included with Raywid's typology.

Benefits of alternative education. There are many theories speculating the reason students succeed in alternative schools. Researchers report the importance of flexibility and student decision-making (Barr, 1981; Griffin, 1993; McDonald, 2002; Arnove & Strout, 1980), "innovation and creativity in both practice and organization" (Raywid, 1994, pp. 26), a feeling of belonging and social bonding (Raywid, 1994; Wehlage, 1991; McDonald, 2002; Arnove & Strout, 1980), active learning through discussion and hands-on activities (Boss, 1998), genuinely concerned and respectful teachers (Griffin, 1993; McDonald, 2002, Arnove & Strout, 1980), low teacher-student ratio (Arnove & Strout, 1980), and key resiliency factors like "one's family, community and school care deeply about an individual, have high expectations, offer purposeful support, and value a person's participation in the group" (Krovetz, 1999, p. 121; also discussed in Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2000). These strategies are equally valuable to traditional school students and should be used for broader school reform (Wehlage & Rutter, 1989;

McDonald, 2002). “Both gifted students and school dropouts have been shown to learn better in alternative schools than they did in conventional schools” (Barr, 1981, pp. 570).

For the two young women I talked about in the introduction, it was a number of complex interconnected circumstances that made Sundown such a valuable, positive contributor to their educational experiences. They spoke of the evening offerings, the flexible class schedules, the caring instructors, administrators, and supervisors, the acceptance they felt as part of the Sundown community of students, and the overall feeling that others thought they could finish. In most cases, these characteristics intermingled with negative factors in these students’ lives, balancing their struggles with some relief and healing.

Wehlage (1991) commented on the needs students have that draw them to the alternative school:

Thus, some students needed a haven from serious home or personal problems where they could receive adult guidance. Others responded to vocational experiences that provide a sense of competence and a road map to the future by linking school and employment. Others, such as pregnant and mothering girls, responded to a curriculum and environment emphasizing child development and the importance of being a good mother. Still other students responded to the challenge of rebuilding old houses, producing newspapers, or learning a marketable trade (pp. 16).

Wehlage’s quote reminds readers that alternative schools are as diverse as the students who come to their doors. The programs within alternative schools are flexible and allow students’ needs to be met, whether that be through parenting classes, applicable vocational training, or a community of students with similar life experiences.

A major characteristic and benefit alternative schools provide is a community of support to students who attend them. They have “...created a supportive environment

that helped students overcome impediments to membership and engagement” (Wehlage, 1991, pp. 15). Throughout the history of American education, socioeconomic status has been a life-changing impediment to educational engagement. Alternative schools offer rectification for “...the failure of the comprehensive high school and of the American education system to serve children who lived in poverty” (Sagor, 1999, pp. 72). “...The poor, perhaps more than any other group in our society, must depend on public education for future success in life” (Brown, 1978, pp. 73). However, it is harder for students who have not been a part of a family that sees college as an option or a goal to feel connected to education in general. Where is the payoff for academic success? “Because course-taking in high school means students are asked to cover superficially a wide variety of topics and information, the material itself becomes meaningless; as a result, learning does not convey to students a sense of competence or intrinsic reward” (Wehlage, 1991, pp. 16). The reward is found in the community of support. Students need to find a personal reason for learning and for being educationally engaged. For this, students need to feel connected to their peers, teachers, and school. Alternative education attempts to envelope all their students in a community, in order to make education important to the lives of each student.

This community of support offered to students in alternative schools has had other positive benefits for schools and students (Barr & Parrett, 2001). “Recent reports indicate an intriguing relationship between alternatives and declines in school violence, vandalism, and disruption” (Barr, 1981, pp. 571). Barr claims this is due in part to their smaller size, the low teacher/student ratio, the caring teachers, and the student-centered approach of alternative schools. These characteristics help establish a community feel to

schools, offering students a place they fit into, a place in which to voice their frustrations, and a place in which to feel cared about. Students choose to destroy that safe place less when it becomes important to them to be a member of it. Educational engagement and membership are two very important benefits of the alternative school model.

Another benefit of alternative schools is their small size. According to Baker and Gump's research, published in 1964, smaller schools correlate with a number of positive outcomes for students' achievement and perceptions. They suggest that students in smaller schools are more involved in their schools, hold more leadership positions, are more satisfied with their education, have greater feelings of responsibility, and feel like they belong more often than students in larger schools. Students in larger schools do benefit from more variety in academic instruction and extracurricular opportunities, but they fall short on the other measures outlined in Baker and Gump's research. Although this research is dated, it was cited in many of the recent books on alternative schools and their benefits.

Best practices. Not all alternative schools are successful. "Because alternative schools have been evaluated more often and more carefully than virtually any other type of public school, their programs have constantly been refined and improved" (Barr & Parrett, 2001, pp. 171). From this research, there are some suggestions in the literature about what makes a good alternative school and what makes them successful. These recommendations illuminate the intent of alternative schools even further and the ways in which they provide a quality education to their students. Case (1981) offers five characteristics of successful alternative schools. He says alternative schools must have attractive educational programs, focused goals, legitimacy in the community, reliable

funding, and positive school climate. He also suggests that schools that succeed are “schools where students and staff feel positive about themselves and enthusiastic about their programs, primarily because the schools are both productive and satisfying” (Case, 1981, pp. 557).

Barr and Parrett (2001) offer a list of suggestions as well. They suggest high expectations for student learning, rigorous vocational courses, more required academic classes, learning in real-world work environments, collaboration among academic and vocational teachers, positive support systems in place for students, expecting more of students, making learning meaningful, setting high standards for behavior, encouraging students to complete assignments, and creating guidance and advisement systems for students. With the implementation of these suggestions, alternative schools have seen successes both academic and emotional for the students who attend them. In most cases, these successes are quite significant when compared to previous achievements of these students. Participation in alternative schools with these characteristics has “improved student attendance, reduced dropout rates, improved attitudes, and has led to significant increases in academic achievement” (pp. 67).

Nathan and Kohl (1981) suggest that it is the collegial leadership styles that help maintain alternative schools. Not only should teachers be key players in decision-making, but students also should have a voice in the processes of school change and maintenance. Successful schools also need focused goals and ground rules. “Successful public alternative schools... learned that they needed rules about behavior, attendance, graduation requirements, respecting the rights of others, etc.” (Nathan & Kohl, 1981, pp. 733).

Impact of zero tolerance. Throughout the last several pages, I have made it clear that students choose to attend alternative schools because they are no longer connected to the traditional school, because they are looking for a different type of education, or because they feel they would fit in to the alternative setting better. An additional prompt for students to choose alternative education includes the impact of policies that consistently push students out of traditional education. Under “Zero Tolerance” policies, “a school will automatically and severely punish a student for a variety of infractions” (Martin, 2001, pp. 1). Regardless of the students’ history or the circumstances of the offense, school administrators and school boards launch prescribed punishment for students’ offenses, which results in the choice between expulsion and suspension (Martin, 2001; Civil Rights Project, 2000; Kingery, n. d.).

This has not always been the case. “Traditionally, a degree of tolerance had been shown to youth who commit mild to moderate violent or other offenses at school with graduated repercussions applied along a continuum, depending on the student’s record of conduct” (Kingery, n. d.). Today, even first time minor annoyances must be punished with suspension or expulsion (Skiba, 2000). “...Disrespect and disobedience are among the most common reasons for suspension, and a significant proportion of suspensions are for tardiness and truancy” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, pp. 7).

The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, as well as many other constituents and researchers, claim that “...Zero Tolerance is unfair, is contrary to the developmental needs of children, denies children educational opportunities, and often results in the criminalization of children” (2000, pp. v). The policy is harsh and often punishments do not meet the offences or student circumstances (Blumenson & Nilsen,

2002). "...Theories of punishment that were once directed to adult criminals are now applied to first graders" (Martin, 2001, pp. 1) and the results are astounding. The research exploring "zero tolerance policies" reveals inappropriate application and no decline in school violence since the inception of "zero tolerance." Although the safety of schools has not changed, one thing has: more students are being suspended and/or expelled from schools every day (Blumenson & Nilsen, 2002). "Zero tolerance" policies have "pushed" more and more students out of school. Instead of dealing with the offense in school and teaching students to behave appropriately, students are arbitrarily thrown out of school to roam cities without adult supervision or guidance and without an education.

Schools with these policies "attempt to protect and better educate one group of children by identifying and excising another...[who] are regarded as more dangerous, more hopeless, and more dispensable" (Blumenson & Nilsen, 2002, pp. 75). Yet, the statistics relate a different story. After students who are considered disorderly and dangerous are removed from the school environment, the safety ratings for those schools remain the same year after year. If the idea was to remove the problem from the school and thus make the school safer, the goal is not being met. Schools are no safer than they were before "zero tolerance" policies were adopted and expanded. In fact, the only change has been more former students on the streets and more students in alternative high schools.

Although school-related constituents support them, the problem of "zero tolerance" policies can not be ignored. "We lack solid evidence to support the effectiveness of harsh policies in improving school safety, and we face serious questions

about the long-term negative effects of one of the cornerstones of zero tolerance, school exclusion” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, pp. 9). School exclusion is a major problem and a major cost to our communities. About half a million students drop out of school each year (Kaufman & Alt, 2001). Research shows that students who are suspended or expelled usually fall behind in school, increasing a student’s chance of academic failure (Civil Rights Project, 2000). Academic failure has been found to be a strong predictor of dropping out (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Barr & Parrett, 2001; Building Blocks for Youth, 2004).

Additionally, “suspension and expulsion may set individuals who already display antisocial behavior on an accelerated course to delinquency...” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Most students targeted through the application of “zero tolerance” policies are those who have a greater need for strong bonds to schools, teachers, and counselors (Blumenson & Nilsen, 2002). With “zero tolerance” policies, these students are identified by their actions and disconnected from the people who could help them the most, teachers and counselors. They are thrown out of school, either temporarily or permanently, which leaves them to roam the streets looking for comrades who also have been abandoned and humiliated by the educational system. Research shows that students who are suspended are likely to feel unwelcome in their school and to later drop out of school (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba, 2000). “...The most well-documented outcome for suspension appears to be further suspension, and eventually school dropout” (Skiba, 2000, pp. 14). “Another strong correlation exists between the lack of secondary education and criminal activity” (Blumenson & Nilsen,

2002, pp. 82). They find themselves unsupervised and at a greater risk for getting into trouble (Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Learning they are unwelcome or hopeless is not the only lesson these students are learning. Several authors of research articles in the area of “zero tolerance” policies speculate what students learn from prescribed punishment policies. The Civil Rights Project suggests that “...Zero Tolerance policies take a “do as I say, not as I do” approach to discipline. Students are taught that adults are not being sincere when they speak of the need for justice and fairness and then do not take those elements into consideration when the child’s punishment is callously and subjectively meted out” (2000, pp. vii). Students learn that adults are not to be trusted and that justice and fairness are often spoken about, but rarely implemented values. Essentially, adults are hypocritical and values are confused. Skiba and Peterson submitted that “...the indiscriminate use of force without regard for its effects is the hallmark of authoritarianism, incompatible with the functioning of a democracy, and certainly incompatible with the transmission of democratic values to children” (1999, pp. 10). If our schools are meant to teach students to be engaged and productive members of our society, shouldn’t they learn the values and role of democracy in our country? They suggest that when applied, this policy “implicitly teaches students that the preservation of order demands the suspension of individual rights and liberties” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, pp. 10). Again, democratic values are something adults speak about, but rarely act. In policy that clearly delineated the values of democracy in action, students would be treated with fairness and justice. They would be allowed to present their side of the story and

those circumstances would be acknowledged and incorporated into a discussion of appropriate and fair punishment. However, this is not the case in traditional schools.

The implementation of a more accurate democratic education is seen most often in alternative education. The key components of alternative education schools match the needs of students during the developmental school years and highlight a democratic vision for education. During this time in students' lives, they need to form engaging and trusting relationships with key adults in their daily lives. They need to feel connected to a community and cared about by those in that community (Wald, 2001; Martin, 2001; Civil Rights Project, 2000). Additionally, students look to form "positive attitudes toward fairness and justice" (Civil Rights Project, 2000, pp. 10). Alternative education schools aim to connect students to their community and engage students in meaningful teacher-student relationships. They also provide students opportunities to make decisions and provide input to the processes of the school structure. Their voices are heard and acknowledged within alternative education schools. Alternative schools seem like the perfect place for youth affected by "zero tolerance".

"Too often, youth react to schools with inappropriate or disruptive behavior. Because of this, state legislatures, communities, and educators have recognized that it may be more necessary to isolate or exclude some students in order to provide others with a more effective climate for learning" (Barr & Parrett, 2001, pp. 52). Problems arise, however, when one thinks about the punitive assignment of students to alternative schools. Are teachers and administrators in alternative schools supposed to make school so undesirable as to deter students' bad behavior? The answer is "no." "A punitive purpose may cause schools to adopt ineffective models for improving learning or

behavior” (Gregg, 1999, pp. 4). Instead, alternative schools need to be schools of choice. They should focus on their original methods, connecting students to a community and providing a positive, supportive and engaging learning environment (Gregg, 1998, pp. 6). “With the burgeoning number of children being suspended and expelled, there is clearly a need for high quality alternative education programs” (Civil Rights Project, 2000, pp. 14). The Civil Rights Project is not the only supporter. Boylan & Weiser (2002) found one area that student, parent, teacher, and administrator organizations agreed on: the necessity and value of alternative education programs.

The value of alternative education is also felt financially. Although they cost more per pupil (Gregg, 1998), alternative schools save communities in the long run. Students who do not attend alternative schools are at-risk for academic failure and dropping out of school. Those who dropout are at a higher risk of criminal activity and subsequent incarceration, as well as being on welfare or unemployment. In the long run, those students who drop out of school, rather than finish their education through an alternative program, cost the community much more than an alternative school education alone (Kingery, n. d.). The costs of no-alternative education are also felt by the student in lost wages and lost freedoms. Alternative education can save both students and communities from enormous reparations.

Capable Students

The students who attend alternative schools vary as much as the theories for their success. Usually, however, they are clumped together under the deficit-driven label of “at-risk” or “disruptive.” The term at-risk means: “...disinterested and disruptive, as

those students who refused to learn, and as those who they thought could not learn” (Barr & Parrett, 2001, pp. 3). The deficit these students share is an essential ambiguous attribute necessary for school success. In this definition, school success is equated with school completion and the attainment of a high school diploma. The students who lack this quality are “often negatively labeled... bad students” (Osbourne & Brynes, 1990, pp. 48), which may be part of the “problem.” We construct our reality through the language we use. We come to understand who we are and where we belong in society through our social interactions with others. Identities are developed as “objects of discrediting attributes” such as drop-out, at-risk, or disruptive, informing students’ “social identity,” which is actively produced in interactions between self and others (Fraser, Davis, & Singh, 1997, pp, 222).

When we label someone, we suggest that their identity can fit into the neat little descriptive box those words provide. In some cases, people rebel against those labels, but in other cases those labels are accepted and lived (Fraser, et al, 1997). As Gregg points out, “labeling students may further marginalize them and solidify antisocial peer groups, compounding the problems one is trying to “fix”” (1999, pp. 108). Students may try to become the person people see them as. Additionally, such “framing divorces the students’ struggles from political, economic, and historical contexts, especially the institutional and societal actions that contribute to their schooling” (Loutzenheiser, 2002, pp. 442). The students who attend alternative high schools should not be separated from their contexts; indeed, it is their contexts, the way they grew up, the lives they lived, the struggles they overcame, that need the attention and care alternative high schools provide. They are not

lacking; they are full of experiences and understandings that do not match the traditional school or the traditional student perception.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will call alternative high school students capable students. Capable is just what they are. They are still in school, they have more experience with life's turmoils and tragedies than most of us, they are determined to graduate, and they will be "successful". The difference in language between "at-risk" and capable is astounding. With a simple adjective change, these students are no longer lacking anything, or failing at anything. They are now attempting to overcome their hardships and they are learning the skills that will help them reach their goals.

Who are these capable students? Boss (1998) contributed one of the best pictures of capable students I have found. She wrote:

Students attending the nation's estimated 15,000 alternative schools come in all sorts of colorful packages. More than a few adopt hairstyles, wardrobes, street language, and attitudes that would make them stand out—or be kicked out—of mainstream classrooms. But what's most remarkable about this diverse student body isn't outward appearances. It's that these students, many of whom face obstacles ranging from poverty to teen pregnancy to long-term academic failure to chronic delinquency, are making an appearance in school at all (pp. 7).

Capable students attending alternative schools are as diverse as the most diverse student body. Baas points out that the students at alternative high schools "tend to be among the "disadvantaged"; disproportionate numbers of them come from families at or below the poverty level and are members of minority groups" (1991, p. 1). They are "pushed out of the norm" by "their social class, skin color, sexuality, and the experiences of their lives" (Loutzenheiser, 2002, pp. 452). They represent higher levels of poverty and more minority backgrounds than traditional school students (Kleiner, Porch, &

Farris, 2002). This is also true of the students I met through the Sundown program. They represented a variety of ethnicities, sexual orientations, personalities, social classes, and skin colors. They wore a variety of different cultural artifacts and came from a variety of family structures. Many students came to Sundown to avoid their family or to avoid the bullying they received from day school students.

Two large research projects on alternative schools and their students were conducted in the last 6 years. The Alternative High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (ALT-YRB) summaries were released on October 29, 1999, reporting data from February through May of 1998. The Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At-Risk of Education Failure Statistical Analysis Report were released in September 2002. These reports provide the best statistical research done on alternative schools.

The ALT-YRB results suggest many of the 280,000 students attending alternative high schools in the U.S. (2% of all high school students; however, as of October 1, 2000, this number has increased to 612,900 students and 1.3 % of high school students, Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002) “engage in behaviors that increase their likelihood of death from [motor vehicle crashes, other unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide]”. More than half of the alternative high school students had ridden with a driver who was visibly under the influence of alcohol, about 30% had “never or rarely worn seatbelts” in the last 12 months, and over 50% did not use condoms during sexual intercourse. One-fourth of the students admitted to driving while under the influence of alcohol and one-third had carried a weapon, each within the 30 days before the survey.

The ALT-YRB survey asked students about their eating, exercise, and dieting habits, as well. All results revealed that these students are risking their health and their

lives more often than students in traditional high schools. The results are disheartening. Are these behaviors acts of rebellion, destruction, self-loathing, ignorance, or apathy? The survey did not ask students to talk about their perceptions of these behaviors or their life circumstances. Ironically, they did ask the students how many fruits and vegetables they ate in the day prior to the survey and how often they do stretching exercises. For the students I talked to the night of the dinner theatre field trip, I wonder if they feel that buying and consuming expensive fruits and vegetables and engaging in stretching are important parts of their daily lives, especially when their lives are as chaotic and unpredictable as they are.

The U.S. Department of Education's statistical analysis report, entitled "Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At-Risk of Education Failure," adds more to our understanding of the alternative high school student. "Overall, 12 percent of all students in alternative schools for at-risk students were special education students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002, pp. iv). Reasons students were transferred to alternative high schools included: "possession, distribution or use of alcohol or drugs (52%), physical attacks or fights (53%), chronic truancy (51%), continual academic failure (50%), possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50%), disruptive verbal behavior (45%), and possession of use of a firearm (44%)" (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002, pp. v). The rest of their report outlines alternative education criteria for entrance and exit, collaboration with outside agencies, and staffing. On the front cover of their report is a picture of five students. They look to be in their twenties, smiling, cleanly dressed in the latest white (Caucasian) culture fashion, all thin and clean cut, and supposedly representing students from alternative

schools. I wonder if the researchers for this report even set foot into an alternative school to see and talk to students of alternative schools.

Capable Women

The development of the capable woman. Before I review the scant research on women in alternative high schools, I wanted to review some of the developmental stages young women might experience during their time in alternative high schools. I chose to discuss two theorists with stage models of development, both of whom have theorized important stages during the adolescent years. Erikson's stage theory discusses psychosocial development (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and Piaget's stage theory explains cognitive development (Lewis, 2004). In Erikson's model, adolescents experience the conflicts between identity and role confusion during high school. The adolescent begins to formulate her future and her understanding of her role in the future. This sense of role-playing and purpose contributes to her sense of self. In Piaget's theory, adolescents in high school begin to have the ability to see possibilities, which increases their ability to problem-solve and make decisions. They are able to describe themselves and become increasingly absorbed in self appraisal and self-centered thinking.

It is important to note, however, that these theories are rarely used anymore. "...No attempt to develop a general theory of normative adolescent development has met with widespread acceptance, and theories of normative adolescent development that had once been popular have declined considerably in their influence" (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, pp. 85). This is due in part to the fact that most research used to develop these theories of adolescent development primarily used male samples, at least until the 1980s.

The stages were then generalized to include both men and women (Wieder, 2004).

“Implicitly adopting the male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth” (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 6). Gilligan (1982) suggests that further research on women shows that the theories do not match female adolescent development well.

For example, Erikson’s theory focuses on the individuation of adolescents and the importance of adolescence as a time of separation to form an individual identity.

Females do not follow this model. Instead, most women find their sense of self through relationships with others and do not disconnect as males do. Therefore, in most stage theories women are seen as behind developmentally because they choose relationships and communication over logic and detachment. They build their sense of self through attachment and relationships and are behind in relation to men when looked at through this theory. New theories are needed about adolescent female development that study women’s ways.

Carol Gilligan (1982) focused her studies on women’s moral development. After interviewing several women about their feelings about abortion, she came up with three stages that women went through in their moral development. She suggested that the first stage was selfishness. During this stage, women were concerned with what was best for them. They were self-centered and concerned with self-preservation. The second stage marked a time when women were concerned about the moral code of their community and swayed with the wishes of those around them. The third and final stage marked the time when women are concerned with non-violence. This is a time when women choose to do no harm to anyone, including themselves. She further demonstrated that

Kohlberg's model of moral development was not accurate for the development of women's morality.

In addition to the studies done on women's moral development, I thought it would be appropriate to discuss the ways women are thought to come to know. Until Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) began their research, most research about women's knowledge focused on intellectual capabilities of women. This research lent little insight into the ways women learn and how the education system could better meet their needs as learners. For their study, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule focused on the voices of women as they retold stories of their educational experiences. They attempted to identify what ways women developed intellectually. Out of the 135 diverse interviews, five themes of women's ways of knowing appeared. They included: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

Silence: Women who learn in silence come to know themselves as passive, reactive, and dependent on authority for knowledge. In their eyes, authority is powerful and knowledgeable. Very few women fell into this category. They were usually very young women and women from socially, economically, and emotionally deprived circumstances. Most of these women had been abused in some form at some point in their lives and had not yet healed themselves. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) describe them as being in denial of themselves and dependent on an authority figure.

Received Knowledge: Women are oriented to the authority outside of themselves, but they believe, by paying close attention to the work and wisdom of others, they can

learn. They see themselves as capable of receiving knowledge, but not of creating it. They collect information and facts and consider this process true learning. These women find that they have no tolerance for ambiguity. They believe each question has one right answer and absorbing that answer from an authority or friend is their ultimate goal. For these women, listening is a “very active and demanding process” (Belenky, et al, 1986, 37). They feel incapable and confused when they are asked to do original work. They try to listen carefully for the right answer.

Subjective Knowledge: Women emphasize the authority within themselves and they attribute less power to external authority. To them, truth is personal, subjective, and intuitive. In fact, many women in this way of knowing believe their gut feeling is infallible. Truth develops from inside of them and cannot be connected to anything external. They become increasingly aware of the inner resource for knowing and valuing. They feel competent and capable. About half of the 135 women they interviewed fell into this category of knowers. Nearly all of the women in this category grew up with a failed male authority, meaning that most had an abusive, absent, or neglectful male role model in their lives. They lost trust in male knowledge and authority. These women look for female role models throughout their lives to guide them.

Procedural Knowledge: Women attempt to gain procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge. They emphasize learning how to think critically and use the scientific method. Ideas for them are not truths unless they measure up to some objective standard. They believe that authorities do not have the answers, but they do have the techniques for constructing the answers. Women in this way begin to feel like their

intuition is irresponsible and inaccurate. The world of knowledge now appears to be more complex and problematic. Objective standards are the only procedures that will validate objective truths. Subjective information is invalid. These women had either attended or finished college.

Two subcategories exist under procedural knowledge. They are separate knowing and connected knowing, which were first introduced by Gilligan and Lyons (Belenky, et al, 1986). Nilsson (1998) claims women should be categorized as connected knowers, which is characterized as open understanding, empathy, and relational transformation of understanding. Nilsson continues by explaining that men are usually separate knowers, which means they do not take anything for granted. They analyze information critically, look for flaws, challenge the knower, and play devil's advocate before they accept new knowledge. Women prefer to learn more about the knower's understanding of the truth and attempt to see it from the knower's perspective. However, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule explain that women are found to be in both categories of procedural knowers.

Constructed Knowledge: Women recognize that all knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known. Everything for them is relative. Theories are not the truth but models for approximating experience. These individuals feel responsible for examining, choosing, questioning, and developing systems for the construction of knowledge. They feel like they have a choice about how they would like to think and be in the world. Internal contradiction and ambiguity are acceptable and self-reflection is a key component of evaluating and reevaluating who they have chosen to become. These women are self-aware and only interested in "real talking" (Belenky,

et al, 1986, 144). Conversations are important and vital for their continual development. Additionally, they strive to transform their moral commitments to action. They aspire to work to improve the lives of and empower others.

Men can also fall into the categories of knowing described here for women's ways of knowing. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggest that these are the themes that evolved from their interviews of 135 women and not necessarily only attributable to women. The research, however, does provide insight into how women find meaning and begin to learn. In all five ways, the themes of knowing describe knowledge as relational. Women learn through interaction, hands-on experimentation, and reflection. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule suggest that these ways of knowing are not hierarchical. Women can begin or end their learning in any of the five ways, but they would like to see an educational system that helps to bring women to constructed knowledge.

According to *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Boxer (1998) explains that women's knowledge is deeply connected to their self-concepts. Experience and self-reflection become vital for a woman's education. From experience and reflection, women learn positional views that help them construct and be critical of structures and systems. However, critics worry that over-personalizing education can separate experiences from social and historical contexts and that at some point expectations for sharing invade personal space. Contrary to that criticism, research done on student success in feminist pedagogy suggests that intellectual learning helped students explain their personal lives and that students involved in this type of learning were motivated to learn more (Boxer, 1998). It was the course content and not the pedagogy that was the most influential in

student learning. The results also suggest that students felt challenged and empowered by their education in this model.

I mention these theories and the critiques of them because they may shed light on the women I will interview. However, I will not use them as measures of maturity or development. As much as any other discourse, these theories confine women and men. They suggest a normal-abnormal binary and do not allow an individual to define their own reality. I will listen to the women's own definition of self and their own lived story of development. I will assume they know more about their development than I can ever know from our brief meetings.

Adolescent females. Further study of the research on adolescent females revealed some common issues females face. This research is also used to shed light on young women in high school and not used as a measure of normalcy. The research suggests that young women in high school experience an increase in bickering with their parents or guardians (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). They find friends in people who are similar to them and who value their relationships, even with the parent/guardian (s) they are squabbling with. Female adolescents are overly concerned about their physical attractiveness and their sex appeal (Katz, 1979). They begin to date more, experiment sexually, seek a group identity, and take more risks (Arizona Prevention Resource Center, 2004). "Adolescence is a period in which girls are increasingly confronted with expectations to conform to gender role prescriptions" (Basow & Rubin, 1999, pp. 25). They become more rigid with their gender roles, experience more sexual harassment, and are 3 times more likely to be sexually abused than adolescent boys (No author, 1998).

Adolescence is a “difficult passage for many girls, even those who have a strong safety net of support at home and in school” (No author, 1998, pp. 1). They fear appearing too smart and reducing their veil of femininity. They become silenced and turn to others for validation of their femininity. Gilligan suggests that these young women are losing their once confident voice and replying “I don’t know” more often (Prose, 1990). They experience a drop of self-confidence. They report feeling as though their physical appearance is declining, “reinforcing their declining self-esteem and gender stereotypes” (Berkowitz, 1993, pp. 195). “...By early adolescence they begin to doubt their abilities” (Worell, 1999, pp. 22). “The contradictory and restrictive messages – about being attractive but not too vain, about being sexy but not too sexual, about being an individual but pleasing others, about developing one’s abilities but not being too achievement oriented, and so on – primarily affect girls...” (Basow & Rubin, 1999, pp. 37).

These factors of difficulty for adolescent females are not all inclusive. They are a review of what some authors find consistent in female adolescents. They are also not true for every female during this stage in her life. Interesting to note is the sheer amount of negative hurdles young women consistently face according to this research. Where is the research that triumphs young women in adolescence and shies away from depicting her as a victim of her own development and of her community? Although I find it useful to be aware of what might be possible in the lives of young women, I am hesitant to accept these assumptions or to even write about them in my dissertation. Such assumptions bound my perceptions and limit my ability to accept the stories women choose to provide me. They provide a prescribed understanding of their lives that does not necessitate critical thinking or the consideration of their own stories.

Capable young women students. The research on women in alternative high schools is limited. Most research, including the ALT-YRB report, compare female characteristics to male characteristics. I mentioned my concern with this type of data before, but I will reiterate that research that compares females to males usually assumes male as normal. In every instance they are compared then, women are either above, similar to, or below the normal level that male data suggests. Such data depicts women as abnormal. However, it is the only data available and will be used here to highlight the findings of the ALT-YRB reports.

“Overall, female students (31.1%) were significantly more likely than male students (20.0%) to have considered attempting suicide” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999, pp. 11). They were also more likely to have made specific plans to implement their suicide and more likely to attempt suicide than males. Males were more likely than females to use tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. They were also more likely to participate in sports than females. Females were also more likely to perceive themselves as overweight and to use unhealthy means, such as diet pills and laxatives, to control their weight. This research runs dangerously close to assuming males are the norm for alternative high school students. I would rather use research that specifically studies the lives and educational experiences of women.

One aspect of the ALT-YRB report was particularly striking. While close to 90% of students at alternative high schools are sexually active, only “14.1% used birth control pills at last sexual intercourse” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999, pp. 39). These behaviors suggest that women in alternative high schools are either unaware of the risks they are taking, feeling pressured to engage in sexual intercourse

without protection, using other forms of birth control, or deciding to become pregnant (Street, 1998). Street suggests that instead of helping young women understand their bodies and their rights to choose, “we focus on the consequences of this situation and rail about wild girls, children having children, girls in gangs, and so on. We rail; we don’t actually deal with girls’ lives because they are made invisible. And girls participate in producing this invisibility because they suffer quietly, and their trouble stays hidden” (1998, pp. 113). Street’s (1998) concept of invisibility was made clearer to me when I attempted to read the research on women in alternative schools. I found very little research on the stories of these young women.

Street (1998) wrote about how she “worked with (girls who) are routinely mistreated, psychologically and physically by boys and men who are victims of systemic oppression themselves, but are also dominant players within gender arrangements that crush girls” (pp. 113). I had seen evidence of this in my conversation with the women from Sundown and thought how terribly hard their lives must be. Not only do they struggle in their homes, but they struggle in their relationships with boys and men. Street’s chapter also talked about the age differences between the young women in alternative schools and their sexual partners. In most cases the men were twice their age. These relationships are happening quietly. They are not talked about or researched, and they need to be, so that an end to women’s oppression can take place.

While Street’s (1998) chapter enlightened my understanding of young women’s experiences in relationships with boys and men, Loutzenheiser’s (2002) article informed me about the perceptions of young women. She explored themes from the stories of nine young women in an alternative high school. Their stories reveal their “otherness,” or

their disconnection with traditional students and education. “The students argue that disconnection occurred over time in reaction to teacher actions, school culture, and pedagogies that “othered” them” (pp. 446). The students felt different and invisible in the traditional school. They felt teachers in the traditional school did not respect or care about them. “Each participant in this study experienced significant traumas in her life” that were not talked about in social interactions or in the curriculum at the traditional high schools (pp. 451). The alternative school helped them accept and care about themselves because they felt a sense of caring from their school community, they saw themselves in the curriculum, and they felt heard. The alternative school helped them flourish into self-respecting young women and eventually high school graduates.

Loutsenheiser points out that she did not intend to portray young women’s experience in the alternative school as a complete utopia; “to do so would set up another good-bad binary and to encourage the notion that there is a singular answer to “problem” students” (pp. 460). Some students do not succeed in the alternative school, some do not match it any better than they match the traditional school, and others need services that are not available through public education. The stories told in this article are only a few of the close to 300,000 women who have stories to tell about alternative high schools.

Further Research

It is through Loutzenheiser’s (2002) stories and the stories of the women in the Sundown program that I began to understand the need for more research on young women in alternative high schools. I witnessed how silenced and invisible these young women are. Their invisibility not only threatens their educational potential, but also the

educational potential of many other students who experience similar educational, familial, and gendered trauma. The stories of the Sundown women and the women in Loutzenheiser's (2002) studies teach us about "what is working and what is not, and how schools might accommodate students. The challenge lies in complicating our analyses and our talk about students' schooling experiences in order to disrupt the deficit model of "at-risk" and success-failure discourses" (pp. 462). Future research must acknowledge the complexity of students' lives and the interconnected factors that contribute to their disconnection from schooling. Their stories need to be told, not only because they are not being told now, but also because alternative schools need support. Todd no longer works for the alternative high school because budget cuts in the state's education funding necessitated the closure of the program he was hired to teach in. I am sure with current school funding cuts soon others will also be closed. Policy makers must be made aware of the success of such schools for capable students and the benefit of alternative schools to society at large.

Attention Female Students:

Are you interested in having your story heard? Do you want to tell others what is it like being you? Here's your opportunity!

A doctoral student at CSU needs you to help complete her dissertation research. The purpose of the study is to tell the stories of young women in alternative high schools. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to tell her about your educational story, beginning with your first memory of school and ending with your experiences at this school.

Participation is voluntary and you can choose to leave the study at any time.

Please contact Becky at 227-0783 if you would like to participate.

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Participation is voluntary and you can choose to leave the study at any time. Please contact Becky at 227-0783 if you would like to participate.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *On the Margins of Public Education: The Experiences of Young Women Attending an Alternative High School*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Terry Deniston, Terry.Deniston@colostate.edu, 491-5208

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Newman-Gonchar, rnewgon@lamar.colostate.edu, 227-0783

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? (Initial Interviews) You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a female student attending an alternative high school. I am studying the experiences of young women who have attended traditional schools and have now chosen to attend an alternative high school. Your story will be used to inform others about the experiences of young women and the benefits of alternative high schools.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This study is being conducted by Becky Newman-Gonchar, a PhD candidate at Colorado State University. She will do the interviewing and conduct the storytelling analysis.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to tell the educational stories of young women who have chosen to attend an alternative high school.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place at Centennial High School. It will last at least up to one hour interview. You may be asked to participate in additional in-depth interviews. You will be asked to meet with me after we have finished our interviews in order that you may check what I have written and make changes to your responses if you'd like to.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to tell me about yourself, why you chose to participate, and what it has been like to attend Centennial.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You may not participate in this study if your parents will not sign the consent form.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are three potential risks involved with this study. The first is loss of confidentiality. Your identity may be exposed. Although you will be identified in the report by the pseudonym you choose to be referred to, there is a chance that the details of the stories you tell will be recognizable and attributed to you. You will also be asked to give permission for the researchers to use the stories you tell. It is unlikely that other students, families, and staff from Centennial High School will read or attend my defense when these stories are made public. The second is that you may reveal during the interview that your parents are abusive. I will need to reveal their names to authorities if abuse is disclosed. I am not sure how likely this event is to occur. The third risk is that you may disclose information which distresses you emotionally. If this occurs, the Centennial High School

counselor has agreed to talk to you. I do not expect this to occur. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no known benefit in participating in this study, but we hope you will gain more personal knowledge of yourself and your reasons for participating in this study.

Page 1 of 3 Participant's initials _____ Parent's initials _____ Date _____

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? I do not expect this study to cost you anything.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you reveal you are being abused.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? You may be asked to leave this study if you choose not to attend the alternative school or if you are not willing to tell your story when the interviews are taking place.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No compensation will be given to you for taking part in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Becky Newman-Gonchar at 227-0783. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Celia Walker, Director of Regulatory Compliance, at 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? Obtain your parents signature only if you are under 18 years of age.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

Page 2 of 3 Participant's initials _____ Parent's initials _____ Date _____

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

As parent or guardian I authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by Becky Newman-Gonchar and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Page 3 of 3 Participant's initials _____ Parent's initials _____ Date _____

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TITLE OF STUDY: *On the Margins of Public Education: The Experiences of Young Women Attending an Alternative High School*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Terry Deniston, Terry.Deniston@colostate.edu, 491-5208

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Newman-Gonchar, rnewgon@lamar.colostate.edu, 227-0783

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? (In-depth Interviews) You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a female student attending an alternative high school. I am studying the experiences of young women who have attended traditional schools and have now chosen to attend an alternative high school. Your story will be used to inform others about the experiences of young women and the benefits of alternative high schools.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This study is being conducted by Becky Newman-Gonchar, a PhD candidate at Colorado State University. She will do the interviewing and conduct the storytelling analysis.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to tell the educational stories of young women who have chosen to attend an alternative high school.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place at Centennial High School. It will last one to two hours. You will be asked to meet with me after we have finished our interviews in order that you may check what I have written and make changes to your responses if you'd like to.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to tell me about your educational experiences in traditional and alternative schools, about your successes and struggles, and about the ways you feel you have changed since you started attending an alternative school.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You may not participate in this study if your parents will not sign the consent form.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are three potential risks involved with this study. The first is loss of confidentiality. Your identity may be exposed. Although you will be identified in the report by the pseudonym you choose to be referred to, there is a chance that the details of the stories you tell will be recognizable and attributed to you. You will also be asked to give permission for the researchers to use the stories you tell. It is unlikely that other students, families, and staff from Centennial High School will read or attend my defense when these stories are made public. The second is that you may reveal during the interview that your parents are abusive. I will need to reveal their names to authorities if abuse is disclosed. I am not sure how likely this event is to occur. The third risk is that you may disclose

information which distresses you emotionally. If this occurs, the Centennial High School counselor has agreed to talk to you. I do not expect this to occur. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no known benefit in participating in this study, but we hope you will gain more personal knowledge of your experiences in traditional and alternative schools.

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WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? I do not expect this study to cost you anything.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you reveal you are being abused.

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Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

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Parent/Guardian signature

Date

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