

DISSERTATION

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF FOUR FEMALE FIRST-YEAR, FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE**

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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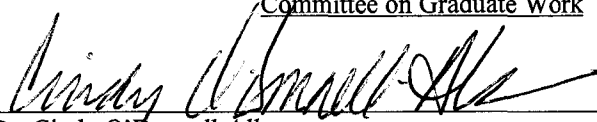
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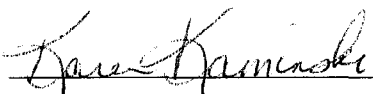
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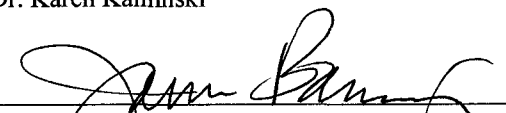
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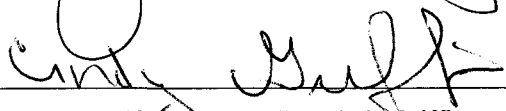
WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY DEBORAH GENGLER-DUNN ENTITLED A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF FOUR FEMALE FIRST-YEAR, FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

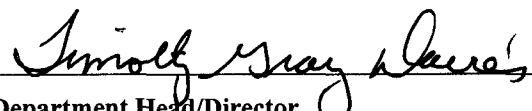
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF FOUR FEMALE FIRST-YEAR, FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

This narrative qualitative study explored the experiences of four first-generation female college students during their first year at Colorado State University. Guiding research questions addressed various influences impacting on this first year as a first-generation student, including social, familial, campus environmental issues, and perceptions of self and expectations. While the characteristic of being a first-generation student female overlapped with other characteristics such as race or socio-economics, the essence of this gender specific study sought to give voice to first-generation, first-year, female-dedicated accounts of the college experience. While shared themes were explored and while these proved useful in displaying index streams of some frequent *female* experiences, the academically mandated process of reducing individual participant experience into generalized themes appeared antithetical to the researcher's felt sense of directing a study toward the individual and the distinct voice and experience of each woman participant.

Using a feminist theoretical lens to secure the ecology of the female experience, the researcher interpreted the experiences of these women and shared recommendations toward female leadership strategies. Although evocative insight emerged due to this marginalized group (females) striking out into unfamiliar academic territory for both themselves and their families, a telling wisdom came from what these women expected. While themes of *Self-Expectation/ Agency, The Familiar, Involvement, Challenges, and*

Other-Expectation surfaced, the dual expectations of *Self* and *Other* provoked a curious antagonistic binary wherein the first courted dynamic self-agency and the latter bred an acquired avoidance/ acquiescence.

As a result, the researcher questioned an existing perception of responsive gender equality in the college environment and challenged educators toward vital conversations regarding how equal-in-premise and equal-in-lived-reality present themselves for women on a college campus. The researcher also advanced the Fens Behavior Model, an oppositional resistance/ avoidance of perceived negative female imaging utilized to defend and/ or preserve a positive personal declaration of the female self. It is the researcher's belief that while the instinctive story these women tell themselves is one of personal strength and leadership, the grand narrative they seemingly, sensibly must acknowledge as regards gender may demonstrate a counter-productive adulteration.

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Early in my doctoral studies, I met Dr. Jim Banning and fell in love; his wit, his understated irreverence, his quiet calm, and his natural likeability did me in. With Jim as my primary advisor, earning my Ph.D. became a love affair with learning. The visual imagery research he introduced me to expanded not only my understanding of the world around me, but inside me. I stand forever grateful and will remain forever in awe of his human grace and humble brilliance.

My co-advisor, Dr. Cindy Griffin, possesses a keen vision I can only hope to grow in myself. More than once she turned me in another direction, guiding without leading, while I tried to steer my way through cloudy thinking. Cindy inspires me to be a stronger student, thinker, woman, and human being.

Little did committee member Dr. Cindy O'Donnell-Allen realize how her kind words regarding my writing ability would lift me through the long dissertation process when self doubts surfaced. Her sentiments buoyed my spirit and resolve.

Dr. Nat Kees saw me through the proposal process and worked with me to develop an effective interview technique, which proved invaluable. When Nat left unexpectedly to pursue a once-in-a-lifetime professional opportunity, Dr. Karen Kaminski was kind enough to step in. Karen's generosity saved my sanity as I attempted to tie up all the (seemingly) unraveling loose ends of my oral dissertation defense.

The study participants were so generous with their time, stories and insights. The study would not have been possible without them.

My parents... I hear my heartbeat and think of you. Mom, thank you for being the storyteller in my life for as long as I can remember, for telling me hundreds of family stories, for instilling the love of *Story* in me—especially with your “Lucy” antics. Dad, every night as I worked through this Ph.D., you listened as I told you the stories of my day and set exam results or papers I'd written on a bookshelf next to a photograph of you and me. When I was little, you wrote stories and poems with me, sang with me, and gave me everything of yourself. You had such a knack for living, for noticing *Life*. You are the writer in me. Though you died more than thirty years ago, you walk with me in everything I do, everything I am.

Finally, there are no words for all I owe to my husband, John.

Always, “H.M.” you are the best man I know.

#

DEDICATION

To my husband ~ because of all the times you took the wheel...

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

All of us live storied lives, that is, we each have a story to tell, an experience of our days and years, a story about the captured moments that make us who we are. But the truth is that some individuals' stories receive a clearer, stronger voice than some others. Often female voices expressing female experiences and concerns are softened or silenced against the backdrop of a male-oriented society (Anzaldua, 1987; Foss, 2004; Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999; hooks, 1996). Further, what might be accepted as "universal," may be in fact predominantly male-dominated perspectives commonly lauded as the embodiment of ubiquitous *human* experiences (Daly, 1978; Gearhart, 1979; Schaef, 1981). Possibly made more acute in a society game for politically correct stances, which encourage equality or sameness, the process of singling out disparate voices from this so-called human universal to provide diverse populations a dedicated platform as regards their specific race, socio-economic class, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, may be met with disfavor or disbelief, as if this in some way discredits this dictum that we are all really the same.

But we are all not the same. And one voice, one story cannot speak for all of us.

Each of us experiences life from a unique perspective. Each of us also lives a gendered life (Beauvoir, 1953; Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999). Gender is classification by sex. While there are a variety of races, religious affiliations, and socio-economic classes, there are but two prominent sexes. For those making a distinction between the terms *sex* and *gender*, sex is generally considered biological while gender entertains a sense of a societal socialization in regards to being either male or female (Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Schaef, 1981). And as noted previously, female perspectives may be muted by or absorbed into a universe of general human experience, which may in fact be formed and informed by a male-privileged perspective. When such perspectives are “other” than what dominates, they are often termed “marginalized” in that these perspectives or the representative individuals themselves, take a position in the margins, on the periphery or borders of the sanctioned accepted norm. Though women have made great strides in voicing their own experiences from female-dominated perspectives (Anzaldua, 1987; Gearhart, 1979; hooks, 1996; Starhawk, 1993), even going so far as to change how the world is redefined as more inclusive (Baumgardner, Richards & Richards, 2000; Kaplan, 1997; Nelson & Chowdhury 1994), female contribution must be ongoing, especially in lieu of a lack of (earlier) female-identified perspectives and history (Freedman, 2004; Lerner, 1993; Spender, 1982) and as more women pursue avenues in life which may have been previously closed to them.

One such pursuit is education and earning a college degree. Originally, universities were closed to all but wealthy white men (Timpson, Cannetto, Borrayo & Yang, 2003). It is interesting then to study the women, those of the “other” gender who now seek college degrees. One set of matriculating women that smacks of fortitude

toward this educational pursuit and which therefore seems particularly inspiring are those who are the first in their families to make the transition towards earning a college degree. Evincing the twin characteristics of being female and first-generation, these women capture the unique nexus of a marginalized group (women) displaying an initial foray into academic personal advancement absent of familial history of such academic pursuit. As such, their insights in regard to negotiating what is a new and often personally and academically challenging first transition year for any college student, could prove striking as well as informative towards developmental strategies for female success and/or leadership models.

That critical first-year and the programs in place to aid students during this transition into college, garners a booming voice in pedagogical literature from educators promoting their insights relative to this ambitious journey (Erickson & Strommer 1991; Gardner, J.N. 1998; Gardner & Jewler 2000; Odell 1996; Raymond & Napoli 1998; Soldner, Lee & Duby 1999; Stovall, 2000; Tinto 1996; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). However, after my initial investigation, I have found it seems less is known about this first-year experience for first-generation women during this key transition period, unless it is also voiced from a particular cultural or socio-economic viewpoint (Lorenzano-Obergfell, 1997; Poast, 2002; Skulley, 2004; Zwerling & London, 1992). In other words, these are first-generation female experiences viewed through a research lens that links such experiences with ethnicity or socio-economic class. A need exists to research the first-year university experience for first-generation women within a female reference frame.

As evidenced above, the first transitional year into the college experience is critical. This transition period is intensified for those women who are the first in their families to experience university life. Reason holds that such women face heretofore an uncharted environment with no familial collegiate history from which to draw on as a resource base, hence their first-generation status.

This qualitative narrative inquiry utilized a feminist theoretical lens as I explored the experience of four female students at a Colorado university with a 20-30 thousand student population. I selected this theoretical lens because life is a gendered experience and because such a context allows an interpretive frame within which the research questions may be explored from female-experienced points of view. A need exists to give voice to the first-year university experience within a first-generation female frame of reference so that these experiences may become part of the ongoing conversation of student experiences regarding this vital transition year toward advanced education. This exploratory investigation used the following research question as the core for the study: What are the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students?

Problem Statement

The aim of this study was to examine first-year, first-generation women with the view to better facilitate the university experience for other females.

Research Question

The study was guided by the central research question: What are the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the first-year college experience utilizing the perspectives of four first-generation female students through a female-oriented theoretical framework with the view to allow these women to voice their experiences and to enable the advancement of female-appropriate success strategies.

Significance of the Study

The study may contribute to the field of educational development since it provides insight toward first-generation female ways of experiencing a first college year on campus. Therefore the study has organizational implications for guiding other women students during this first-year transition into a university experience. Greater knowledge about how first-generation women may experience the transitional qualities of this first year may engender female success during this first critical year and may lead to greater female student satisfaction and retention.

Conceptual Framework

This study was informed by a feminist philosophical theory. The rationale for employing such a lens was to allow for both a female-friendly and a female-only centered view. While many “feminisms” may account for what one might call a feminist philosophical perspective (Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999), at its foundation, feminism seeks to improve conditions for women (Foss, 1996), and in general attends three focal precepts: “First, that women are oppressed by patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system of power relations in which men dominate women so that women’s interests are subordinated to those of men and women are seen as inferior to men” (Foss, 1996, p. 166). Second, “that women’s experiences are different from men’s” (Ibid). And third, “that women’s perspectives are not now incorporated into our culture” (p. 167). Again, while there may be many “feminisms,” personal self-determination and choice are the vital precepts for a feminist philosophy (which applies to all people, not only women, although women are the subject of this study), which seeks to end an ideology of patriarchal domination (Foss, 2004). Further, I believe at the core of feminism is the idea of females experiencing life differently from males. Sex role or gender socialization not only affects *what* experiences females have, but *how* these are experienced. This opinion was echoed in Foss (1996, 2004).

Women’s experiences and how they see themselves are predicated on gendered constructs (Lamphere, Zavella, Gonzales with Evans, 1993; Segura, 1992). Josselson and Lieblich (1995) state, “The ultimate aim of the narrative investigation of human life is the

interpretation of the experience” (p. ix). Constructivist theorists assert the existence of multiple realities and that knowledge can be mutually crafted by the viewer and the viewed (Charmaz, 2000). Thus it was practical to examine the experiences of first-generation, first-year women students by focusing on female experiences through women’s eyes and social contexts. A feminist theoretical frame of reference suggested that gender constructs informed female experiences. Hence, the experiences of *Mankind*, may not be the same experiences of *Womankind*. It is with all the above in mind that a feminist theoretical lens was chosen in regards to female experiences of first-generation women during their initial year on a college campus.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to the first-year college experience as well literature concerning first-generation students. Since the nexus where female, first-year, first-generation is lacking, such literature is lacking as well. Purely female gender studies in this area, seemed, unfortunately, overlooked, absorbed into “student” experiences, or dealt only a glancing nod as literature more keenly featured socio-economic class and/or race in combination with a first-year experience or a first-generation student experience.

Given this, I concentrated on surveying what had been highlighted regarding two main areas, the first-year college transition experience (for traditionally-aged students) and first-generation students. I commented on a female-oriented perspective when relevant. I also included a section on being female, which hopefully paints a rudimentary portrait of female issues in learning and development.

The First-Year College Transition

Where's my desk? Where's the bathroom? When can I go home? First-day-itis.

What kind of student were you, and how did you experience your first day of grade school? Did you love it or did you think you would never survive? The transition from high school to higher education, or college, is another first in a student's life. It is a major life event for many adolescents. The critical nature of this first-year and the programs in place to aid students during this transition into college are well documented (Erickson & Strommer, 1991; Gardner, 1998; Gardner & Jewler, 2000; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Soldner, Lee & Duby, 1999; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 1996; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Thus, the first-year experience has received systematic study because what happens during this time can make or break a student's path to success in college (Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Stovall, 2000). In addition, while educational institutions are committed to aiding these students toward successful completion of their academic goals, these institutions are also businesses and as such are interested in retention rates (Curtis & Harte, 1991; Soldner & Duby, 1999), which transfer into dollars and cents. Therefore, first-year research is also rife with information regarding retention rates for students, since this first year is considered a make-or-break year for many students as they decide whether or not college (and the college environment) is for them: "Retention research and nationwide trends present overwhelming evidence that students' experiences during their first year of college largely determine their academic success in subsequent years—and,

in fact, the likelihood of their remaining in school to complete their degrees” (Upcraft & Gardner et al., 1989, book flap).

A study conducted by Hoyt (1999), indicated that first term academic performance had the strongest relationship to retention, followed by student receipt of financial aid. Numerous colleges have turned to using collaborative approaches--First-year Seminars, Learning Communities, Freshmen Adjustment Orientations--during this first year in order to aid incoming students with this important transition into college life. Called by various names, these programs’ focus is still the same: to help students transition from a more dependent high school atmosphere to an independent college arena. There is also the sense (to differing degrees depending on the institution) that it is important not only to fit the students to the school but also to make the school fit the student (Smith, Bar, & Burke, 1976; Strange & Banning, 2001).

The shock of this adjustment to college life has been compared to being in the military (Wintre & Ben-Knaz, 2000) as a similar life cycle transition into an authoritarian environment. Researchers studying the first-year experience also often utilize Erikson’s (1968) notion of crisis and identity development and focus on the import of students’ ongoing identity development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Robinson, 2003Jan.). However, as far as *female* students are concerned, male-oriented evaluation guidelines (like the moral development models of Kohlberg (1981) and adolescent development models of Erikson) so often utilized to mark various developmental stages, have been deemed less accurate for women’s development (Gilligan, 1982).

The impact-import of this first crucial college transition year presented a fertile slice of a student’s academic life and presented a central time locus for this study.

Person-environment interaction (PEI) remains a significant discussion within student affairs practices (Strange, 1994). And within developmental social psychology, an ongoing interest exists in “person-context interactions, whereby various types of persons approach and experience the same context differently” (Cote & Levine, 2000, p. 58). Such “developmental contextualism” concerns person–context interactions and how different types of persons experience different “fits” in any given context (Lerner & Kauffman, 1985; Lerner, 1995; Strange & Banning, 2001). I found such interactions important since I was particularly interested in how various *women* may experience this first-year. Yet with all the discussion of “fits” that to me were reminiscent of Stern’s environmental press (Strange & Banning, 2001) where the ecology of the individual self and the outer environment must mesh or be complementary for that “good fit,” there was little found regarding how to prompt the (university) environment to adjust to females, rather than prompting women to fit into an existing (male-oriented) university structure. Whereas females on campus were generally encouraged to help their own adjustment through seeking counseling, volunteering or joining female-oriented clubs or functions, it seemed equally if not more pertinent to develop female-oriented institutional interventions (Fried, 1994).

I also thought it was interesting that some researchers had called what happened in the university setting a mystery and a black box (Karabel & Halsey, 1977), and yet women were often grouped with men without deliberated continued investigative focus as to gender differences within an historically white male university setting. Such a female-fit perspective was particularly missing within the first-year-female-first-generation parameters adopted for this study. The goal, of course, was not to presume

there was a one-size-female-fit perspective ideal but rather to acknowledge that a broad-based female fit may be lacking before focusing on particulars such as where individual personality, gender, class, race, etc., overlap and converge.

An integrated paradigm of student development constitutes a personenvironment interaction model, according to Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) classification of student change. In the field of human development it constitutes a goodness-of-fit model of developmental contextualism as applied to higher-educational settings. In addition, it provided an approach to an issue that has plagued past research, namely whether "the environment should be defined objectively, as a reality external to the individual, or perceptually, with reality being whatever the individual perceives it to be" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 39). Such subjective perceptions meant the first-year, and certainly the environment of the college campus itself, could prove problematic for some students unless more was done to engender that two-way fit (person-to-environment and environment-to-person). And this two-way-fit serves the twin goals of greater student retention and a greater number of completed degrees.

Although published more than a decade ago, *The Freshman Year Experience* (Upcraft & Gardner et al., 1989) is still considered a benchmark publication today, and in it contributing author Dr. James Banning further discussed the environment by way of an ecological perspective and how it can impact first-year students. Banning was not alone in acknowledging the import of environment on college students (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Craik, 1981; Cook, 1987; Ferguson, 1992; Little, 1987; Salter, 1996; Schneider, 2001). While numerous environment-to-person theories can be accessed, the point is to acknowledge the effect of the environment on each *individual* person as best as possible

within the context of that environment and not merely lump all students together under the banner of “freshmen” as though they were interchangeable within a campus ecology.

The campus, and more specifically, the college campus during this first year is a complex environment. Yet to bring it into the most simple terms, there is a “fit” that is needed between environment (and all that entails) and the person. “Fit” may not only effect behavior (Strange & Banning, 2001) but success and adjustment (Brown, 1978; Cook, 1987). Some may simply call this *belonging*; however, what should also be acknowledged is that there is a symbiotic, dynamic relationship between student and environment in that while the environment changes students, the students within that campus cause the environment to change (Strange & Banning, 2001). However, the “press” of the university environment is more resistant to change than its overarching cumulative “press” on any individual student.

I thought of the campus-person dynamic as a “collective” model: the individual gathered information from her environment to help situate herself in some manner so she can fit and feel comfortable. Such a model that integrates all factors deals with the issue of the possibility that social settings are not neutral to the person experiencing them. Nor is the setting unaffected by the persons within the setting—people can affect the environment in dynamic ways (Strange & Banning, 2001). There is a continuing mode of interacting, a sort of push-pull, although, again, the university environment or nature has greater resources, including its very structure and history, to remain seemingly unaffected by any one student.

Yet the nature of the environment was especially important regarding gender if it was to be a rewarding, reciprocal experience for female students. With this in mind, and

if it is given that we all operate under a patriarchal system, female students, particularly during this first-year transition into an institutional setting originally created for male attendance (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Timpson, Cannetto, Borrayo, & Yang, 2003), may be even more sensitive to the pressures and changes they may be experiencing within their new educational environment. Nunez (2005) asserted the need for women-centered first-year, first-generation studies yet stated, "... none have emphasized the experiences of women" (p. 88).

Female experiences should not simply be palely included in a wash of what so-called *all students* experience during this first year, especially since higher education is often under scrutiny for its ability or inability to foster student achievement (Cote & Allahar, 1996; Billson & Terry, 1982).

First-Generation College Students

For the purposes of this study, first-generation students were identified as those college students from a primary family where neither parent attended college or where parents only had some college experience but did not earn a degree. London (1992) defined first-generation as those who generally came from families where grandparents did not finish high school and who held blue-collar jobs, and whose parents work in blue- or white collar positions. For some of the associated literature, "first-generation" was defined as those students where neither parent *completed* a college degree, thus allowing for some parental college credit within the definition parameter of "first-generation."

First-generation students also represented nearly half of all college students (TERI, 1997).

Literature concerning first-generation students commonly fell into three general categories (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). A first category consisted of studies comparing first-generation students and other college students regarding demographic characteristics, secondary school preparation, the college choice process, and college expectations (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kojaku & Nunez, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). A second category underscored the transition from high school to college (Lara, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Rendon, Hope, & Associates, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994; Weis, 1992). And a third general category investigated persistence through degree attainment and possibly entry into an early career (Attinasi, 1989; Berkner, Horn, & Clune, 2000; Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2000; Horn, 1998; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

According to findings in the above categories, first-generation students tend to be at a disadvantage in accessing college and find college more challenging than their peers once they get there. According to Terenzini et al. (1996), while first-generation students face all the usual difficulties of any college student, these students may also confront greater cultural, social, and academic hurdles. Yet while first-generation students are a growing dynamic in higher education, such students also often face the prospect of college with little to no understanding from parents, siblings, or friends who have not

attended college; this makes separation difficult from those who may even prove obstacles for the first-generation student (Hsiao, 1992).

Further, after following students during their first year and analyzing information from 23 two- and four-year educational facilities that participated in the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora (2004) found evidence that when compared to other students, first-generation students did not complete as many first-year credit hours. There was also evidence they studied less and were less likely to undertake humanities or honors classes. Studying non-traditional (over twenty-five year old) first-generation students, Byrd and MacDonald (2005) concluded that standardized-test-based college admissions generally neglect such students' pre-college strengths and those deficiencies that affect their college readiness. Other researchers view the lack of readiness, both economic and academic (Valadez, 1993; Hoyt, 1999) as making college problematic for some students. Many researchers studying first-generation student dynamics agreed that students who were first in their family to attend college were less likely to graduate compared to students with one or both parents who had baccalaureate degrees (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). A student's ability to "fit" included navigating the pressures of college life (academic, physical, emotional), and Napoli and Wortman's (1996) meta-analysis correlated student success with such academic and social integration.

I must also comment on what I term "bundling" by some researchers as they reported first-generation studies. At times some researchers did not address how the type of institution could come to bear on first-generation student attrition or success. For

instance, Billson & Terry (1982) studied first-generation students from the University of Maine, which is a selective, 4-year university. Part of their conclusion pointed to higher attrition rates for first-generation students; whereas Pratt and Skaggs (1989), who studied first-generation students at two commuter-oriented liberal arts colleges found more commitment and less retention issues among first-generation students. A piece of analysis should have contained, I believe, environmental factors relevant to the success or attrition of first-generation students, or the reliability of retention rates, commitment/persistence attributes, etc., concerning first-generation students becomes suspect unless analyzed alongside environmental “fit” factors as well.

As I reviewed the literature pertaining to first-generation students, I was also taken with how often the term “first-generation” seemed to equate with “poor” or “weaker academically.” Exploring how poor students access college, Levine and Nidiffer (1996) specifically included first-generation students, and as the investigation of access to college continues (especially in the shadow of ever-increasing tuition rates), first-generation students were often categorized as a weaker specific subset of college students (Hsaio, 1992; London, 1989, 1992, 1996; Fallon, 1997). Further, London (1996) divided first-generation students into those who did not view their experience of college as particularly unsettling or problematic, and those who never expected to go to college. While I appreciated the attempt at some delineation within the broad “first-generation” label, London’s either-or binary was troubling. He separated first-generation students into “maintainers” (those who seek to maintain a present middle-class lifestyle) (p. 10) or “pioneers” (those who wish to move up and out of a present low socio-economic status)

(p. 11). He also seemed to randomly toss in other identifiers such as gender and race without enough attention to a discussion of how each may impact outcome.

I found the end of one article by Terenzini et al. (2004) interesting. It was somewhat long, but the point was an important one when also considering female students. It concerned the ability of first-generation students to gain the same benefits as those students whose parents have some experience with college. It read that in order for them to:

... reap its [college's] multidimensional benefits—to the same extent as their peers whose parents have benefited from college. 'Access to higher education' must be understood to mean not only admission to some postsecondary institution, but also 'access' to the full range of college experiences and to the personal, social, and economic benefits to which those experiences and degree completion lead. It would be cruel irony, indeed, if current financial aid policies and packages removed the barriers to college attendance for first-generation students but then had the effect of denying them the opportunity to participate fully in the educational experiences and benefits that lay beyond the collegiate threshold. (p. 281)

Could this be true for a female population, even in absence of other factors? Despite perhaps best attempts by parents, numerous women in our society may be socialized differently than men as well as possibly internalizing things differently from men. What

of the college campus culture? Is it women friendly so that these female college students can reap college's multidimensional benefits and participate fully?

I did not locate dedicated female first-generation literature. In the literature of students who were the first in their families to attend college, gender seemed minimalized, and researchers looked instead at first-generation status as a mix of males and females and thus representing a total population (London, 1996; Koehler & Burke, 1996; Hellman & Harbeck, 1997), or gender was overlooked/absorbed in favor of showcasing other various socio-economic demographics or race (Lorenzano-Obergfell, 1997; Poast, 2002; Skulley, 2004; Zwerling & London, 1992). While I acknowledge the need for individuals to identify with class and perhaps particularly race in our often all-too-white patriarchal society, this highlighted what I believed was the existing need to address gender for its own distinctions.

The college campus environment is a challenge for any incoming student; however, this environment presented often greater challenges to students who were the first members in their families to attend college (London, 1989; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Weiss, 1992). Choy (2001) further believed that these difficulties were reflected in many indicators of postsecondary success, and numerous other researchers contended that compared with peers who had college educated parents, students from families in which neither parent attended college were at a keen disadvantage in not only gaining access to but in completing a degree (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Yet a college education is increasingly important to economic and social success (Day & McCabe, 1997; Lavin, 2000; Ntiri, 2001). But according to the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP),

only 29% of first-generation students considered college right after completing high school while 73% from families where at least one parent earned a bachelor's degree enrolled directly after high school (IHEP, 1997, p. 6). Further, after gaining access to college, first-generation students had higher drop out rates within their *first semester* [italics mine] and lower first semester grades when compared with students whose parents attended college (Riehl, 1994).

Research in the area of first-generation students, indicated that these students were distinctly disadvantaged in not only gaining access to college but had greater difficulty (than non-first-generation students) in actually matriculating long enough to graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, July 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) under guidance from the Department of Education, a substantially greater percentage (approximately 70% compared to 25%) of students whose parents were themselves college graduates, completed a college degree while first-generation college students left college without a degree (NCES, July 2005). This portrayed a general reported tendency towards attrition concerning first-generation students even after they (apparently) overcame obstacles to initially enter college.

In this same NCES study, the point was also made that first-generation students were more likely to be Black or Hispanic, to come from low-income families, be less prepared academically (thus prompting the need for additional remedial work), and more likely to enter 2-year institutions or to attend part-time (NCES, July 2005, p. iv), which made them retention risks. This study also reported that,

Finally, this analysis demonstrated important associations between early credit production and academic performance and students' success in postsecondary education. More credits completed and higher grades earned *in the first year* [italics mine], and fewer withdrawn or repeated courses throughout enrollment were strongly associated with postsecondary degree attainment and persistence. (NCES, July 2005, p. ix)

This pointed up the unparalleled importance of that first year, that first entry into a student's college experience.

There should also be a nod for individual personality as a predictor of success. Individual attributes are, of course, complex, and student behaviors and characteristics such as personality factors have been attributed to the success of underprepared learners, a category into which some first-generation students sometimes fall (Amey & Long, 1998; Ley & Young, 1998; Ochroch & Dugan, 1986; Smith & Commander, 1997; Valadez, 1993).

It is important to note again that first-generation studies generally linked first-generation with another attribute, and this other attribute was primarily either an author-selected ethnicity or socio-economic class, or perhaps some other variation of "class," such as non-traditional students or rural students, etc. Much literature has been written, for example, documenting the history or the experience of first-generation students of Mexican, Hispanic, African American, or Asian origins (Benmayor, 2002; Merullo, 2002; Min & Kim, 2000; Gim Chung, 2001; Throgmorton, 1999). Others explored various economic class distinctions (Lamphere, Zavella, Gonzales & Evans, 1993;

Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Poast, 2002). Still other researchers studied emotional aspects or identity development of first-generation students (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Alessandria, 2005). And while this list could continue, I did not locate dedicated female first-generation literature.

On Being Female

One of the worst limitations we can heap on each other as human beings is to define another person as though he or she has only one dimension, one identity. Any single label suggests what a person *is* can fit into a particular neatly descriptive box. In some cases, people rebel against those labels, but too often such labels can be accepted and lived (Fraser, Davis, & Singh, 1997). Women have a long history of being framed in a domestic box. It was not until the 1750's that Benjamin Franklin made it possible for females to attend school, but this attendance could take place only through early elementary years before they needed to remain in the home to learn domestic skills (Collins, 2005). Further, Jacobs (2003) asserted that orthodox roles for men and women in society, as well as social rank led to different educational parameters for the middle-class and the working-class and between males and females. From these stratified beginnings, one can see how the lens used in the university system was that of the dominant upper-class, heterosexual White male and how women, in an educational afterthought, were cast into a second-class role.

As women's entry into the university system progressed, first in women's colleges and then in coeducational facilities, the university became *loco parentis*, or the

parent who was missing on campus. However, according to Andre (2001), *loco parentis* policies were sex-based and focused on the regulation of women students (and their morals) more so than it did for male students. Such restrictions included residence policies and control over the “appropriate” behavior, appearance, and location of female students. Such policies also contributed to male privilege by reinforcing women’s domestic place. Today, “others,” including women, who attend a university, are expected to integrate into already established social and educational norms of the institution, and the unspoken but understood assumption is that “male” is the accepted universal.

As more women entered college, the study of women as a separate population gained significance. Theories like those developed by Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1981, 1984), which utilized only men and boys had been systematically used to analyze various developmental testing in females. When populations of women did not “fit” the male psychological development model, these women were “shown” to be lacking or deficient: “Implicitly adopting the male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth... in the life cycle as in the Garden of Eden, the woman is the deviant” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 6). Researchers Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates assert that “Members of any group value themselves to the degree that their group is valued” (p. 294). Ambient devaluation of women and how they “know” their world then, can have detrimental consequences on women as they both absorb and reflect this devaluation in a self-perpetuating deprecation. And this “difference” may have been made even more apparent in university systems that were birthed and grown for males (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Timpson et al., 2003) and continued to be operated from a male-dominated perspective where women (if allowed access at all)

were expected to "prove" themselves to be considered worthy from this male perspective by adopting to the existing framework and male value hierarchy by "fitting in."

However, in 1982, Carol Gilligan argued that by using male developmental models, women were too often mistakenly labeled as being deficient. She therefore sought to expose the experiences of women. In her highly acclaimed and simultaneously criticized work *In a Different Voice* (1982), Gilligan focused much of her attention on female moral reasoning. While Kohlberg (1981) had based theories of moral development on abstraction and impartial conflict resolution, Gilligan organized theories of development around notions of responsibility and care. While I hesitate to generalize by calling these global "female" developmental attributes, and as Gilligan herself stated, "The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme.... To highlight a distinction between two modes of thought... rather than to represent a generalization about either sex" (p. 2), Gilligan's use of "Amy" and "Jake" as two representative female and male models in her work ushered in a fresh way of legitimizing moral development, which did not fit conveniently into the old "male" package. This insight brought into question the then established (male) developmental models that were employed to "mark" women's development—Gilligan's point being that women did not naturally fit this male-oriented model. For example, while old models, such as Kohlberg's (1981), sought evidence of adolescent separation in order to gauge a maturing of individual identity, Gilligan fostered a belief that many women do not follow nor need such (male) separation, but rather find their sense of self through relationships with others and do not necessarily disconnect as males tend to do. A lack of separation, therefore, did

not necessarily evince a lack of growth or maturity or lesser movement toward self-autonomy.

It should be noted, however, that while Gilligan is often referenced for advocating a relational web of female knowing, various feminist legal theorists (Williams, 1989; Menkel-Meadow, 1984; MacKinnon, 1987) have criticized such knowing for further labeling and stereotyping women as “relational” while men are “objective.” I believe, however, that the essential import here is that to say any woman is any one thing is another form of female reduction. Gilligan provided another developmental model on which to build understanding. Thus the emergence of feminist research challenged conventions that a male perspective was the only one from which to conduct inquiry.

To consider women and their world from a female perspective rather than from a male “normal” was, I think, Gilligan’s prime legacy, and four years later Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s work *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986) enlarged upon this position:

Drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike... Major educational institutions... were originally founded by men for the education of men [and] girls’ schools and colleges have been modeled after male institutions to give women education ‘equivalent’ to men’s. (p. 5)

Unfortunately, because of such history, there was and is too often a devaluation of women and “women’s ways of knowing” (Belenky et al., 1986). According to Belenky et al. in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, women’s knowledge is deeply connected to self-concept. Therefore, experience and self-reflection become vital for a woman’s education. And yet the classroom and the university system itself are predicated on male-based concepts (p. 5).

Focusing on how women developed their own knowledge, Belenky et al. interviewed 135 women and identified perspectives of women’s knowing based on five epistemological categories:

Silence: “... women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority (Belenky et al. p. 15).

Received knowledge: “... women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own” (Belenky et al. p. 15).

Subjective knowledge: “... truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited” (Belenky et al. p. 15).

Procedural knowledge: “... women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge” (Belenky et al. p. 15).

Constructed knowledge: “... women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing” (Belenky et al. p. 15).

However, the authors admitted their own research limitations: their epistemological categories cannot give voice to all individual unique experiences and similar categories can also apply to men's thinking. They do, however, conclude that women learn through interaction, hands-on experimentation, and reflection and would favor an educational system that helps to bring women into the category of constructed knowledge. In a subsequent work, *Knowledge, Difference, and Power* (1996), the authors highlight the lack of attention to the differences among women, stating psychologists frequently use "... inappropriate assumptions and strategies when they do not attempt to study women's differences" (p. 175).

From an educational perspective, the broad-stroke was that adolescence was a challenging period, and it is even more challenging if one was expected to fit into a pre-established box that was ill-designed and ill-fitting, as it often may be for female students in a male-oriented university. Worse, for too many years women as a group were often labeled as deficient (according to male psychological development models), and this is a harsh history to then attempt to overcome just because we have now tried to be "enlightened" and thus endeavor to amend models, values, or sentiments. Tradition, as it were, dies hard. Worell (1999) states that "... by early adolescence they [women] begin to doubt their abilities" (p. 22) and Basow and Rubin (1999) add,

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..." (p. 37)

In the climate of our social world, it is not difficult to understand why so many women were and are negatively affected.

By way of finally giving women as a population their due, numerous feminist writers advanced, explained, and exposed the lives and experiences of women (Anzaldua, 1987; Foss, 2004; Daly, 1978; Gearhart, 1979; Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999; hooks, 1996; Lorber, 1994; Schaef, 1981; Starhawk, 1993). The “difference” therefore, between males and females is well referenced. Feminist legal theorist MacKinnon (1987) made the point, however, that if all the fuss were really about (just) the differences between men and women, there would really be no fuss at all. The issue is really about how that difference feeds inequality in a power-play of dominance since “women and men are equally different but not equally powerful” (p. 51). This power differential is also present among women; not all women are equally powerful. In a setting where education for *all* students is the goal, sensitivity to this and to women themselves is paramount. Therefore acknowledgment of differences and attention to the voices of *all* women becomes even more vital in a college campus setting where women are not just learning, but living as well.

Yet even the term “freshmen” while widely accepted almost without thought, makes female first-year students invisible in a language sense, as though they are just meant to fit in. One way we construct our reality and learn to understand who we are and our place in our world, where we belong, is through the language we use in interactions with others. “Social identity” is actively produced in interactions between self and others (Fraser et al., 1997, p. 222).

As previously noted, even now, nearly twenty years after *The Freshman Year Experience* was published, Upcraft and Gardner (1989) are considered two of the authorities in the field of research considering the first-year experience. In one of the book's chapters titled "Women Students," contributing author Sabrina Chapman acknowledges that "more than half the students in higher education—52%—are women" (Upcraft & Gardner et al., 1989, p. 287) and discusses the need for inclusion. While this, of course, is dated from today's 2007 perspective, the fact is that after nearly twenty years, the discussion of inclusion is still heated and ongoing. Quinn (2003) contended that "mere tinkering with the system" rather than an overhaul of the status quo (p. 8) would not afford increased access to higher education for women. Women, according to Quinn, hold a small majority over males in terms of enrollment in postsecondary institutions. Yet women are over-represented in the arts, humanities, and education—areas that generally afford decreased income potential when compared to more "male" pursuits like science. Quinn viewed the marginal enrollment majority that women hold suggestive of an arena where the "power to name what is worth knowing" (p. 25) may be fought. Daly (1973) called the prevailing male perspective a phallocentric or male-centered reality and asserted, "Women have had the power of naming stolen from us" (p. 8). Spender (1985) and Lerner (1986, 1993, 1997) echoed this perspective. Feminist bell hooks (1994) coined the term "colonized" or "the colonizing mind-set" (p. 46) to define a culture of domination that characterizes the Western world. This system works because we internalize and consciously/unconsciously support it. "Decolonization" involves breaking from the present ways reality is defined by the dominant culture.

In addition, this male-standard, dominant view has meant that women's-centered history is missing or has been silenced, according to Lerner (1986, 1997), a pioneer in the field of unearthing and constructing a true women's centered history. This meant that women, unlike men, had little female recorded history to learn from. To comprehend the totality of this domination, one must realize that women were, for the most part, not afforded access to an education and that so many could not write. Lerner (1993) stated:

The archaic states of the Ancient Near East which developed priesthood, kingship and militaristic elites did so in a context of developing male dominance over women and a structured system of slavery. It is not accidental that the time, leisure and education necessary for developing philosophy, religion and science was made available to an elite of priests, rulers and bureaucrats, whose domestic needs were met by the unpaid labor of women and slaves. (p. 5)

Therefore it was the males who constructed language and definitions, males whose words and ideas were "truth." Lerner (1986, 1993, 1997) also discussed ways in which women have been silenced by men's constructed history. Lerner concluded that there is perhaps a true historical story and then there is recorded history—recorded of course by men, and women's voices have often been marginalized or obliterated because female writers were often attacked for their views. Spender (1982) regarded women's forgotten history as well, emphasizing that not only have women of the present been robbed of their past and the contributions women made, but that it is difficult to see patriarchy at work because it is so readily accepted.

The point is that throughout our recorded history women's true experience has been suppressed or ignored. As a society we have a distorted, one-gendered representation (predominantly literate white male) lacking the accuracy that other voices and views could instill. While women today may have louder voices and a greater felt presence in the public/market sphere, society lives with the tradition and the male-oriented spirit, memory, and written legacy of such an historical "tradition."

So are college women included but held to a traditional university construct that yet places them in supporting roles since the fields of learning that many women value (Arts, Humanities, Education) are still not deemed as worthy (financially) as the more traditional male endeavors (such as Science or technology)? Are such avenues of education devalued because they are more fully populated and driven by females and a female-oriented perspective? Or are these fields truly intrinsically less financially "worthy"? If the university operates under a male-oriented traditional construct and the overarching social construct is male as well, the journey toward an answer grows clearer. Educational institutions must be more than sensitive to these implications; educational institutions should act as enlightened change agents.

Yet college faculties remain predominantly male as are full professorships (Hall and Sandler, 1982; Timpson et al., 2003). And in traditional college classes, whose history is dominant? Are the achievements of women or of traditional white men (for the most part), highlighted? What is the role modeling for women students? How do women come to understand the college experience? Clearly this educational experience is different from the outset for male and female entering students. Hall and Sandler (1982) called this a "chilly classroom/campus climate" for females. The authors asserted that

from their first days on campus, entering female students confronted patterns of sexism, which may include a teacher's derogatory comments about women, interruption of females more often as they attempt answers, or referencing females as "girls" while the boys are referred to as "men." Strange and Banning (2001) contended,

Dominant campus features reflect the influence of dominant groups. The essential challenge in the achievement of campus safety and inclusion is the fact that those who share the dominant characteristics are more likely to feel safe and included, while those whose characteristics differ may be at risk. (p. 122)

However, "at risk" takes on deeper distinctions than those that are physical. While a safe physical environment was necessary for all students, "risk" also had psychological /educational ramifications for female students or any students who were "other" (gay, lesbian, minority, etc.) How was the image of women depicted on campus? Are women supported and valued on campus and in the classroom?

It was important to consider that while the campus ecology at large was significant when discussing how women are treated on campus, the classroom can be a microcosm of this "intent." In the "safe" ecology of the college classroom, sexism can be accepted as "education." Yllo (1989) contends, for instance, that despite female-oriented advances, most courses and curricula remain at the traditional "womenless" phase. History lessons, for instance, may describe Greece's "golden age" without any consideration as to whether "women (and enslaved men) found it golden" (p. 659).

Add this to what Belenky et al. (1986) and Gilligan (1982) found: women may have different ways of knowing and different means of needing to connect personally with the information they are receiving and women's knowledge may be connected to self-concept, experience and self-reflection and that these may be vital for a woman's education. As previously mentioned, there has also been less attention afforded to how women learn and how this may be different than male-generated "knowing." Researchers such as Belenky et al. (1986) postulated that women need to connect with what is being learned, but this "woman's way of knowing" is less likely to be valued in a traditional college classroom setting where greater mastery of content/information and not necessarily connection-with knowledge is more often than not what is pursued and rewarded. Relationship-oriented learning, which may be favored by some women—and some men (Moody, 1989; Ullman-Petrash, 2000)—is devalued in formal settings like the classroom. And while Gilligan and Belenky et al. suggested a higher female correlation with a feeling, relationship-oriented knowing, Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer (1998) found approximately 24% of adult women are thinkers and 44% of men have feeling preferences (pp. 157-158). This suggests that many students—both male and female—could benefit from changes to traditional classroom practices.

Although relationship-oriented learning would, perhaps, benefit from greater personal interaction between student and teacher, the dominant mode of teaching is still the less nurturing lecture-style approach, which tended to separate student-teacher relations and promoted the leveraging of power away from the student (Quinn, 2003). Nilsson (1998) concluded with similar findings of female "relational" themes like those of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) and Gilligan (1982). Such research

more than suggested that rather than focusing on women's intellectual capacities, more attention should be paid to *how* many women come to learn and what they need *to* learn.

The point was to see women not in comparison to men. The point was to come to understand *and value* their way of knowing and negotiating their world, as well as valuing what women could contribute.

This is still true.

An educational setting should offer a portal of increased understanding, of hope toward the heightened valuation of female knowledge, views, experience and collaboration, and not an arena where an institutional lock-step grinds out a perpetuation of closed minds and stereotypes. If society's vortexes for learning cannot embrace female experiences and female-oriented ways of knowing and coming to know, the existence of a sustainable, educated *culture of women* is in jeopardy.

Summary

It is evident how women's developmental differences, their socialization under a patriarchal construct, their ways of coming into knowledge for themselves and of themselves all have bearing on how women may experience a university setting.

While this review of literature concerning the first college year emphasizes the challenges students face during this transition, it also acknowledged additional challenges first-generation students may encounter. As first-generation women students enter college, at least by research standards outlined in this review, these women inherit a triple threat for possibly negative college experiences, or worse, lack of success against jarring

odds. With this in mind, it becomes even more important to be alert to the lessons afforded when they succeed in negotiating and overcoming such challenges.

It is fundamental to acknowledge their perceptions and experiences as being not only unique to each as an individual but as a *woman*. To do so can help women to holistically grow their own true education, that is to say, what educators and educational administrators should mean when they discuss “the college experience” and “gaining a university education.” In so much as these first-year, first-generation female students face challenges, the depth of the strength and the robust character they may learn to develop and assert should not go unnoticed, so that others may benefit from accounts of their journeys.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and views of first-generation women during their first year of college and to provide them with authentic voices for their experiences. Particular attention was paid to their critical first year. The focal question for the study was this: What are the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students?

Qualitative research or inquiry touts the importance of considering the participant's perspective and describing it within a setting or context while exploring meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way it is naturalistic inquiry or constructivism. In addition, qualitative inquiry may be better suited where the intent is to describe and explain something that more traditional quantitative means cannot facilitate (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore in this qualitative inquiry, the participant's frame of reference and context was emphasized.

The scarcity of dedicated female-perspective literature describing women's experiences as first-generation females attending college and working through the crucial first-year transition has been noted. Qualitative inquiry speaks to the sincere attempt to authentically capture female study participants' experiences while allowing other avenues

of thoughtful exploration to emerge. Because capturing and examining these first-generation women's experiences is so crucial to our deeper understanding of this lived experience, qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate design for this study.

Narrative Study Approach

“Narrative” as a term, comes from the idea of narrating or telling a story with detail (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980). Utilizing narrative as a means of inquiry focuses on the researcher's interpretative description of the lives of individuals, which embraces collecting and telling stories about those lives, while writing narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The narrative approach was selected for this study for two primary reasons. First, its use as a methodology is respected in the field of qualitative research (Creswell, 2002; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Riessman 1993). As Creswell pointed out, “Narrative designs are frequently used as a form of research in education. National research conferences have devoted sessions and papers to it and educational journals have increasingly published stories reported by teachers, students, and other educators” (Creswell, 2002, p. 521).

The second reason for the choice of narrative was its utility for this particular study towards what I as the researcher sought to allow to emerge as the study progressed. The value of the narrative approach grew from the fact that while it was true that each woman belonged to this group of first-year, first-generation students (thereby advocating for the possibility for phenomenology or ethnography perhaps due to a shared culture), each woman was an individual with an individual experience and story to be told.

Utilizing what Riessman terms “the narrative turn” (1993), provided, I believe, each female participant a voice for her distinct experience. Narrative also allowed me to attempt to maintain the authentic spirit and quality of each woman’s personal journey.

What does it feel like, look like, *what is it like* to be a first-generation female experiencing her first year on a college campus? Creswell (1998) emphasized gaining *emic* perspective, and so first order concepts like language and how female student participants viewed the campus, their classes, dormitories and events in their campus lives, and their feelings about these became key.

Data Sources

The research site was Colorado State University, a multipurpose educational university in Colorado with a broad range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The student population is approximately 25,000, and the university is located in Fort Collins, a mid-size city with a population of 100-150,000. Calls for volunteer for the study were posted via Colorado State University's Center for Advising and Student Achievement (CASA) and the Academic Advancement Center. Posting included hard copy announcements of the study and its parameters, and e-mails to female first-generation students who had successfully completed a first academic year on campus. From these data sources, four volunteers self-identified and these same four volunteers participated in the study.

Purposive sampling. In qualitative research, sample sizes are typically small and purposefully chosen (Patton, 1987). In this study, I will used a convenience sample from

the selected university campus. Purposive sampling is relevant here since I am exploring the experiences of individuals with the particular characteristics of being female, first-generation, and first-year university students at, near the end of, or recently having completed their first-year experience.

Access. As the researcher, I used proper respect for the site, employed appropriate protocols for institutional access, and gained permission from Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). My presence did not cause any disruption to normal activities at the university. After meeting with my advisor to review the announcement calling for study volunteers, I contacted the Center for Advising and Student Achievement and later worked with the Academic Advancement Center to access volunteer subjects.

Informed consent. As the researcher, I utilized the necessary consent forms and provided participants with a brief background of the nature and purpose of the study and what would be required of them. This information disclosed the possibility for sensitive issues arising within the study. Each participant was advised that she had final say regarding the inclusion of any information she had supplied toward the study, and that she could terminate her involvement in the study at any time. While study volunteers who were not yet eighteen could have participated with parental or guardian consent, all four study subjects were at least eighteen-years-old. Participants were informed of all research aspects; their privacy and anonymity were guaranteed to the best of my ability. It was hoped that study participants might benefit from voicing their experiences and perspectives as first-generation, first-year female college students.

Data Collection

Qualitative research most often uses at its base person-to-person interviews to collect data (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 1998). This seems particularly true perhaps when using the narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) since at their foundation, both qualitative research and the more specific narrative qualitative inquiry concern themselves with understanding experiences from the perspective of those living the experience and deriving meaning from it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2002; McEwan & Egan, 1995). In this frame, the person who lives a particular experience becomes an expert on her own experience (Darlington & Scott, 2002). An interview approach began the process of describing the experiences of this study's first-generation, first-year female students.

Data was collected using open-ended and semi-structured questions within the interview format. I conducted two interviews at the convenience of each participant. These face-to-face, one-on-one interviews took place in either a vacated classroom or a conference room within the Education Building on campus. The first interview with each participant lasted approximately ninety minutes, and a second follow-up interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. The follow-up interview took place several weeks after a first interview with the participant. This interview gap allowed the participant to write and select several journal entries for the study, and it afforded me as the researcher the time needed to transcribe the audiotape from the initial interview, review these materials, and generate follow-up questions, which were to be posed at the second interview. Time was also needed to collect the participant's selected journal entries from a determined

Education Office drop-off point, to review these, and generate further questions for the follow-up interview. All four study participants individually took part in the initial face-to-face interview. And all but one repeated this process for a later follow-up interview. One study participant conducted her second follow-up interview via the telephone. Three study participants took part in a one-hour focus group discussion a few weeks after all second follow-up interviews had been completed. With the permission of the participants, the interviews and the focus group discussion were audio-taped in order to provide a permanent record and research trail (Silverman, 2000). Only the one follow-up interview via telephone was not recorded. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcription of her own quoted material and to make any corrections or improvements to engender deeper and more accurate researcher/audience understanding. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to review a hard copy of the final dissertation toward this end as well. Tapes will be destroyed by incineration or magnation after allowing for the appropriate time for an audit trail. Participants were encouraged to provide final study content. As Creswell (2002) suggested, it is fundamental to allow participants to express themselves in their own words; it is particularly relevant to this study, which existed to provide a platform for these female, first-generation first-year students. Data collection also included my observation and reflection as the researcher. How participants said something or their body language as they told their stories was important to note for deeper understanding of meaning (Riessman, 1993).

Data Analysis

According to Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003) deciphering the meanings that are contained in the material and presenting these "... is the art of this kind of work and the process cannot be specified a priori" (p. 268). To comprehend and analyze *meaning*, I conducted several readings of the interview materials and attempted to gain a holistic picture of what each participant experienced. This global understanding is, therefore, primarily more content versus form-oriented, as suggested by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998) (as cited in Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003). Such an approach allowed "... freedom for the researcher to change perspectives if better modes of reading emerge from the actual collected data" (Josselson et al., 2003, p. 269).

Narrative using thick description was the hallmark of analysis in this study in order to immerse the audience in the experience and voices of these female participants. To aid in this, I employed the Holistic-Content Perspective suggested by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998). While Lieblich et al. constructs this approach towards narrative cohesion of study participants' life stories, I utilized the Holistic-Content Perspective to present a "global impression" (p. 63) of a participant's "picture" of her (short-term) experiences and how these combined to form personal meaning in her experiences during her first year on campus. To summarize Lieblich et al.'s "... process for reading for content in a holistic manner..." (p. 62), a researcher would reread all material with an open mind until a pattern emerges, record in writing the initial and global impression of the case or story, decide on the special themes (or content) that emerge, specifically,

visually separate various themes as they appear in the written record, and keep track of findings noting the first and last appearance of themes, transitions between themes, the context for each, and their relative prominence in the text (pp. 62-63).

This process involved detailing the participants' stories in an artful sense, that is, while both listening and deciding what to distinguish as "special." This included further exploration of key issues the participants raised as well as their use of overt silences. This process, repeated over and over, allowed various themes to emerge. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) stated that the researcher must "Read or listen carefully, empathetically, and with an open mind" (p. 62) and must also be able to recognize that "Episodes or issues that seem to disturb the teller or produce disharmony in his or her story, may be not less instructive than clearly displayed contents" (Ibid). Lieblich et al. (1998) advocated a researcher approaching others' life experiences with a sense of listening to and reading stories and interpreting these with a sense of innocence or naivete in order to truly hear the narrative as it is delivered and grant it the respect it deserves. However, they also acknowledge, that, "While many of the researchers of life stories advocate relatively naïve, nonjudgmental reading, and refrain from extensive theoretical interpretations, every reader is inevitably bringing her culture, language, experience and expectations into her interactions with others or with texts" (p. 76). So while I utilized the Holistic-Content Perspective, I was also fully aware how significant my interpretation became to the process within the qualitative scope of the *researcher-as-instrument*.

While "Qualitative research designs are typically not intended to prove or test a theory, and it is more likely that the theory will emerge once the data are collected (an inductive approach rather than a traditional deductive approach)" (Rudestam & Newton,

1992, p. 37), I found common themes which suggested a link to common behavior. Although I am reluctant to label this commonality a theory, I did advance a behavior model that I believe provokes future investigation.

However, the primary purpose of this study was to provide each female participant a platform for her experience and her authentic “voice” to that lived experience. To this end, I did my best to employ Lincoln and Guba’s idea of *verstehen* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 224), which is really the German word for “understand” or “understanding” something in full, as in making sense of an experience. I thought this connected particularly well with the Holistic-Content Perspective since the sincere attempt of a total picture of “understanding” is the key to the Holistic approach.

In the narrative research method, the researcher first collects the story about an individual’s experience and then, collaborating with the individual, provides a “restorying” of the participant’s story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2002). In my narrative retelling or restorying, I included information relevant to the individual. I attempted to build a temporal, chronological sequencing (Creswell, 2002) to each participant’s story with the goal of fostering a clearer understanding of the individual’s journey as a first-generation female experiencing her first critical year transition on campus. It should go without saying here that writing sensitively (as related to participants’ feelings and lived experiences and perceptions) was essential.

Ethical Concerns and Reciprocity

Since qualitative researchers usually spend considerable one-on-one time with participants, ethical concerns were primary (Creswell, 2002). Data collection, which required probing and therefore probing questions, at times become sensitive. While allowing each participant's story to emerge, I also sought to protect their privacy. Participant anonymity is vital (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Participants always had the right to end any interview or terminate participation in the study; however, all four participants remained in the study until its conclusion. To maintain privacy, I used only letters or fictional first names regarding each participant's documents and audio records.

There is concern in qualitative research in regards to the role of the researcher and any conflict with participants because of that role (Munhall, 1988), but in this proposed study I had no connection to the participants, personal or otherwise, except in lieu of this study.

Regarding reciprocity, participants were provided a safe environment (either a vacated classroom or a private conference room) in which to tell the story of their experiences and were afforded a voice in the process and final interpretative narrative. It was my hope that this study offered each participant a benefit: a place, a space, a time to voice their experiences, which may improve their college experience. There was no obvious or subtle risk or physical harm to participants. (However, each participant was given a printed guide to Colorado State University counseling services before the start of

the initial interview.) I also believe the university could benefit from a deeper understanding of these female students, which may engender greater female student satisfaction and retention.

Analysis: Methods of Trustworthiness/ Validation

Although terms to address the validity of findings in a study vary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), soundness of research must be protected. Merriam (1988) and Miles & Huberman (1984) pointed out that a few diverse methods could secure the intent to harness this internal validity in a study. Internal validity is described as how accurate the information reported compares to reality (Merriam, 1988). In this study, validation of research was protected through triangulation of data collection, member checks, an audit trail, and a personal (researcher) journal (which adds to the audit trail) as suggested by Merriam (1998). “Triangulation” is a term borrowed from military strategy use based on the concept that biases within particular sources of data could be mitigated if used along with other data sources or methods (Creswell, 1994, p. 174). I used different types of data, like observations, interviews and participant journal entries. Methods of data collection included original participant journal pages, audiotapes of interviews, and interview information sheets I developed to help me remember questions that arose from what the participant was saying (since I did not want to habitually interrupt the participant as she was speaking) and how the participant (visually) responded to various questions. I also used member checking of transcriptions from the one-on-one interviews and allowed participants the opportunity to review a final draft of the written dissertation.

This practice supported Creswell (2002) and the suggestion that collaboration between participants and the researcher is ongoing, and that “validation [of the accuracy of the report/narrative] may occur throughout the project” (p. 535). I believe the study also incorporated a sufficient audit trail since there are original observational notes from the interview information sheets, audiotapes of individual interviews, an audiotape of the focus group discussion, transcripts of the individual interviews, original copies of participant-selected journal entries, my personal study field journal, and another thought/research notebook I used as I discovered possible reference material I found interesting.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

As stated, the focus of credibility in a qualitative research format is whether or not researcher findings match the reality of a given situation (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The strategies for credibility in this study included, as has been discussed, the triangulation of data collection and a considerable audit trail.

Confirmability (Objectivity)

Confirmability relates to researcher bias as regards interpretation and whether researcher subjectivity can account for inaccurate interpretation and reporting (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Again, in this study all artifacts are available for review.

Reliability

Reliability relates to the issue of replicating the study (Creswell, 1994); however, while Yin (1989) (as cited in Creswell, 1994) “strongly suggested reporting a detailed protocol for data collection so that the procedure of a qualitative case study might be replicated in another setting” (p. 159), since qualitative studies focus on often unique circumstances or people, and honors the collaborative efforts of the researcher as part of the study and study process, such replication is a challenge: “... the uniqueness of a study within a specific context mitigates against replicating it exactly in another context” (Creswell, 1994, p. 159). While Creswell went on to say the more information the researcher supplies as to biases, assumptions, etc., will aid in study replication in another setting (Ibid), and while I have included reflexive information in my research journal, this could still prove challenging.

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability or external validity, concerns itself with whether or not the study can be generalized beyond the participants being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yet again, at its core qualitative research does not necessarily look for populations or contexts which foster a generalized outcome or view. Rather it seeks insight into perhaps unique situations or interpretations (Merriam, 1988), and in fact uses smaller, purposefully selected sample populations (Patton, 1987).

While my study did generate a suggestion of common behavioral choices, the intent of the study was to present a platform for the voices of the four study participants as female first-generation students who had recently negotiated their first year on a college campus. At the outset of the study, it was also hoped that there might be some female-perspective generalizability toward experiences encountered during this first year, and I believe some limited generalizability did indeed arise via the themes that emerged.

Researcher's Reflection

In qualitative research, the function of the researcher is collaborative and positive rather than intrusive or negative (Creswell, 2002; Locke et al., 1987). The researcher becomes instrumental in the evolution of the study. In the qualitative research utilized in this study, my opinions, worldview, and biases influenced the study dynamics and study outcome. In qualitative studies, and perhaps to a greater extent in “storytelling” narrative form, study participants and the researcher collaborate to co-create the re-storying of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, there may be limitations as well as benefits that I as researcher bring to the research.

Conclusion

The consideration of gender and how it may effect the advancement of women is significant. Instead of neutralizing gender, often for the sake of politically correct policy, gender concerns need exposure, since it is often the experiences of women, the voices of

women that are muted. While women's concerns have penetrated our society, women are too often compared to men or compared in terms of male perspectives rather than being regarded on their own terms. To set up women oppositionally, that is, how they are either the same or different from men, is to limit original female values and concerns. I believe the women in this study and the stories they shared can help grow insight for other women during their initial year on a college campus. This insight can also offer universities and administrators a glimpse of this first year from gendered, authentic perspectives.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE PORTRAIT PREVIEW

Not everything that can be counted counts,

and not everything that counts can be counted.

~ Albert Einstein ~

Over the summer of 2006, as I contemplated how I would eventually structure this dissertation, I read several books that had to do with two passions of mine, writing mystery novels and what I call nuance-architecture, that is, how we build our individual home living space. It wasn't until October and until I was well into conducting participant interviews for this dissertation, that I finally got around to reading a "building book" my sister-in-law had suggested, *The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live*, by Sarah Susanka with Kira Obolensky (1998). While I usually flip through pages and glance at vivid illustrations until something interesting gives me pause to care enough to read a few paragraphs, when I opened the front cover of *Not So Big* what was written on the inside flap had me greedy to read the entire book: *Why are we drawn more to smaller, more personal spaces than to larger, more expansive ones?*

I have always been drawn to the seemingly smaller things in life, things that some may say don't count. In a house it might be a welcoming refraction of light over the back of a nubby-fabric sofa, or a green smell slipping in a cracked-open window, or maybe the

clean whisk of a far-off church bell, or the lay of a table-top as a clutch of daisies sheds its life petal-by-petal in ongoing story.

In tandem with my reading *The Not So Big House* was an aching awareness that I should be doing something else--like writing my dissertation. As it turned out, however, this procrastination led me to my framework for the dissertation. You see, I love books. I often think that if only our lives could be scripted like a novelistic plot, all would be well: The Title, so we would know what our life was about; Table of Contents, or at least chapter headings so we would know where we were going; page numbers to keep us on track; illustrations and photographs to spark memory; narratives and explanations to harness life lessons. And then at the close, a satisfying, maybe even a happy, ending. There might also be additional explanatory notes or references in case we needed more information about our life and how to live it. Of course, we could re-read the book if something was not clear the first time through... and rewrite the parts we didn't like. However, in reality and at least consciously on a day-by-day basis, mostly we plod along, cobbling together our life story as a clumsy work in progress.

One of the methods I sometimes use in order to attempt to get a better handle on my life is to view my life as a book on houses. I flip through the pages and imagine my life as a house. Now it does not have to be a particularly big nor a particularly grand house, but it does have to suit me. My house has to have a lot of *snugs*, intimate nooks all my own. It has to have a few, not too many, formal, fussy areas where I can bring guests. My house also must have an abundance of easy-living spaces where my interests can thrive and where my friends can grab a pillow and plop on a sofa-of-my-life while still feeling easy in their own skins. My house has to allow at least a little wiggle room for my

eccentricities and allow charitable expression of all my psychological contradictions, complexities, and eclectic spiritual nature. It has places that are sunny, and places that are dark, and too many spaces in between that are too many to count.

It is an ongoing and oft times frustrating process of renovation.

I rummage through my rooms, distracted by the clutter here, shifting furniture to empty spaces there, while I blend, change and coordinate in order to accommodate myself. It has to work for me. It has to fit.

I am not alone in thinking that the "fit" between you and your Life--how you live, where you live, your environment--determines that Life and how you live within your Life and your behavior within that Life (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Brown, 1978; Cook, 1987; Cote & Levine, 2000; Craik, 1981; Ferguson, 1992; Lerner & Kauffman, 1985; Lerner, 1995; Little, 1987; Salter, 1996; Schneider, 2001; Strange & Banning, 2001). Many researchers have developed theories concerning how one's environment impacts behavior within that environment. And as I use the structure of students building themselves a life as they might a house, I recall that Josselson and Lieblich (2003) affirm the notion that narrative inquirers must have "broad intellectual background and wide-ranging reading habits" (p. 272), and so my mix of mystery, architecture, environmental behaviorism and the importance of story both in our lives and within this narrative inquiry become even more endearing to me, more round with meaning.

Everything comes down to fitting in with your environment and your expectations about yourself and yourself-within-that-environment. There is an inner environment you carry, perhaps in the form of self-image, and an outer environment that is thrust upon

you. There is also, I believe, a co-constructed social environment, co-constructed by what you see/ experience and what you hope for.

I think this is especially true when you are a "fresh" college student. And this sense of inner and outer space and fit and expectation came back to me again and again as I interviewed the four female students for my study. So as I present what can be obviously only a snapshot of the narratives of their lives as they have shared them with me and as I attempt to interpret them, I found myself thinking of their first-generation, first-year college experiences as houses that they co-constructed as they continued to simultaneously create and piece together the accommodating spaces both within themselves and outside themselves as they emerged as women, as students, and as "home" architects developing their own life story.

Process: The Holistic-Content Perspective

I utilized the Holistic-Content Perspective, so before I attempted any actual writing, I read all the participant narratives several times "to form a holistic-content picture" (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003, p. 62) and to get a sense of any emerging patterns of information. Since I also conducted all the one-on-one interviews and personally transcribed the narratives derived from these interviews, the task of formulating such a picture and discerning particular patterns was made a bit easier due to repeated exposure to the material not only through listening to the participants' stories in face-to-face interviews and returning to their stories via the audio recordings, but also through my extended familiarity as I re-read and transcribed each narrative.

While I listened to the participants answer study questions and elaborate on various segments of their narratives during a second follow-up interview, I was also able to note nuances in their inflections, determine when they felt a need to set the stage for further explanation, or personally wanted to explore the reason for their answers as they began talking about their experiences. As thinking human beings, often when we speak about a topic or write about a topic we find our voice, so to speak, *as* we go along. In a sense, our story and how we want to express ourselves emerges as we hear ourselves relate it: we hear it and we think about it, and then continue on. It is a recursive process. As we hear our own words or re-read our own thoughts in written form, this aids in our continuing discussion and supports a direction for our thoughts. I found this to be true as the participants answered questions, repeated questions when they felt they were losing the path they wanted their stories to take, and provided self-identified important details they found significant.

Though I was aware of the import of all the verbal and non-verbal information during these interviews, I was also acutely aware of their feelings and did not want to appear as if I was not paying close attention to what they were revealing. Eye contact and what I deemed "interested body language" were essential on my part. I am sensitive to people who lack emotional-visual connection when I am speaking to them. Because I wanted my study participants to know I valued them, their time, and their stories, I jotted only cursory notes during the first interview and used a self-created interview protocol form during a second interview. During this follow-up interview, I also let participants know I would be glancing away and occasionally making such notes on this form

throughout the interview. (A copy of the interview protocol form is included in Appendix E).

Following the tenets of the Holistic-Content Perspective, I also attended to *how* participants focused or did not focus on particular aspects of their stories. I did this with an eye toward possible emerging themes and in an attempt to distinguish where more details or perhaps an omission of details could indicate an important--and/ or possibly a delicate subject. I am always aware that empty silences are not quite so empty:

Decide on a special foci of content or themes that you want to follow in the story as it evolves from beginning to end. A special focus is frequently distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature, and the number of details the teller provides about it. However, omissions of some aspects in the story, or very brief reference to a subject, can sometimes also be interpreted as indicating the focal significance of the topic... Again, pay special attention to episodes that seem to contradict the theme in terms of content, mood, or evaluation by the teller. (Lieblich et al., 2003, p. 63)

While I believe the authors here were targeting what a researcher does with the written transcripts of interview material, I tried to accomplish this as I was listening to the narratives as well as closely attending to these aspects as I read and re-read the textual transcriptions of each participant narrative. Moreover, I was aware of allowing myself to formulate a "global impression" (Ibid) of each story.

CHAPTER 5: THE NARRATIVES

Introduction: Brick-by-Brick

My first face-to-face interview is scheduled to take place in about ten minutes. While I have met with many students in various positions in my teaching career over twenty years, I am a bit nervous because I feel as though those students who have offered to participate are giving me something--their time, stories, words, their private emotions--something *of themselves*, and I am on the humble receiving end of their generosity. This is not an easy circumstance for me.

I do not mind being the one providing assistance, or working, or doing for others, but something inside me tenses when I believe I am not doing enough back. Yes, the consent form the participants will sign indicates they will not receive any compensation while in the same instant indicates that they may find sharing their stories some kind of personal "payment." Even as I understand the need for them to freely volunteer in order to maintain the integrity of the study, I want to give them something, to *do* for them.

I find myself wondering if this is how many other people would feel or whether it is just one of my idiosyncrasies. I find myself wondering if many females gendered in our society feel this way, this way of not doing enough, of not giving back enough when a

seeming kindness is done for them. Or even when one is not done for them. I find myself arranging and rearranging on the table in the conference room where this first interview will take place, the three different kinds of soda, the Pringles' container, the plump bag of miniature chocolate-covered doughnuts, the pristine white-satin-like dinner napkins I have brought as an offering, so they may appear somehow more important, a micro-ecology of welcoming. To make this small tribute... enough.

It is not.

When my first study volunteer walks in what I want to blurt out is, "Why have you given up a couple of hours of your day, your time, to meet with me? You are so special in a world where most would ask, 'What's in it for me?' Thank you SO much for volunteering." I do not do this, of course, and try to maintain some Ph.D.-candidate-dignity I am supposed to possess but rarely feel.

I see too much of myself in each of them, even though I have not laid my eyes on a one of them as yet. We are all knowledge-seekers, First-Gens, females. We are all human beings who can be unsure in any number of situations, as I am in this one.

Procedure

The following narratives contain information from an initial interview, *journal entries, and a second follow-up interview. I read the following statement to each participant before commencing a follow-up interview:

I have listened to the tape of your initial interview and have read the journal entries you shared. That information has generated other questions I'd like you to consider today. What I am interested in are your experiences and your stories about your experiences. Actually, an interview is co-constructed. If I don't ask "the right" questions, you may not be prompted to tell what you consider to be your important stories. Yet I don't want to put my words in your mouth or lead you in any direction you don't want to go. My intent is to explore your experiences as a first-generation female student. So feel free to explain or describe or tell a story you want to and feel free to veer off the path of any question. And as always, you may choose not to discuss any question.

I will call or e-mail you when I have completed the written transcription of all the information you have shared in order to provide you the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy. (All study subjects were also invited to read the dissertation and to comment on it before its final draft.)

*All but one participant chose to share journal entries before our follow-up interview.

Follow-up interviews took place a few weeks after the initial meeting. The time interval between a first and a subsequent meeting gave participants an opportunity to write several journal entries and then choose and submit those they wanted to share with me. This interval also gave me the necessary opportunity to consider journal entries and deeper questions these engendered and to transcribe audiotapes from the initial interview and consider emergent questions.

Because of this context, I took some small liberty abbreviating or editing the structure of my actual questions or omitting my questions between participant responses if I felt doing so did not harm comprehension. My intent during this second interview was to gain depth and detail within the study while getting to know each participant individually in order to aid my subsequent interpretation of her narrative. Because of this, narrative material presented here may appear disjointed at times since a (reader expected?) story-like transition between responses to separate questions as the participant explored these simply did not exist. Portions of participant responses are liberally included to flesh-out individual personalities and generate a "storying" for the reader. However, some segments of the interviews received greater attention and length, namely those that seemed more significant as possible themes emerged and as participant thought/ response patterns assisted an eye toward a (previously stated) feminist theoretical perspective.

(The names of all participants have been changed, and present tense was used in the re-storying of all narrative interviews to convey immediacy.)

FAY

First Impressions

Fay had always indicated via e-mail, a positive attitude about our meeting. And as she casually strode into the 207 conference room in the Education building wearing that same easy, positive attitude, I felt our meeting would be positive as well.

Fay is slender with a small to medium frame. She has below-the-shoulder-length deep brown hair and dark eyes, and her manner seems somehow genuine and confident to me. Dressed in a two-layered top and faded jeans, she takes a seat to my left after I thank her for coming and shake her hand. She also seems a bit quiet to me, not shy, but having a quiet, thoughtful way about her. Her complexion appears even lighter than it is in contrast to her dark hair and eyes. She wears no make-up that I can see and smiles freely. As I ask her to help herself to the few snacks I've arranged on the conference table (Fay chooses a ginger ale), I also notice how slim her fingers look, how natural without a hint of nail polish. I know it may seem odd, but I think her hands and fingers look somehow smart, adept at tasks. Even though I have the overhead light on in the conference room, I notice how the sunlight filters across the room, splays itself across the table through the blinds covering the rather large but somewhat concrete-lattice obstructed window. I lean toward her, slipping the consent forms to her across the top of the surface of the shiny table. As the air lifts because of the papers I am shuffling, I can tell she wears no perfume. I also get the sense she is at ease with this process, as though she has done this a

hundred times before. (And in fact, I later learn she has previously volunteered for other studies.)

We review the consent forms. Fay signs in all the requisite spots before I pass her a few more pages with typed questions to help her keep track of anything I might ask. And as I ask her a series of questions now and then again in a second follow-up interview and she answers, at least a part of this story, her story, emerges.

Fay's Story

Fay's immediate family consists of a dad originally from Mexico, a mother from Missouri and a sister who is in her first year of high school. An older stepbrother, a son from her father's previous marriage, does not live with them. Fay explains that this son has done some jail time, and he shows up when he needs money. She does not think he is a "contributor" to the family. She makes a point of saying of her parents, "... they're still married, they haven't been separated or anything."

She laughs after this and pauses before explaining she just assumed she would attend college even though her family did not push her to do this or expect this from her. She thinks that in her generation it's a given that she would go to school: "Ah-m, just because my parents didn't go didn't mean, you know, that I wouldn't. Um, I was more worried about the cost, just because um, we are classified as low income, and we always have been." At first her younger sister missed her since Fay lived on campus, but her sister soon adapted, especially when she got to have Fay's bedroom. Her sister wants to attend college as well, and she talks to Fay about what field she might like to pursue.

While Fay is glad her younger sister wants to go to college, she tells her that she should not feel that their parents expect it from her, meaning she should not feel pressured.

When asked what made her decide on college, Fay said she thought it helped that the kids she went to high school with (though she says most of her close friends had moved away earlier) never told her *not* to go since some of them were also considering college. She seemed to believe that those of her generation know they require an advanced education in order to attain a good career, and Fay sees this as a generational expectation she has absorbed even though she also knows she "always figured" she would go and that "I just wanted to do it myself."

Something she says stands out: "Just thinkin' that, if I don't do this, what's going to become of me?" There is stress in her voice. She mentions wondering if she would be able to support herself and her family in the future.

Fay is concerned about a politics class she feels she is "struggling" in: "I've gotten, I haven't gotten any better than Bs on any of the tests." She doesn't think she "clicks" with this course or the information, nor retains information as well as other students in the class. While she doesn't follow politics, she is trying to become more informed. The illegal immigration issue is on her mind,

...because my dad came to the United States as an illegal immigrant. And he got his citizenship and so it's really hard for me to be against it because it's like I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for illegal immigration. But then on the other hand I don't agree with--like a lot of his family are here illegally, and so it's hard to see them, you know, using fake social security or, you know, fake documents to get

stuff that, you know, I shouldn't get, you know... So, I'm a little torn on that.

When asked if her parents ever talk about politics, Fay smiles and says she and her mom get into little arguments about Musgrave but that there is more talk about politics in her grandparents' home than in her own primary home. She thinks her grandparents are "... more affluent and informed..."

I asked her if she could share any stories about both her parents working at the same dairy farm. Her intonation seems slower here, and she explains that the family lives about a half mile from the dairy. Even though her mother suffered a bone chip injury, she returned to work at a reduced workload, mostly milking since machines do most of the work. Her mother works from midnight to 2 and then from 5 to 7 a.m. Her dad does a "little bit of everything" like feeding the cows, irrigation, planting and harvesting the fields and taking bulls to auction. They aren't on the exact same part of the dairy but they've worked there about seven or eight years. Fay says that before her mother was injured, she fed the baby cows and relates how she and her sister used to help her with that. Other people would often comment how they would want to do that, but Fay says,

... it's cute for the first couple of times but then they---don't want to get up and eat or their buckets are in their huts. You have to climb in there with them... I mean it would get hard, especially in the winter when it'd get dark... you'd be so cold.

Her mother would have them go with her once a week when they were younger. She and her sister dreaded it and would try to make up any excuse to get out of going. But they would go,

And then it would be so cold that we'd stick our hands in the buckets of milk... it's not that hard of a job, but it's just getting dirty. You have to really be able to... deal with filth... so many of the women and females we know would never be able to do it because you have to deal with like the poop, you know, an' maggots.

She ends with the idea that her mother's job is "unique."

Graduating from college is tantamount to career success for Fay. This reasoning is due, at least in part, to her attending a college preparatory course, Upward Bound, during several of her high school years. This program allowed her an intimate view into college exams like the ACT, living in the dorms over several summer weeks, where to seek scholarships, and what being in college classes might be like. Fay feels that these experiences were big pushes for her to go to college,

...I graduated as Salutatorian, and so I think that it was kind of like empowering myself to strive for something rather than depend on others and say, 'Well, you know, I'm not being pushed by my family, so I'm not being expected to do anything so I don't have to. I think that it was more of a, if I can, you know, if I can get these grades and if I can get scholarships, then why not?

Again I watch her hands as she continues to discuss her concerns about affording college and how those hands filled out six direct scholarship applications to about six different schools and got accepted to all of them while also getting scholarships from five. I hear the deserved pride in her voice, see it in her straight-up manner. She ended up at the university that gave her the most scholarship money (including a First-Generation Award), which also happened to be one that wasn't too far from home. She mentions that she didn't want to feel overwhelmed or homesick. After this, Fay adds that Colorado State University, the school she chose, also had a good journalism department, journalism being the career she wants to pursue.

As we discuss expectations about college, she mentions that her mother went to college for a semester and then dropped out, and that her mother is excited for her but also entertains a mix of pride and sadness: pride that Fay applied for and landed all the scholarships by herself, and sadness that she (her mother) did not or could not help her daughter with this because she didn't know how. As Fay puts it,

Like I don't want to sound egotistical or anything, but I... [laughs] um, but I applied for all the scholarships myself. I applied for over two-dozen scholarships in the extent of like, I think I started the end of my Junior year and went on to about the middle of my Senior year. And I mean, I didn't wanna, you know, I never felt like I needed to ask my mom, or, um so she was really proud of that. And ah, my dad, it was really hard for him to grasp.

Fay thinks for a moment. I watch her hands as she takes up a can of ginger ale she is nursing. I feel as though I am watching her mind *click, click, click* as something triggers a memory. Then she goes on to say if anyone did expect her to attend college, it would be her grandparents. It comes to light that her mother hadn't personally decided to go to college. It had been her mother's father (Fay's grandfather) who had arranged everything regarding her mother's matriculation, including making application and securing a place for her to live with a relative. Fay says her mother didn't even know she was going to move away and go to college up until two weeks before leaving to live with an aunt in closer proximity to the selected college.

This thought leads to a discussion of her dad's lack of formal education in Mexico. She makes it clear that he only went to school in Mexico for three days "total": "And my dad being from Mexico, like he went to three days of school that's how long his education was in Mexico."

Several times in the interviews and also in the journal, it seemed that how her dad feels about what she can achieve in college is significant to Fay. I ask her if this is a correct assumption on my part. Fay hesitates and then offers that college is "an entirely new concept to him" because he had no experience of this with his family life in Mexico. and that she believes he was needed to help his family farm,

... he has nine other siblings, and so all of the ones that are still in Mexico live in this like little village. It's like in a little village within themselves... so I think that I... I think it kind of made him sad and kind of angered him and kind of freaked him out, like I don't have control anymore, at the beginning [of her attending

college]. But now it's like, you know, you're going to school, you're not getting in trouble, and so I think that he's a lot more accepting of it now. If I call home, he'll be like, 'Oh, how's classes?' or 'How are your classes going?'

She doesn't know the entire story but thinks he was quite young when he stopped going to school, possibly the United States' equivalent of a student in second or third grade.

Fay reinforces the idea that the concept of college is hard for her dad to grasp and that her mom sort of knew what it was about but didn't know much about living in the dorms. To me it is stunning in its expressive simplicity when she says of her parents concerning college that "Um, it's kind of lost on them" but that over time they'd visit her and figure what it was about and that she wanted to "do it [college] myself":

Um, I wanted, you know, I wanted to go to college but it was like the cost and I don't know if I can and I had like all these aspirations to be a journalist and so, I don't know, I was just glad that I could get into, um, both First-Generation Award program and Key because a lot of the students that are in Key or were in Key with me were first-generation also and so it was like meeting a community of students that are like yourself that you know, come from poorer households, um, but are still academically-driven and can collaborate in kind of one group, and kind of grow off of each other.

In various forms, this sense of "doing it" for herself repeated throughout our interview.

While her mother seems to understand a bit more about Fay's college life since she attended college for a semester before getting married, she has not given Fay advice about going to college or getting married. Her mother was, however, disappointed that she couldn't help Fay with college applications. Fay offers that her mother is proud and tells her friends how Fay did this [getting into college and getting scholarships] by herself. Although her mother hasn't advised her, Fay says her mother has mentioned how she wished she could have finished college and that she would have been a dental hygienist. Fay likes that her mother had such aspirations: "... it would totally change our lives... And so it shows me, you know, that she didn't just give up because she was done with one semester. I mean, it's always in the back of her head..."

Fay compares herself to her mother, saying she has never been "dangerous or... adventure seeking" and worries about the weather or if there are enough groceries or if something is going to spoil, just stuff like her mom does. She adds that she notices that she talks like her mom, that it "drove me crazy" when her mom would always start sentences with "But no..." and now Fay catches herself doing it. I get the feeling this doesn't bother her as much as it somewhat interests her that she's picked up Mom's habits.

Fay tells a story about her first day on campus and how she and her mother left their house at 7 a.m. and got to campus by 7:45. She laughs as she remembers how early they were and how much unpacking she had to do. She feels lucky that she got a nice roommate, but adds that other than that she doesn't remember much of her first day. It was only when her boyfriend got to campus a few days later that details emerge. And a romantic memory is the one that most resonates with her,

Um, I don't really remember the first day. I don't think--we had a bunch of Orientation things. We came--KEY moved in earlier, like two days earlier, than the rest of the campus, so we were the only ones there. So we had a bunch of stupid--those like Orientation things where you go to different like classes and then activities, and--I'd done so many of those throughout my life that it gets old. Um, but then I remember that night my boyfriend came up, and he was--I guess it was the day before the rest of the campus because he wasn't moved in yet. And he came up and, um, visited me at my room and then we went walking around campus. That was probably the most memorable. And we found this little spot. We walked around forever and wished on this falling star and it was just this totally romantic night. And we found this little spot--I don't even know where it is on campus--where you like walk up a ledge and there's like this little secluded spot, kind of like on the side of a building, and we just sat there and like held hands, and I don't know, it's--we still call it our spot, and we go back there, you know, on anniversaries and stuff. But that's probably the biggest memory of my first day. Um, getting moved in, finally feeling like I'm part of this college atmosphere. Knowing that I didn't, you know, have to be home or that my mom was going to be calling me and be like, 'Where are you...' ...or knowing that I had to be in by a certain time...

When asked if being on campus made her feel older, Fay says, "it definitely did" and "it was finally nice to be able to do things on my own time and not have a curfew or anything." Fay knows that it helped her to have her boyfriend on the same campus

because she always felt she had someone to be with when she wanted to go to football games, eat, or attend social activities: "Yeah, it really, I mean, it probably sounds clingy, but I'm definitely one who has to have someone that they know around to be, you know, comfortable and so it helped a lot..."

The fact that her boyfriend started at Colorado State University at the same time that she did is a core benefit for Fay since she always had someone to go to, talk to, be with. This familiarity softened her "newness" on campus, and in a way brought "home" with her to her new environment and facilitated her transitional adjustment. While she does not seem to identify with many of the stereotypical first-year, transitional problems (loneliness, lack of connection, difficulty with classes) other first-year students might experience, she does mention a personal challenge she experiences: shyness.

She says that shyness was one of her "first big challenges" during her first year. Having her boyfriend in her new environment, therefore, made her "fit" better within the university environment; this familiarity helped her. As Fay speaks, I understand that her boyfriend could act as an easing-in buffer for her, both within her new surroundings and as they met new people and situations together. Fay didn't necessarily feel the abrupt transitional "bump" so many first-year, first-generation college students might because her boyfriend's (familiar) presence and her progressive assimilation to a college experience through Upward Bound comforted her. Her ability to fund her college attendance through various scholarships also eased her transition process, and Fay talked about how fortunate she felt, especially when she compared herself to her first-year roommate who was also low-income and constantly worried about how her family was

going to pay for her tuition. Fay seems particularly happy that her college ambitions are not placing any financial burdens on her family.

Fay also rates much of her college success during her first transitional year to belonging to an organization called Key. This gave her a built-in community where students are grouped into clusters with the same fifteen students attending two classes together as well as a seminar class linking those two classes. She also says having a mentor helped:

I had a mentor that sat me down every, you know, semester, half semester and said this is what your--here's all your grades. This is how you're doin', you know, you want to identify what you need help with. And, um, I know a lot of students, you know, would never have that. They would never go out and seek that, and so that really helped, um, and just being in like the classes with the other students, um, I got comfortable with college level classes and having people around me that were going through the same thing. So, that really helped a lot.

In addition, Fay explains that this group support and familiarity was further aided by living in the same residence hall that first year, "... if we ever needed help with like group assignments or homework, we were all right there together, and so that really helped." There is also some disorientation during her second semester because of the lack of structured classes. But she says that after this communal, structured first semester, she knew better what was coming, what to expect, and so, even though she was on her own, knowing where to get free printing, for example, or what times certain things were

available made things easier for her than for those who had not had such structure their first semester. Knowing what to expect after that first semester also made her feel more at ease (concerning what was to come) than she had in high school.

I point out that in a response in her first interview, she seems to equate First-generation with low income, and Fay agrees because, she says, that every First-generation individual she has been around has come from a lower income family. She points to the people she has met in Upward Bound, TRIO and COSMOS, saying,

I mean, being in COSMOS for three years, you know it's what you come to expect. You don't go into the program, you know, are paired with the rich people or whose parents graduated 'cause that's not the criteria to get into the program... Like a lot of the people that I talk to, um, we all got like the First-Generation awards and so we were able to say, you know, 'Oh, well, most First-generations belong to low income families...

I ask Fay if she feels like a leader. After a long pause she says,

I definitely think I am, especially when I'm involved with the President's Leadership Program. And so for the last year and a half--I'm going on my second year--um, with all we do, we do leadership activities, and it's really helped me broaden who I am as a college student... Um, in terms of not just following my family, I think it was more of like a social, um, decision, knowing that a good majority of high schoolers go on to college was, um, more influential than seeing

that parents didn't. I never really thought, you know, 'Oh, they couldn't do it, so I can't either.' Like that never crossed my mind once. And so I think that it was more just, you know, seeing everybody getting ready for college, you know, everyone choosing colleges and talking about it in like the Spring, um, definitely was a big factor. 'Cause I never, I figured that I should, I mean, I figured it's kind of embedded in my mind that you should try to go to college. I mean that's the only next step. And so I never really thought, Oh, maybe I should work instead...

She goes on to credit the college prep programs she took part in Sophomore through Senior years in high school, saying it "was definitely probably the biggest factor" in getting her ready for college regarding getting scholarships, taking the ACT, taking college-like classes and doing research in a college facility. Doing this made her "assume that this [college]" was the next step.

One of the underlying premises Fay seems to adhere to is this sense that she is at college for an education. I asked her what "getting an education" means to her, and a key part of her answer is that she must get "it" in a "timely manner." She seems occupied with the idea of credits, how many she has, how many she needs,

... it's kind of freaking me out, I still have at least, you know, two years but, um, I feel like I'm so far behind credit-wise than people, 'cause you know high schoolers these days, they come in with 30, like my boyfriend came in with, I think like 38 credits and that made him a sophomore before he like even started... it seems like a lot of people are, you know, well on their way, done with their

generals and are into their majors and it's like I'm just barely getting into my major. Am I going to have to take summer school? Or am I gonna have to pay for it? Because I'm fully scholarship these two years and... my next two years will be at least half paid for and so... I don't want to jeopardize, you know, wasting the education that's being paid for... other than that it's just being able to have the information to get a job... I don't want to graduate and not retain any of that and be like well, what did I learn?

Fay explains that she thinks education is being able to have that information necessary to get a particular job. I am again struck by her pragmatism. "An education" is a concrete entity:

I think it's just being able to have that information. I mean not everyone who graduates with their major goes into that kind of job field, immediately at least. And so I think it's at least just using that knowledge 'cause not every class you're gonna take is gonna be to your major, or what you're gonna, you know, be employed in. And so I think that just being able to remember and being able to function intelligently on what you've learned, um, in addition to having the skills for your job subset are really important for you to get an education, because I mean you're paying for it, I mean you're paying thousands and thousands of dollars so you might as well get something really decent out of it.

It is no surprise to me, since I am also a first-generation student, how the cost of college plays an important role in her thoughts about gaining an education since she has worked hard for the scholarships she has secured both as an exceptional student and as a first-generation student.

Our discussion turns to a comment she made about college, about how it made her feel sort of sad how rowdy and obscene our college athletic fans get at games. While she says she can appreciate the [college teams'] rivalry, she expected more from a college atmosphere and took issue with a particular football game she went to where vulgar language and behavior bothered her, especially when there were families with kids present,

Yeah, just like-- just stuff that has vulgar language I don't participate in. I mean, yeah, I guess in good humor sometimes, but um, if you see a little kid in your vicinity and you're yelling obscenities... I don't know, I don't approve and... I don't know... just like the incident that happened, we had a row of, I don't know, students, and they came in late in the game. So we assumed they weren't even supposed to be sitting there, and you could tell they were really drunk. They were just acting stupid, and um, the girls--there was like three of them--they were like pulling their shirts up and one of the girls like pulled her shirt up and like tucked it above her bra and was like lookin' around and waitin' for people to look at her. And then... it was just, I don't know, it's--I don't like girls that show off like that and they--I'm assuming it was the alcohol and the atmosphere but I don't know, I mean you can go to a football game and have fun and not be you know that wild,

but I guess maybe that's what they choose to do so...

I ask her if watching this made her feel anything in particular as a female. Fay thought for a moment before saying,

... I don't know--I just, I have this whole thing about girls that dress scantily anyway and so--I don't know, it seems like a lot of girls take advantage of being, you know, skinny, and pretty, and having money and they kind of use it to be like sex objects, to, you know, you know, in the eyes of guys or whatever. They're doing, you know, their dressing in short-shorts to go to the gym, or short skirts to go to class and it's kinda--it seems to me like they're trying to like emulate a standard like they see on, I don't know, *Laguna Beach* or something. And they kind of look down on everybody else who isn't that and they make--they kind of establish like the standard that, um, everyone kind of expects to be because there's so many of them. Like guys expect girls to look that. And girls are like, "Well, I want to look like that too, and so I don't, I mean I think that you can be natural and you know, look pretty and dress up but... not to the extreme where you're just dressing up to look good for others. I mean you should be comfortable in your own, you know, body and self and so I don't know--I just don't, I don't approve of it. I don't know, I just don't like how--what they're doing it for. I mean if you dress up because you like to that's okay but... I think they're doing it for, you know, just be show-offy to guys, an' catch guys' attentions.

She adds that such behavior makes her feel uncomfortable, especially with her boyfriend around:

... it really kind of gets me on the edge of you know, 'Is he lookin' or does she want him to look' or, you know--how many people--I don't know, does he expect me to look like that. But we've talked about it and he--he calls them skanks along with me, so [laughs] I mean it's not like he's checkin' them out, and, um, we just kind of have like this agreement that most of the girls on this campus try to look like one another, and it gets kind of uniform so... You lose your originality when everyone's wearing the big glasses and the little skirts and... It's more of a... tryin' to...I don't know, be what you think others want you to be and try to be like the whole--like sexy, especially with Halloween comin' up, you know that 95% of the female costumes are gonna be like, I don't know, little go-go dancers [laughs] whatever they are. Um, just a little like... scant costumes and I think it's just because they want people to look at them [slight pause] more than anything.

Fay had mentioned that she felt strongly about women trying to portray themselves as sex objects, adding, "It gets old when you don't look like them." I asked her if she meant that she didn't look like them in how they dress, how they talk, how they are, or in some other way, and she says,

I think it's just, it's a little bit of everything. I mean, everyone's going to vie or envy someone for how they look and I guess that's, I mean, I'm sure that's what it

is for me, you know? Knowing people have the dedication and work out at the Rec, you know, every day, or you know, and can stay to a, you know, some kind of like regiment. While also, you know, having the best clothes or always looking, you know, top notch. And, I don't know, I guess it's just, I guess I mean it is kind of like an envious thing. Um, and I know that I have, like, the power to control it. That's what my boyfriend's always said when I've freaked out about [laughs] everything.

She continues by telling a story about some time in the middle of her first semester where she felt she just had a "break-down." Fay says she wasn't connecting with anyone in her hall and felt that she was not performing well academically. Her stress seemed to reach its peak when girls out in the hall kept banging on her door with something like drum sticks and wouldn't stop even when she asked them to: "And I missed my family and it was just kind of everything like on my back just kind of, just kind of breaking at once, and so I kind of broke down and just like, 'I can't do this. How am I supposed to do this?'"

Fay says this is when her boyfriend helped her a lot. He reminded her she had the power to change and be successful in her classes,

And so it really helped me kinda... reconsider like what my aspirations were. I mean, yeah, it's important to, you know, be healthy and be working out and stuff, but I've also realized that it's not realistic to work out at the gym, you know, every day of the week, you know? I mean, you just don't have time. There are other ways to do your own thing. And I figure for me, um, as long as I'm healthy in my

own way, um, I'd rather focus on academics and things that are really important in the long run. Then, you know, just working out to be thin, and, you know, beautiful for everybody else...

Fay explained what she meant by "everyone," meaning both sexes,

I think it's kind of like the competition thing for girls and then kind of like an objectification thing for like the males. Everybody trying to *hook-up* and get with one another.

When I asked her if any experience as a female stood out during her first year on campus, she takes a long pause and then replies,

I don't know, probably... I don't know, probably the main one was my boyfriend. He lived in Edwards Hall and his floor was an all-males' floor. And so the first time that I stayed over--'cause he didn't have a roommate--um, I stayed over and I remember walking out to go to the restroom the next morning. And it felt like the --what you see in the movies [she stares at me without blinking]--like the walk of shame [we laugh slightly]. Like I felt like I was like that girl, that was like the one --night stand there. All the guys were kind of lookin' at me, you know, and it was like--it was one of the first like, I think it was the first couple of weeks, and they were kinda... I could tell that they were like forming like assumptions and like judgments [raises voice like a question]. Um, I was embarrassed. You know it's

an all-male school [sic] and you're walking out of some guy's room after the night. And so, that was kinda iffy, but, um, over time I was there so much that we all just got to know each other. And then everybody else by the end of the year--it's so funny--we counted, there was like seven other guys in the hall that had their girlfriends over all the time, so... I was kind of like a trendsetter.

We laugh together when I comment, "So you were a leader," and she agrees saying that she felt she made it acceptable.

On of the events that made her feel especially good during her first year on campus came at the very end of her first semester in a leadership class she was involved with:

We started working on a big project that was going to be implemented in second semester. And that was probably like one of my biggest triumphs, you know, getting it planned and getting most of it set up before we even went to Break. Um, we were ahead of a lot of the other groups and so we had a good, I don't know, a good advantage over them, like you know, we could come back from Break and just start it. And I think that, that was one of my biggest accomplishments, like going to Break, you know, I was at ease 'cause I knew I didn't have to stress about it. And so it was cool. And knowing that the project was going to be big was... really cool too.

When asked if anything made her feel bad that first semester, Fay thinks and then talks about getting two B-pluses that semester when she had only gotten one B during her entire high school career. She was concerned she was "dropping her standards" and that people were expecting a certain academic standard from her. While she expected a certain standard from herself as well, she adds,

... but I knew that it was going to be hard coming in, so I was actually partly... I was glad that I was kind of disappointed that I had gotten Bs. But then, you know, you always hear how hard, how much harder college is than high school, and so to see that I could actually pull off a few As was, on the other hand, really good...

Finally, I asked what it was like to be a First-generation female during her initial semester on campus:

I don't know, I think that my first semester went a lot more well than other students' because I was in KEY and the first semester is structured. I mean, you're in classes, you're in three classes with the same individuals. And so that really, really formed like a strong bond between us and between, um, our academic success. Um, like our cluster was in the KEY Program, had the second highest GPA average of all ten of them we had. And so it really helped me academically. It helped me prepare. Um, and if I ever had a questions about, you know, some kind of hard college class concept, I had, you know, seventeen other people that I could go talk to that were in the same class. Um, and so that really helped me. I

think that it helped me a lot more. I saw friends that weren't in, you know, um, KEY, and they were, you know, struggling with like time management. Um, they were struggling with, you know, making friends in their classes because they were in them alone and they didn't really know anyone and they didn't really want to branch out and so I think that I had an advantage over a lot of students that weren't in the program because it was structured for me and that's what the program is for. And it's got me prepared for my second semester to be on my own, which I found that I was doing a lot of the same things that I was doing first semester just because of that structure I was used to, so...

So the structure she received during her first semester helped her socially and academically and, she added, that this helped her to learn how to manage her time and helped her to anticipate what would be expected on college exams. However, she did admit that the large size of her new college (approximately 25,000 students) compared to her high school where she graduated in a class of ninety-two, as well as large lecture classes that seemed to have as many students as her entire high school had had, seemed "overbearing" to her at first. But she countered this almost immediately with an ease she felt because the stories she'd heard of being "bombarded with papers and having to stay up all night" never materialized for her during her first year.

Fay shared that she thought she might not be up to the college's expectation for her. Yet her personal expectations for herself were quite high. Besides all the factors that were working in her favor during her transition into college, Fay shares that she believes

"getting involved" was key for her into fitting in and overcoming any possible challenges both in high school and college:

I was really involved in high school, and I was, you know, President of National Honor Society and, you know, Secretary and Editor-in-Chief. And then coming to college I, you know, I was afraid to get involved. And so I got involved with the President's Leadership Program (PLP) and through Key and then I just you know I just started to network with people through that program and people through PLP, and that kind of... it was probably those, the two biggest to help me broaden out and meet new people because if I wasn't involved I probably wouldn't have gotten involved in any other programs and probably wouldn't have known many of the people besides who was in my dorm or in some of my classes.

While at times during the interview, Fay hesitates to collect her thoughts or perhaps seems more mindful as she talks about her dad, I never get the sense that she is at a loss for words. When I ask her what image of women she thinks the campus culture projected, I watch the fingers of her hand set down the can of ginger ale she had by now pretty much drained, before she answers:

I don't know... [laughs] When I first came in like it was seriously a problem my first couple of days and, um, I was (laughs) in the library writing on my blog and I was just talking about how fake our society--I have a big issue with how demoralized, especially the women in our society are becoming, and I don't know,

it's just something I'm passionate about. I don't know, I don't like girls that are dressing slutty, I just don't, I don't care for it and it seemed coming to campus that everybody was like that and even going to the rec [recreation center] seein', you know, all the machines full of girls that are, you know, venemently [sic] working out when they're already tiny. And so that really bothered me right off the bat, like it really bothered me at first. Um, so that kind of gave me, you know, like a negative perception on the campus, you know, like everybody is anorexic and hey they love to work out and, you know, it gets old when you don't look like them. And so that kinda, that was probably one of my first gripes but then I got involved with like PLP and Key and I just met people you know, so--there's just so much diversity especially in Key that I met people you know that didn't, you know, they weren't worried about all the materialistic things in our society. They were there, there were more there for the academics and for PLP, the leadership and so that really helped me realize that you know not everyone on this campus was, you know, the uniform cheerleader you know want to look good for all the guys every day kind of thing, so...

You'd see like you know the stereotypical what you hear, the girl, you know, some guy coming out of a girl's room at seven o'clock in the morning or you know, the girls that get dressed up for their eight o'clock classes and so I mean it was like the sterotyp--I mean, I expected it because, you know, it goes on in high school. You see it at the malls. You see it at the stores. So it wasn't anything I didn't expect. It was just a little unnerving to come in and see all of these people that look so much like each other and are so, so (hesitates) I guess

engrossed in looking good and looking good for others. Seeing them like in your classes, going to the rec, seeing them on campus. And so it was just a little unnerving to see, you know, just to see 'em.

When asked what kind of advice she might give to other first-year, first-generation women, Fay says,

Probably just don't be worried. I mean if you're first generation, um, especially if you're female, that is no reason to not pursue--I mean there are more women in higher education now than men, than there have ever been and so, I mean, those shouldn't be factors as to why you shouldn't pursue, um, because there's so--like first generation award, there are resources available, you know there's scholarships, there's programs. So it's, um, it's not like you're going to come in and be a minority or that you're going to be looked down upon because you're first generation or that your going to come in and not have any idea because--even if other people's parents did graduate, you know, they're all coming in, they all--most of you haven't been in a college setting, and so it's--you're all in the same boat. And so you can use that first generation you know to, like I have been, to go through it and take it back to your family and share it with them because they probably won't ever have that opportunity to do it themselves. And so, um, just, you know, use your opportunity. Being female or first generation is no reason to not pursue what you want to do...

Reflection

The initial interview lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes and the second lasted about an hour. As I listened to Fay answer questions and relate certain stories from her first college year both as a female and as a first-generation student, the reaction that initially struck me was how comfortable she seemed with her life and the choices she is making. I kept thinking of her confident hands and how this impression translated into her steady voice and the matter-of-fact attitude I heard. I listened to details some might consider a hardscrabble way of life, yet I hear no such judgment from her, either in the tone of her voice or the phrasing she selects. What I do hear is much love for her family. And I find that she laughs easily, laughter that is never harsh or strained or insincere.

As Fay talked, she used "um" and "you know" frequently, but I felt she did this, as many of us may, to gather thoughts for a moment before going on. I guess I also thought that she probably might not like to see these words on a transcript, as I might not; seeing our spoken words on paper or hearing our words/voices over a tape often makes us cringe. Hearing myself, I am aware that I seem so hesitant or naïve when I often do not really feel this way when I am actually saying those words while relating a story or answering questions. In any case, I found myself wanting Fay to "do good" and feel at ease answering, which I thought she did. And when I e-mailed a transcript of our interviews together for her review as she requested, I made sure to mention the normal "pausing to think" words many of us utilize when we speak.

As she spoke, I really didn't note any hesitation as she talked about her family or her experiences, and I got the sense she was enjoying talking about her experiences. She was proud of herself for taking the initiative of amassing scholarships toward her college finances, and I felt proud for her. Few people who live and breathe outside an educational arena comprehend the immense help it is to have parents or other authority figures to guide a pre-college hopeful through the financial battleground in order to attain a college education. When one is a First-Generation student, which generally means there is no one in an immediate family to turn to for *any* informed advice, the financial maze is often times daunting or seemingly impossible to negotiate. There is also the lack of a *knowing* about college and its format: the classes, commitment, homework, campus resources, social arenas--just what the heck to expect. Even with the "outside" support of her high school's pre-college prep program, for Fay to manage to champion herself toward "college," to do this on her own, not just the motivation to do so, but the actual applications and eventual "scholarship wins," is a truly significant accomplishment.

I also noticed that Fay would laugh if she did seem unsure, and her dark eyes would meet mine, connect. I read this as a knowing-ness between us, like "you know what I mean" without either of us having to say more.

I thought Fay had an optimistic worldview. She seemed to have a good frame of reference and balance concerning her personal expectations about her grades and the difficulty of her new college classes. Never did she mention regret or a true fear of failing, though an anxiety seems captured in that idea of not being able to provide for her own future family if she does not attend college and succeed, that sense of "What will become of me?" So college does indeed help her define her life and her goals in that life.

As she talked of her family, I got a true sense of understanding and respect and a lack of negative judgment from her. Life, her family, any present or past circumstances, everything simply just seemed "it is what it is." For example, her description of her father's lack of formal education in Mexico or his inability to at first grasp what college and her having to move away from home was all about were matter-of-fact and loving, especially when she notes that he never had the opportunities she has had. I also never got the sense that she felt threatened by her financial circumstances, which she self-identifies as low-income. While Fay did mention that she worried how she was going to pay for college, she set to getting herself scholarships and took on the responsibility for her finances for college, perhaps in part because she knew she would have to be responsible in order for her to manifest actually attending college.

I believe Fay is mindfully trying to construct her life. This may seem insignificant to some people, but I do not view it that way. How many eighteen or nineteen-year-olds are mindful about how to go about self-actualizing and aiming themselves toward what they really want for their future? How many can do this while overcoming financial hurdles? How many can do this contrary to a family's educational history?

Analysis

I used inductive analysis; no prior codes were established but were instead "induced" from each participant's narrative, which allowed me to more holistically process each story I was receiving and examine it for possible meaning and repeated messages. I found myself reading and re-reading the thirty-six single-spaced pages of

interview material I had collected regarding Fay, as well as reviewing the journal entries she chose to share. In truth, after the hours it took me to transcribe the first interview and then consider emerging questions born of that initial interview, I had already absorbed a strong sense of the main ideas from the interview. These ideas distinguished themselves all the more as I wrote out possible questions for my second interview with Fay, keeping some, disregarding others based on what I needed and wanted to understand more fully. For example, from the first interview, Fay had said, "It gets old when you don't look like them" when discussing other women she saw when she came to campus. After I transcribed that first interview audiotape, I didn't know whether Fay had meant that she didn't look like them, for instance, concerning how the other women dressed, talked, or simply *were* somehow unlike Fay in her own estimation, so I made sure to follow-up on this during our second interview.

Therefore, my pre-coding process consisted of first, listening to Fay as she communicated during her first face-to-face interview, and second, reviewing the audiotape from this first meeting as I transcribed her narrative. A third step in the pre-coding process included the interim between this transcription and a second interview with Fay, when I collected her written journal entries and considered follow-up questions from these entries along with questions that came up from the first interview transcription. As I was reviewing Fay's data in such detail and with such repetition, I became saturated with "her story," which then helped me begin, at least mentally, to have some ideas about the larger segments of information coming to the surface in Fay's narrative. Finally, when Fay and I had our second, what I called our "follow-up" interview a few weeks after our first meeting, I felt I had internalized much of Fay's

story. This was further embedded as I asked her questions during this second interview and jotted notes using the Interview Protocol (copy in the Appendix) I had created. When I transcribed this second interview, I felt I had harnessed a solid appreciation of Fay's narrative.

Now I say this with appreciation for the caveat that this transcribed narrative was thirty-six single-spaced pages and two typed pages that made up Fay's journal entries. No, I could not "memorize" all this information, but I do credit myself with a better than average "sense of story," perhaps because of my penchant for both reading and writing fiction, and so I am comfortable saying I did indeed feel I internalized sections of her narrative that seemed to repeat or stand out for me. Because of this and before I actually hand-coded the transcripts, I jotted down a few "main ideas" that had come up in the narrative. These included: self-image/agency, money/cost, Mexico/dad, expectations, relationship w/ boyfriend, leadership, first-year, first-generation issues, and female images on campus. Since I was also interviewing other participants at this point in the study, I wanted a way to mentally separate Fay's story elements from any other narrative, and so I made this list as a memory device for myself since these triggered actual "visual" lines of Fay's narrative for me.

Once I had transcribed both of Fay's audio-recorded interview sessions, I hand-coded this and the typed journal entries Fay had provided. While the entire list of codes is rather lengthy to include, here is a representative sampling:

Family Low-income First-generation	Level of college work First Year First Generation Awards	Boyfriend
College Cost/Money	Comfort	Support
Scholarships	Shyness	Credits
Journalism	Career	Politics
Future	Image of women	Cost and time
Expectations	Female stereotype	Scantily-dressed girls
Self-Expectation	Self-motivation	Self as leader
Large Classes	Pride	College vs, high school grades
Dad's lack of formal education	Mom with little formal education	Belonging
Friends Community	"KEY" Group Involvement	Appearance

Table 1. Fay's Codes

Fay's Themes

Again, as I absorbed an ongoing holistic sense of Fay's narrative, I also saw major components in her story emerge and repeat. I had no pre-established codes or themes when I began the study; however, since the focus of the study itself *is* first-year, first-generation women students and their university experiences, this focus naturally generated the perspective that at least some possible themes related to these characteristics would emerge, and I was, of course, aware of this. The point is that I was not out to prove any pre-established theory, nor did I assume any pre-established fixed codes or themes. In the same vein I was the principal "instrument" to interpret Fay's story (Chase, 2003) so my own subjectivity and biases shape the outcome of the presented-for-

audience narrative. I decided what to leave out, what to present, and what to spotlight (Janesick, 2000; Johnson-Bailey, 2002a).

While the overall center of the study was to explore, "What are the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students," the initial questions I created and the follow-up questions I chose both reflected and influenced my thinking. Some of the initial questions included: What family dimensions helped these women towards educational advancement? What are the strategies utilized by these women to overcome perceived challenges and expectations during this first year? What image of women did the campus culture project? What factors would empower women who may follow their lead into a first college year? The intent I thoughtfully served, however, was to maintain the authentic character and soul of Fay's narrative as I attempted to gain insight about her experiences; this was both a challenge and an ever-present personal directive.

In order to uncover Fay's themes, I made marginal notes in the typewritten transcript pages: in the left margin I noted codes for the meaning segments, and in the right margin I noted how some of these codes and their repetition could point to possible themes. For example, *future*, *self-expectation*, *self-motivation*, *attaining scholarships on her own*, all pointed toward Fay's self-determination and her own purpose for her future. When she discussed her *future*, Fay said, "... just because my parents didn't go didn't mean, you know, that I wouldn't" and "It's not like, you know, my family was expecting me to go. But ... if I wanted to get a decent career in the future, I'd have to go to school." When Fay discussed "scholarships" she said, "I never felt like I needed to ask my mom..." and "Like I don't want to sound egotistical or anything, but I... um, but I applied for all the scholarships myself."

As I continued to review transcripts, many ideas repeated and similar messages began to emerge from meaning units I had, at first, labeled as separate. For instance, while I began with codes like *future* and *self-motivation*, I began to see these separately-coded meanings began to cluster under a larger umbrella of meaning so that some other codes could fit under this larger message. Hence *future* and *self-motivation*, for instance, became a theme of SELF-RELIANCE since I felt this term better represented Fay's self-drive toward her future and her reliance on herself to not only embody certain self-aspirations but to also act on these to produce a future she envisions. As I continued analyzing and thinking about possible themes that were emerging from the narrative, I realized what I had labeled as, for example, *future*, *expectations*, *self-motivation*, *self-concept*, and *leadership* could be distilled into SELF-IMAGE for Fay since it was her positive self-image as a leader who could influence her own future life that impelled her to make the choices necessary for her to attain scholarships and attend college. As I continued this excursion into an analysis of Fay's story, and as I continued to synthesize meaning and messages, several themes emerged. The next section presents these themes along with illustrative quotations, which capture the essence of that theme:

(Note: Later, I renamed self-image or self-expectation or self-reliance to *Self-Expectation / Agency* to reflect a confluence of messages. This term married the ability to act for oneself and towards one's goals with the (internal) self-concept necessary to do so. This was a shared theme among all four participants.)

SELF-IMAGE

"I always figured that I would [go to college] just because in this generation, I mean, it's kind of a given that everyone goes to school. Ah-m, just because my parents didn't go didn't mean, you know, that I wouldn't."	"So I think just pushing myself, I graduated as Salutatorian, and so I think that it was kind of like empowering myself to strive for something rather than depend on others..."
"Just being able, doing something that no one in my family has done before."	

FAMILY

"They [mom and dad] still work at the dairy. We live, um, about a half a mile away from it..."	"There's gunk everywhere, so it's definitely a change of culture [the dairy]. I mean, no one would ever look at her [mom] and think that she was a farmer or anything, but yeah, definitely a unique job..."
"Well, my mom went to UNC for a semester and then dropped out because she got married."	"And my dad being from Mexico like he went to three days of school that's how long his education was in Mexico."
"He [dad] I mean, it [college] really is an entirely new concept to him...I really don't know what his ideas of college are. I know he was entirely freaked out that I was moving away..."	

CHALLENGES / COST

"Um, I was more worried about the cost, just because, um, we are classified as low income, and we always have been. And so that kind of worried me. Um, but I... um, applied to about six different schools and got accepted to all of them."	"Um, I wanted, you know, I wanted to go to college but it was like the cost and I don't know if I can and I had like all these aspirations to be a journalist and so, I don't know, I was just glad that I could get into, um, both First-Generation Award program and Key..."
"I don't want to jeopardize, you know, wasting the education that's being paid for... I mean it's being paid for and I should take advantage of that <i>now</i>."	"... because I mean you're paying for it, I mean you're paying thousands and thousands of dollars so you might as well get something really decent out of it."

BELONGING / BOYFRIEND

"Um, my boyfriend also started CSU that same time that I did, so I always had him around, which was really beneficial to me. I never felt like, you know, who can I hang out with or who can I go to talk to."	"Um, I--I like to think I'm, you know, easy going when I meet people, but I guess I have kind of the shy tendency to kind of get to know people before I do anything drastic, so having him here... having kind of like that friend, that acquaintance that you can go to football games with, that you can go eat with and that you can do other social activities with really helped me get to know other people."
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COMMUNITY-THROUGH-ORGANIZATION

"... I was lucky enough to get involved with the KEY community my first year. So instead of coming into school and ... not really knowing where my classes were and taking classes with people I didn't know, we, um, were grouped into clusters... we take I think it was 3 classes with a group of the same 15 people... And so that really helped knowing people in my classes."	"I don't know, I think that my first semester went a lot more well than other students' because I <i>was</i> in Key and the first semester <i>is</i> structured. I mean, you're in classes, you're in three classes with the same individuals. And so that really, really formed like a strong bond between us and between, um, our academic success."
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FEMALE IMAGES

"When I first came in like it was seriously a problem my first couple of days and, um, I was in the library writing on my blog and I was just talking about how fake our society--I have a big issue with how demoralized, especially the women in our society are becoming, and, I don't know, I don't like girls that are dressing slutty."	"You'd see like the stereotypical what you hear, the girl, you know, some guy coming out of a girl's room at seven o'clock in the morning or, you know, the girls that get dressed up for their eight o'clock classes and so I mean it was like the stereotype--I mean, I expected it because, you know, it goes on in high school. You see it at the malls. You see it in the stores. So it wasn't anything I didn't expect. It was just a little unnerving to come in and see all of these people that look so much like each other and are so... I guess engrossed in looking good and looking good for others."
"... and it seemed coming to campus that everybody was like that and even going to the rec seein', you know, all the machines full of girls that are, you know, venemently [sic] working out when they're already tiny. And so that really bothered me right off the bat, like it really bothered me at first. Um, so that kind of gave me, you know, like a negative perception of the campus..."	"They were just acting stupid, and, um, the girls--there was like three of them--they were like pulling their shirts up and one of the girls like pulled her shirt up and like tucked it above her bra and was like lookin' around and waitin' for people to look at her."
"I don't know, it seems like a lot of girls take advantage of being, you know, skinny, and pretty, and having money and they kind of use it to be like sex objects to, you know, you know, in the eyes of guys..."	"It's more of a... tryin' to... I don't know, be what you think other want you to be and try to be like the whole--like sexy, especially with Halloween comin' up, you know that 95% of the female costumes are gonna be like, I don't know, little go-go dancers... Um, just a little like... scant costumes and I think it's just because they want people to look at them more than anything."

Table 2. Fay's Themes

Interpretation

These themes represented the most vigorous elements of Fay's narrative although the quoted material cannot provide the full depth of her story. As I said before, the study's initial questions provided a direction for possible themes for Fay (and for all participants) but the follow-up interview explored richer personal meaning for each study subject. I heard a great deal of love for her family. When she talked about her father, who is originally from Mexico, she explained his lack of educational opportunity in a matter-of-fact manner and was grateful that she has opportunities he did not have. She wanted to make the most of her opportunities to help prove (to him) that even those from low-income circumstances can be successful.

From Fay, I got a compelling sense of her own advocacy for her future, which included a college education despite this lack of academic history in her own family. And yet I also absorbed the sense that running a very close second to this self-motivation, she credited any high school prep program like Upward Bound along with what she sees as a "normal" generational understanding that college is needed for future success. As I listened, I don't think she realized the import and the self-resolve of what she had said. In my experience not only as a first-generation student and then as a college instructor but also as an observer and participant of life, there are so many people who do not consider college as being a part of their future *in order to even think of participating in such a program*. And while many young adults may think or feel college could lead to greater opportunities that this does not necessarily translate into *taking action* toward this

endeavor. When funds are tight or non-existent for the expense of college, many would not even entertain the notion. However, Fay *expected* college to be within her life and within her grasp, and I find this quite telling. And while she discussed her classes and her choice of journalism as a career, I was struck with the understanding that she wanted to make sure everything she is paying for in her college classes is relevant. More and more, I saw her directed pragmatism toward her future career and how college must lead to this.

There was certainly something within that drives her.

I found this attitude--her self-motivation/self-expectation/positive self-image--to be a reoccurring sentiment in the context of her narrative along with the impetus for her of belonging to a supportive community of college-bound learners both in high school and then at the university level. She credited such support with forging her resolution to attend college and succeed; however, my sense was that somewhere early in her development she possessed the self-expectation of attending college while such supportive programs did just that--supported and perhaps bolstered her existing predilection for a university degree. I do not believe, however, that they *forged* such an interior inspiration or expectation. Her sense of doing something that no one in her primary family had done, experiencing the rigors of college, likewise seemed to fuel her self-expectation. The fact that she considers her family low-income and that she says she wanted especially to show her dad that even someone from such circumstances could be successful, I believe, furthered her drive.

She also emphasized her sense that there were many other women on campus who did not look like her. These women tried to look sexy for the males on campus and dressed or acted in ways to compete with other females. It made her sad that this existed

on campus, even though she said she expected it because she'd experienced the same thing in high school, at the mall, and in stores. Since I was sensitive to the feminist theoretical lens I had advanced in my proposal for this study, I was naturally alert when Fay discussed her perception of male-female image/relationships within the campus culture. Several times she mentioned female behavior that distressed her, yet along with this I got the distinct impression that while she certainly didn't approve when females objectified themselves for men or used what she termed "slutty" behavior ("I have a big issue with how demoralized, especially the women in our society are becoming, and I don't know, it's just something I'm passionate about."), there was *an expectation of it being accepted, accepted by a campus culture and a wider, universal culture*. It was, most simply, the way things were. Fay said of what she saw on campus,

... the girls that get dressed up for their eight o'clock classes and so I mean it was like the stereotype--I mean, I expected it because, you know, it goes on in high school. You see it at the malls. You see it at the stores. So it wasn't anything I didn't expect. It was just a little unnerving to come in and see all of these people that look so much like each other and are so, so (hesitates) I guess engrossed in looking good and looking good for others. Seeing them like in your classes, going to the rec, seeing them on campus. And so it was just a little unnerving to see, you know, just to see 'em.

The understanding I was left with as Fay discussed this was that not only was Fay "unnerved" by this behavior, she was unnerved because she did not expect it (at first) to

have a place in an academic arena, but that this belief was almost immediately dashed after she actually became a part of the campus culture. Then the "reality" of what she had seen in other venues--high school, malls, stores--and the reality of behavior she observed on campus adjusted her expectation of behavior on campus. She says she "expected it" and yet it is "a little unnerving to see." I interpreted this to mean, see here on a campus where academics should be the focus.

I also believed Fay sometimes combined this issue of female objectification with a socio-economic "materialistic" class issue,

I have a big issue with how demoralized, especially the women in our society are becoming, and I don't know, it's just something I'm passionate about. I don't know, I don't like girls that are dressing slutty, I just don't, I don't care for it and it seemed coming to campus that everybody was like that and even going to the rec seein', you know, all the machines full of girls that are, you know, venemently [sic] working out when they're already tiny. And so that really bothered me right off the bat, like it really bothered me at first. Um, so that kind of gave me, you know, like a negative perception on the campus, you know, like everybody is anorexic and they love to work out and, you know, it gets old when you don't look like them. And so that kinda, that was probably one of my first gripes but then I got involved with like PLP and Key and I just met people you know, so--there's just so much diversity especially in Key that I met people you know that didn't, you know, they weren't worried about all the materialistic things in our society. They were there, there were more there for the academics and for PLP, the

leadership and so that really helped me realize that you know not everyone on this campus was, you know, the uniform cheerleader you know want to look good for all the guys every day kind of thing...

In one portion of the follow-up interview, Fay admitted to some envy for those able to stick to a work-out routine, but again added a nod to socio-economic class,

Knowing people have the dedication and work out at the Rec, you know, every day, or you know, and can stay to a, you know, some kind of like regiment. While also, you know, having the best clothes or always looking, you know, top notch. And, I don't know, I guess it's just, I guess I mean it is kind of like an envious thing.

While I was cognizant of Fay's apparent marriage of female objectification and socio-economic class here, what struck me was the duality of her expectations: those for herself in the face of a family history, which would certainly not forecast her advanced academic journey yet an expectation that impelled her to action, and another expectation that a number of females would "... be like sex objects, to, you know, you know, in the eyes of guys..." One expectation motivated her; the other seemed to leave her action-less.

I purposely did not use the word "passive" here because Fay was most certainly passionate about how seeing females act this way bothered her, but this was overshadowed, it seemed, by the inevitability of it. While she is action-less against what these other women choose to do, she "acts" by not being this way. Yet, my point is that

one expectation is fueled by an inner positive energy while the other is thrust upon her as a culturally accepted, even promoted (ads, media, etc.) form of ubiquitous conduct. Though it may not be a sanctioned form of female conduct within a campus environment, it is accepted or if you like, tolerated, even in a culture of supposedly higher scholarship and wisdom.

There was also an anxiety expressed about getting her education in a timely manner and that this education was something tangible and would provide a path to her future career, which presently is something in the field of journalism. This is vital to her because she has secured scholarships to acquire her college degree "now." Fay felt an urgency toward accumulating graduation credits because many other first-year college students arrive on campus with previously earned college credits; urgency grew from catching up with other "new" students who were ahead of her. Time and cost played central roles for Fay. These concerns fall into standard concerns for many incoming university students and more especially for those who do not come from affluence. I hesitate to say "first-generation" since often "first-generation" is bound to the belief that these students *must* come from lower income circumstances because their parents did not graduate from college. I do not wish to catalogue any students in this proscriptive manner.

Credit for her comparatively easy first-year transition derived from involvement in high school/college organizations like Upward Bound, Key, and the President's Leadership Organization at Colorado State University (CSU). Her boyfriend also began attending CSU at the same time she did. Although he was about thirty credits "ahead" of

her, he provided her with comfort and social security. Such "familiarities" instilled a high comfort level even as a new student within a relatively unfamiliar college culture.

While she wed "first-generation" with "low-income" due to her own family circumstances and because she had met like-situated students through Upward Bound and Key, she felt she was luckier than some other first-generation students since she had scholarships that provide for her education: she does not have to burden her family with any expense. In truth, I do not think Fay would have burdened her family, but would have made sure she found a way to provide for her education herself, which reiterated the theme of self-image/motivation/expectation.

JJ

First Impressions

Initially it proved difficult for JJ and I to manage a convenient meeting time because she is such a busy art student. Additionally, not only does she negotiate two jobs, she is also Treasurer of the Student Organization for Visual Arts (SOVA) and is also slated to begin a local chapter of the League of the United Latin American Council (LULAC). As she hurried into the classroom where we were meeting, I felt this "busy-ness" of her life. Immediately I liked her and her energy. It was this energy that ultimately characterized JJ for me. And as we spoke I found it particularly easy to "see" the pictures she was painting for me through her descriptions and stories while infusing them with her own special--and honest--interpretation. She is a firecracker.

JJ is a robust, larger framed young woman with dark hair and dark, knowing eyes that seemed to be taking me in, evaluating but not judging. I quite felt that I might be sitting for a portrait. And if I was attempting to get a "fix" on her, she was doing the same to me. She seemed quite comfortable sitting down and "having a chat" like we'd known each other since grade school.

She is dressed in a colorful top, jeans, and her hair is pulled back as she settles into a chair to my left. I think I see some eye make-up but her eyes are so deep this may be more natural than artificial. I like the way her cheeks lift and her eyes taper as she almost smiles, laughs and talks quickly at the same time.

She is a woman I think I would have been friends with in college because of her easy, open way and that infectious energy that muscles over her in undulating waves, drawing you in. We review the consent forms; she seems a quick study as far as their contents. I keep thinking to myself how I wished the rather sterile classroom were "prettier" for her, for her artistic sensibilities. Instead of questioning me about the consent forms even as I try to explain, she seems to trust that I wouldn't do anything "bad." While I remain mindful of protecting her, I appreciate her generous trust. At the moment I smile to myself at this, immediately I *know* JJ is the sort who would spot on set me right if I *were* to do or say anything questionable. However, I also sense JJ allows a *wider than this* margin for others' transgressions before lowering the boom.

As I pass her two pages with initial questions and she begins to tell me some of the stories of her life so far, I am struck with the sense she will lob me the stories, and I'd better be able to catch.

JJ's Story

JJ describes her family as "very diverse," adding it's also "divided." Since her parents divorced when JJ was four, she leads one life with her mother and another with her father, stepmother, and sister. She defines it as diverse because her mom's side is Caucasian while her dad's is Hispanic and Chicano and her stepsister is half Black/ half White and JJ is half White/ half Hispanic. While her dad was strict and her time with his family was more "middle-class," her mother tried to spoil her, even though money was tight, "... we're always really, really, really poor. Like we lived off of like food stamps

and Food Bank and like she would wear clothes with holes in them just so I could have new clothes..." There is also more known background on her father's side, including an artistic heritage and a history of her dad's family name being linked with the San Luis Valley for over two-hundred years.

When asked about how she decided to attend college, she says she didn't want the kind of life she had with her mom then adds,

I've always wanted to do something really important with my life... So I've always hoped that I'll get out of college and find some great position but maybe have like enough information and clout o really change something in this world... So, yeah, the motivation to change this world, motivation to not be poor anymore. I love going to college, but I'm so sick of being poor. And, um, I don't know, just to make my parents proud, just 'cause they were never really able to do it. Um, and the fact that I know I can do it, so...

A large piece of what JJ shares with me has to do with being made fun of when she was a child. She believes this was done because she was poor, and there were times she felt embarrassed. While her mother usually made sure JJ had new clothes, her mom's clothes often had holes. She speaks of attending "a lot" of elementary schools because her mother moved around a lot. JJ would attend a school in her mother's district or her father's district. She recalls attending a more upper-class school in her dad's district,

... I was like one out of four Hispanics. My sister was the only Black kid there...

all those kids were rich and *White* and it, it, oh, it bugged the hell out of me. I got like, like, um, I had a lot of parents treat me badly because they knew I was poor and that I was Hispanic...

She says she ended up being blamed for a harmless incident with some boys during a girl's sleepover birthday party when in fact "... one of the White girls had called over these boys..." and the following year a friend accidentally thought JJ had been invited to this same girl's birthday party again when she had not. The incident hurt her feelings, and,

... some people told me that the parents called me a street rat because, um, where I lived... a girl, her dad was a priest and her mother was like a stay-at-home mom ... she dropped off her daughter once to spend the night at my house, and she was never allowed to come back again because my neighborhood wasn't good enough ... after she saw my house, I was never invited back to my friend's house. Um, they would plan--I remember once, like after that, after her mother had seen my house--I even remember the reaction on her face--um, it was an apartment, but after, like after that I remember that friend of mine, her mother planned this extravagant birthday party to go to *Estes* [sounds breathy & sophisticated] and all this stuff and like every one of my friends was invited except for me. So, um, so I kinda like me doing this [going to college]--has also been a kinda like a fuck you to all these people. Excuse my language, but it's like 'Fuck you, I'm gonna do *better* than your daughter.' I'm gonna, you know, I don't know--so that year, that

year in school I got like all As at the 6th grade graduation thing. I got more awards than *any* other kid and I was like volunteering and all this stuff. It's like, 'Fuck you,' I may be poor, but I'm not like some dirty, uneducated street rat who's gonna be a bum her whole life or something. Or a drug addict or something. So this is kinda my way to be like you know what, um, yeah, I'm not gonna be what society has dealt me, keep me in that position. I'm gonna do whatever it takes to do better, so, um, yeah, I'm not one of those people who, um, who, ah, if something is bothering them I'll let it, you know, stop me from doing something. I'm just like, you know, 'Screw that!' I'm gonna do better. I'm gonna, you know, totally overcome this challenge and I'm gonna like, you know, totally change my situation.

JJ self-identifies as a person who doesn't take no for an answer easily and will go out and get what she wants. She earned a First-Generation Scholarship and another award, and even though she knows her family was impressed, she did this on her own and for herself.

As I bring up the subject of family expectations or her own expectations, it comes out that while this is her first year at Colorado State University (CSU), JJ did take classes at Front Range Community College first since her high school grades were not that good. She took off a year after high school and believes a community college atmosphere after that--where she got to know her teachers and where she was in smaller classes with traditional and non-traditionally aged students--helped her motivation. The vastly different experiences she says she had at the community college and then at CSU seem

distinctly important to her. JJ says that her family was supportive of her going to college but then veers into how important it was to her. But then about mid-junior high school she says she just fell into a severe depression, which led to her finally graduating high school with a 1.76 grade point average. JJ offers that she was not "... a big druggie or anything, I just hated school. Um, I didn't really like myself at that time."

Because of this episode she didn't think her family expected much from her then. JJ herself admits that she never used to think that she needed to go to school to be a successful artist, which she aspired to, and she does not think her friends influenced her decision to go to college. At present, however, she has a 3.9 grade point average, and as she improved her grades, first at Front Range and then at CSU, her family's expectations rose. Yet they never pressured her too much because "... you know, they didn't go." She offers that when she finally was attending CSU, she felt more confident, and "I felt like I was being part of something important. And, um, starting something finally with my life. Like starting to find my niche." She felt she had a "destination."

Her dad is "absolutely amazed" now at what she has accomplished, and while her mother is also proud, JJ senses some envy: "And I think my mother, over time, has kind of become a little jealous of how well I've done, and like I think the better I do, the more she feels she needs to reach out for me, cause she's losing that." Besides being Treasurer of Student Organization for Visual Arts (SOVA), JJ volunteers for the League of the United Latin American Council (LULAC) and has been asked to start a chapter in Fort Collins. She also volunteers at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and while her family thinks she should slow down, JJ says, "Um, so yeah, sometimes I think my family thinks

I'm doing too much. But, um, I just want to ensure like--I'm very competitive. I want to be the best at everything I want to do."

Even though she was born and raised in Fort Collins and was familiar with the campus, she credits the time she spent part-time at Front Range Community College (3 years) with helping make her actual first-year on CSU's campus go more smoothly because she was "more experienced," even though she still wasn't sure what kind of art she wanted to pursue. When she came to CSU she also "... felt like college is gonna take for-ever" and this wasn't helped by the fact that she "... only got to take one art class" her first semester. She says because of this she didn't feel like part of the art community she wanted to belong to her first semester. By her second semester, however, she became more active in SOVA and "... I just started to feel more comfortable here..."

While she also expressed the feeling that there was a more "click-ish thing" on CSU's campus than she was used to, comfort also at first eluded her because she felt so old (she's 24 now). She calls the students in the classes with her "young-ins" and didn't experience the variety of ages she did while taking classes at the community college. JJ worries about her grades like any other student but also feels "so behind" others. This discomfort with her "age" and her sense that CSU had more clicks, irritated her transition to CSU. Some transition to campus was smoothed, however, because her boyfriend was attending CSU. This meant that she not only had had a chance to visit the campus, which made it more familiar, but she also had a familiar acquaintance on campus. She admits that her boyfriend is getting jealous of SOVA because it consumes her time,

We have this foodcart--SOVA cart in the Art Department, and I completely run

that. I buy everything. I keep everything stocked. I make sure like we buy enough stuff that sells. And right now I'm in the process of getting donations from certain like places like for coffee for our SOVA carts. We have that for free, and a better type, and um, and you know I'm writing diversity grants and proposals and all that stuff. And then part of SOVA, like part of my responsibility like is to be like, like a leader to the students, right? So I should interact with them more and for SOVA, to make our closeness we should interact. So sometimes I, like, like last Friday I went out with someone from SOVA and, um, like he didn't want to go, but he was still jealous, so, um, and he just graduated from school, so he's working, and he doesn't see me very often... sometimes I don't think he understands why I feel like I have to do all this stuff. Like I just, I feel like I just have to. Yeah, just like I feel like I have to like volunteer to make a difference or something.

Large class sizes and the fact that this translated into her not getting to know her teachers or other students was a drawback for JJ. This was alleviated when she finally started getting into more art classes, and formed a community, "... yeah, I love the fact that art classes are small. It's very comforting to me."

Two organizations that helped her to fit in the most were the Student Organization for the Visual Arts (SOVA) and the First-Generation Office. She considers herself lucky to have had a drawing class with the SOVA advisor and she encouraged her involvement with the organization. This involvement helped her "build community" with other artists.

The First-Generation Office also offered her optional meetings and receptions with positive speakers. This organization helped JJ to feel like she was "doing something really important."

When asked whether she feels she is a first-generation student and what that means to her, she says she knows the definition but adds, "I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna be the first of all of you to graduate." She is figuratively speaking to her family, to cousins who have begun college studies only to stop. After glancing at the sheet of questions on the table in front of her, JJ thinks for a moment and says of first-generation students,

Well, I think personally it means you have a little more power to do good things. Um, cause I think, you know, we're a determined group obviously and we've, you know, cause you come from like--I had a teacher the other day ask me, um, like what my dad had said about this aspect of college. And like [laughs] well, my dad didn't go to college so he, you know, neither of them had any information on, you know, what to give me or what to expect for school. Um, so I don't know, I think it [being a first-generation student] means that, I don't know, that you're more determined. I don't have this information and I still, you know, find a way to make it work...

On her own, JJ found out about scholarships and personally visited various academic departments on campus before she applied in order to learn what services they provided.

She intends to pursue her Master's degree, aiming for Stanford, even though she is "so scared" about feeling lonely when she pursues graduate studies in an unfamiliar state and is away from her family.

One of the first-year challenges she identified pertained to her looking White but being half Hispanic. She relates a situation in the art department:

... well I guess I kind of blend in so people don't like, exclude me, kinda thing. But then because I do blend in, I'll hear people say racist comments and they won't like understand--no, I'm like--'Excuse me. I'm Hispanic,' shut-up kind of thing.

JJ says there are two African Americans and not many Hispanics in the Art Department. She admits "always" noticing how many different kinds of races make up a room. Since there was a lack of diversity in the Art Department, this "...challenged me and not feeling like I *fit* in at first."

In the Art Department there are also "way more females than men." She finds it "strange" that in every art class she has most of the students are female while most of the teachers are male and that "... most of the artists that are famous *are* men, or making money *are* men." Her possible reasoning for this includes hearing,

... some studies that like Ivy League schools a woman will go there and they'll get like scholarships and stuff and they give them like a survey later they say that they would give up their career for a family and a marriage and a family...

JJ says that this makes her feel like she may "have a better chance" because she doesn't want to get married or have kids that much, and she thinks "... maybe I'm at an advantage." She finds it "kind of discouraging" that there are not that many female teachers in the Art Department but says she does have a "close bond" with the female teachers who are there and believes the "ones who are there are very strong, positive role models." She wonders how many women are on campus just to get their MRS. degree, "Like how many women here are like serious about what they're doing?" She thinks that they shouldn't waste their time or any government scholarship money if they're not serious.

In speaking about the female images she sees on campus, JJ makes a distinction between "slutty" versus "sexy" dress and behavior:

Sexy I see as more elegant, very feminine. I think it, it's, you know, if you're a woman it's great to be feminine, it's, you know, enjoy it... I see slutty as more a little girl thing, like a teenager, you know? Sexy is more of a mature woman, you know? And so I think it's great to show off your woman-ness, but just don't, you know, go around wearing *nothing*. [laughs] It's also the way you act. Your attitude.

She says she hasn't noticed many women on campus acting or dressing "slutty," but that there are those girls who put on very revealing clothes and "act that way." JJ explained that flirtation wasn't bad, but a girl should not degrade herself, should not act like she's "a

material object instead of a human being." One thing JJ has personally noticed is when she is flirtatious with a male friend of hers and he is flirtatious back (in a friend-to-friend, joking way) that *she* is the one who seems to get the label of being slutty while no one mentions his behavior, "... we both know it doesn't mean anything serious at all. And of course everyone projects that onto *me* as being slutty.... no one says anything about *him* being slutty or anything. It's just all put on *me*."

JJ also had a recent epiphany about herself: she is more competitive than she realized. This realization surfaced because she is Treasurer of SOVA but had been seeking the presidency because she thought holding that higher office would look better on paper when she applied to Stanford for her Masters degree. But there is a competition for the presidency between JJ and the secretary of SOVA, and this same woman competes with her in art classes. JJ strives to be the "... very best *I* can be." However, she is finding she does not like the way she acts when she is so competitive, offering, "Maybe I would be a better treasurer and act as a better person if I *didn't* want that so bad." But at the same time she is aiming for a full-ride scholarship, so "I think that's why I also gotta, you know, *really* look good on paper."

While she seems to have set a course for her own life, JJ tells two stories about feeling controlled on campus. One occurred when she was walking through campus and suddenly felt assaulted by large anti-abortion posters. She felt disrespected because these images were "thrown" (figuratively) at her, and she was robbed of the choice not to see them because they were so huge and in a public, busy area. Another seems to resonate even more with her, perhaps because it involves an art class and an "old-fashioned" teacher:

Um, he is the reason for a lot of my stress right now... I--well, I get the feeling that he's--he's been here since 1965--so he's very old-fashioned, and he's--when he says things he is kind of sexist. He told me yesterday, I should learn how to cook... that it was essential that I should learn how to cook. I was like, Oh my God, I could vomit.

She states, "I have absolutely no freedom as an artist in that class, and on top of it, he makes me feel like a really crappy artist... I feel very controlled in that way." This particular teacher hates her work while another female teacher loves her work. It does not surprise JJ that the two teachers hate each other but this only adds to her stress. This also brings up the competition bug for JJ since JJ is the female teacher's favorite student (artwork-wise) while the secretary from SOVA who she is in competition with is the male art teacher's favorite student.

When I asked JJ what she thought about the female image the campus culture projected, JJ was hesitant, as though she was not somehow "girl" enough to have a good answer, saying,

You know, maybe I've never really thought about that too much. Um, because I've always been quite the tomboy. It wasn't until I recently that I, I started looking like a girl [laughs]. Like until like high school I was like--I didn't buy a purse until like last year, you know? So I've been, like most of my guys--my friends are guys.

And I've always just kind of seen myself as one of the guys, kinda thing, so...
um...

I remind her of a comment she made during the first interview, that she "may look like a girl but I'm really a tomboy at heart." I asked her to talk about that:

I don't, I don't know. I just never, um, until recently I didn't even really enjoy a lot of things that girls do. I don't--I hate shopping [laughs]. Um, I hate--I think I always didn't like it cause women were--they seem more backstabbing... I didn't like 'em a lot when I was younger. Like I thought they were all just really mean... and then probably, um, my weight, stuff like that. Not having the body that I wish--like, you know? Like they have the body that I want so maybe that was another reason I just like, you know, play it down. I used to [laughs] dress completely like a guy so--when I was real little so--maybe that's why.

Since JJ has mentioned her weight, I ask her if she thinks thinner women have a different campus experience than heavier women and she is saying "Oh yeah" before I can finish the question. Yet she also thinks she is an example of a bigger girl who can also be very sexy. She adds, "... I think you just have to not--like today I had like two minutes to get ready. But I always--because I am bigger--I try to look nice because that'll build up my confidence. And if you have confidence you're definitely more attractive. I know that for a fact." JJ echoes a previous thought that it is "soooo important" to have confidence. She

is conflicted, however, that it seems superficial to worry about looks, especially since she never used to think about this. With this thought she says,

... So fuck everybody. Who cares what they think about me [laughs]... Excuse me, but... But, um, I don't know, you gotta--I think I just want people's respect... Um... I'm sure the weight, you know, the men look at them, possibly the teachers, cause [scoffs] male teachers can be very flirtatious. I think that's--I've met a lot of them in my college career. Um, like the _____ [name intentionally omitted] teacher, he--his two favorite students are the two most gorgeous girls in the class. I guess that he's very old-fashioned. Um, I don't know if there's more opportunities. I'm sure you'd be able to get into a sorority more. I mean just when you look better people like you more.

I asked her if she thought it was the same for men, and JJ responded,

Do I think it is the same for men? Ah, *no*. Um, just cause I know that, ah, looks usually quite aren't as important to women. It's more about--ah, I always take the evolutionary stand--um, because, I mean, you know they *are* looking for a provider, they want to have children and--I don't--I don't but [laughs] look for that kind of thing, but, um, so I think you know, more intelligence, capability, confidence, stuff like that matters more for a woman, so--just where they are in their life.

I find it interesting that JJ appears to separate herself from her opinion of what she thinks women, in general, want. I ask her if she has ever made a different choice or decided not to do something or go somewhere on campus *because she is* a female? At first JJ laughs, then sighs and says she loves football and sometimes wants to watch the players practice but feels "weird as a woman" going by herself to watch them practice, so sometimes she takes her car, parks, and will "just chill," but what she wants to do is "just get up there" and watch. She hesitates as she tries to think of other choices she might have made because she was female. I don't want her to struggle but I wait several beats before adding the prompt, "Ever have any problems walking around at night on campus?" Now she immediately answers,

Oh-h... you know what? I always call my boyfriend when I'm walking around at night... and I make him talk to me as I get to my car and as I'm unlocking my car I put him on speakerphone. Yeah--no--I'm actually--I'm quite worried about that, especially being alone at night in the Art Building.... So sometimes that's scary but I just try not to think about it.

I ask her about her discouragement that there are (in her estimation) more successful male artists yet more female art students. JJ says she thinks about this all the time, but then says that she remembers that Affirmative Action was supposed to help all minorities and women, "But what it's mainly helped is white females... which is what our school's full of. Um, and so, yeah, in the past, men have, you know, been more advantaged in the workplace. They still get paid more, all that stuff. Um, I think it could be too that maybe

men don't see it as a serious profession (?) That could be why they're not *in* art school." I add that yet there are more male teachers.

She attributes this to the males having their jobs for a long time in the Art Department:

... most of the teachers are, like I said, like you know, since 1965. That's a long time to be teaching. Like a lot of them are about to retire. We have *so*--like there's countless, um, older men with white hair and white beards. There's like seven of them [laughs] in our department. Um, one's finally on like semi-retirement. One talks about it all the time. So I think it's 'cause they're all from the older generation. That's why there's so many male teachers there. Like recently they've hired, um, like one --last year they had one man--er... two females and one female, one male. And then like a few years before they hired a female. So they're mixing it up. Which is good. Um, yeah, they'll have more females in the classes, but I don't think they're necessarily--I think the problem is that they're gonna come out and they're gonna, you know, have a family and stuff like that. I even have one, one of my best friends, she, she's just here for her MRS. degree. Like she, she just wants to get married and have kids [laughs]. Like then why are you like wasting money and time of the college and, you know, it's like, you shouldn't be here then if that's--I don't know. Well, actually no, she should be able to be educated if she wants but--I don't know...

She adds that she thinks there are males on campus who look for wives as well and that while it was unattractive to be an intelligent woman in the early 1900s, now men look for it. She says she knows a lot of men who don't take college seriously and who will just go to work in restaurants after graduating.

At this point in her life, JJ says she most identifies with being an artist (she chose this over other possibilities like being female, first-generation, a college student, etc.) She thinks the way she views life is more of "an artist's way."

When asked if she can share a story about a proud moment for her on campus, JJ takes a few moments to think. Finally she responds that she is proud of the job she does as Treasurer especially since she has heard others say what a good job she is doing. She emphasizes that she is the one who feels she must be the best, must do it all:

It's, it's all myself. I don't know why. It mainly has to do with self-esteem, I'm guessing. I don't know. 'Cause like I'm one of those people who comes off as very confident, but I don't have--my confidence isn't fabulous. It's, it's good--I love myself, but I know it's, yeah, what you project is very important... you have to, especially as a woman or a minority, you know? Like, yeah, you have to, um, yeah, if you don't come off as confident no one's gonna listen to you, no one's gonna respect you. Um, so you shouldn't come off as a disadvantaged person. You should come off as this is who I am, I'm gonna do the job better than anyone. You know?

I asked her if she could change one thing in her life, what would that be? There is no hesitation when she answers that she would change her weight. She wonders if it would be easier for her to perform (she sings) and says,

Like as a singer you gotta be attractive. I think my face is, you know, my face is good, it's just the body [laughs]... but I just figure [deep breath] you know when you're attractive, you get what you want more in life. So I think that will help me as an artist, and I think to be a singer, you have to be attractive, and to be an actress, it really helps to be attractive. So... school is gonna help me. I think losing the weight is gonna help me significantly do what I want to do. It's so sad but that's just how it is in life.

Reflection

The initial interview lasted a bit over an hour while the second was about fifty minutes. The second interview was somewhat abbreviated since JJ had agreed to meet with me in the middle of her class day; we were both keeping an eye on the clock so she would not be late for another class. What stood out for me after interviewing JJ was, yes, that muscle of in-your-face energy, but what also emerged was her crackling passion to overcome *any* complication in her way.

I believe that some, if not all, of the challenges she had already faced actually acted as fuel for her ambition. Her early experience of being excluded because of being poor prompted JJ's "I'll show 'em" attitude while her family's inexperience with a college

journey and her own lack of knowledge about how to make college happen for herself, drove her to mine answers on her own.

While JJ was appreciative of her extended and extensive family, she seemed to be able to very much separate herself and her circumstances from theirs. Naturally, she recognized that she is a first-generation college student, but I absorbed the sense that she takes what is best about her heritage and uses the rest to polarize herself in a "this is what I do not want my life to be" effort.

JJ laughed and seemed to feel at ease, and indeed put me at ease, when she spoke because she came right out with what was on her mind, expletives included. I also felt drawn in because she employed "You know?" as a way of both including me, and securing a bond of understanding between us. Such phrasing can be used as a way to ascertain approval as well, but the effect here, I believe, was to elicit a nod to our shared experience as either human beings or females, depending on the context of her response. However, perhaps part of the reason I used "seemed to feel at ease" was because I also sensed such a strong need to "make it" rolling off her. In no way did I feel this was desperate or anxious, though *incessant* would be accurate--like a throbbing beat forming a tenacious rhythm for her life and how she *intended to live it despite you, thank you very much*. I could only wish for such certainty of purpose.

JJ's focus on achievement, on doing "something important" with her life, appeared to compel her to take on numerous responsibilities even though her boyfriend and family thinks she does too much. She was aware no one else was pressuring her as she said, "it's all myself." She self-identified this as having to do with her self-esteem and her desire to exude confidence, something she said will help harness others' respect. I thought it was

interesting, from a feminist perspective, that she believed this was particularly important for women. How women "appear" was significant, both in a performance of confidence and in an image of beauty or sexiness, which she viewed as positive when negatively compared to a "slutty" image. I also found it interesting that she made false starts answering and hesitated when I asked what kind of image of women the campus culture projected. She said that she didn't think she really thought about that very much and then referred to herself as a tomboy as though, I thought, this might help explain why she didn't consider her surroundings from the viewpoint of a woman or how it would effect a woman, as though she felt this was somehow "outside" her and her worldview.

Analysis

As I indicated previously, since I had not established any codes for this study, analysis codes were induced from each narrative. I sought to achieve holistic meaning from each story while remaining open to possible meanings and repeated messages. However, as I continued transcribing and re-reading transcriptions and notes regarding the interviews, some patterns did emerge, particularly since I had, as I have stated, used the same initial questions for all participants during the first interview session.

JJ's transcript included thirty-five single-spaced pages of interview material and approximately one page of handwritten journal entries and another page, which made up the Interview Protocol I had created. Questions that emerged as a result of JJ's first interview session, as well as her journal entries, served as guides for the follow-up interview.

As I had done with Fay's transcripts, I read and re-read JJ's material in the same manner in order to induce codes and possible themes. I should make clear that I considered this a separate process for each individual narrative: in other words, while I first, transcribed and secondly, hand-coded all the transcriptions of the narratives, I then set to focusing on each narrative separately from this juncture on until I would finish that narrative's journey and placement within this dissertation pertaining to its Re-storying, Reflection, Coding, Themes, and Interpretation. This allowed me to saturate myself with *each* narrative in a singular attempt to internalize it alone, so I could appreciate it fully and then (finally) come to an informed interpretation regarding its messages.

As I had done with Fay's narrative, I reviewed JJ's transcribed narrative and wrote down what I considered its main ideas. For JJ these included: poor/excluded childhood identity, artistic passion, challenging teachers, self-determination, hyper- involvement, racial identity, artistic identity, behavior of women, confidence. These descriptors helped to solidify JJ's story for me as I continued toward interpretation of her narrative.

The following Table contains some of the codes that emerged:

Diversity in family	Better future	No pressure from others
Female appearance	Self-Expectation	Hyper-Involved
Women and Marriage	Large classes	First-Generation
Scholarships	Self-Identity	Self-Motivation
Art	Lack of money	Being the best
Grades	Competition	Racial identity
Future career	Slutty vs. sexy	Old male teachers
Respect	Weight	Female image
Bisexuality	Tomboy	

Table 3. JJ's Codes

JJ's Themes

Certainly, some of JJ's themes echoed Fay's themes due to the questions I initially asked each participant; however, how these two students defined those patterns were distinct and then other idiosyncratic themes surfaced.

In order to uncover JJ's themes, I again made notes in the margins of the typed transcripts, allowing for "codes" on the left side and "possible themes" on the right. As codes repeated and meanings became clearer, patterns in JJ's narrative emerged. This next section illustrates the themes I discovered along with representative quotations:

FAMILY / RELATIONSHIPS

"Um, the way I usually describe my family is very diverse... it's diverse and divided. My parents divorced when I was four, so my mother--it's just me and her. It's always me and her... it's diverse because like my mother's side is Caucasian, my father's side is Hispanic and Chicano."	"... they didn't really pressure me too much 'cause, you know, they didn't go... now they're both, you know, like my dad's just absolutely amazed at all the stuff that I've done. And I think my mother, over time, has kind of become a little jealous of how well I've done, and like I think the better I do, the more she feels she needs to reach out for me 'cause she's losing that."
"Like my grandpa's side and my father's side, um, they've, our family's been--lived in the San Luis Valley for over two-hundred years. Like if you look on some maps, our last name was on the area there..."	"Um, this semester he's [boyfriend] become a little jealous of SOVA because, um, it like really consumes my time."

SELF-CONCEPT

"I've always wanted to do something really important with my life... So, yeah, the motivation to change this world, motivation to not be poor anymore... the fact that I know I can do it..."	"Excuse my language, but it's like 'Fuck you, I'm gonna do <u>better</u> than your daughter.' I'm gonna, you know, I don't know--so that year, that year in school I got like all As at the 6th grade graduation thing. I got more awards than <u>any</u> other kid and I was like volunteering and all this stuff. It's like, 'Fuck you,' I may be poor, but I'm not like some dirty, uneducated street rat who's gonna be a bum her whole life or something. Or a drug addict or something. So this is kinda my way to be like you know what, um, yeah, I'm not gonna be what society has dealt me, keep me in that position. I'm gonna do whatever it takes to do better..."
"I'm very stubborn and I'm also--my mother spoiled the hell out of me, so it's like, you know, if I want that college degree, I'm gonna get it. And I'm gonna get a really good job when I get out of here, and I'm gonna go get my Masters..."	"... you could just tell from some people that they aren't--like when they speak they are educated and I just didn't want to come off as ignorant or uneducated at all."

FIRST-GENERATION

"Well, I think personally it means you have a little more power to do good things. Um, 'cause I think, you know, we're a determined group obviously...my dad didn't go to college so he, you know, neither of them had any information on, you know, what to give me or what to expect for school... I don't know, that you're more determined. I don't have this information and I still, you know, find a way to make it work..."	"... just the fact , um, like no one in my family had done it..."
"Pretty much that you're, you can be a role model to people."	

HYPER-INVOLVEMENT

"Like I'm usually really stressed out. I don't have a lot of social time...I don't even see my boyfriend who I live with. I don't have a social life at all."	"I volunteer at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I used to volunteer two years at the Homeless Shelter until this semester 'cause it got to be too hectic and-- I used to volunteer like at the Sierra Club until I went to CSU 'cause it kinda conflicted with my schedule here... I just want to ensure like--I'm very competitive. I want to be the best at everything I want to do. So that can lead to very stressful times..."
"But then my second semester, um, I started, um, volunteering more for SOVA, Student Organization for Visual Arts. Um, and then because of that you know, they made me the treasurer this year and... I just started to feel more comfortable here..."	"We have this foodcart--SOVA cart in the Art Department, and I completely run that. I buy everything. I keep everything stocked. I make sure like we buy enough stuff that sells. And right now I'm in the process of getting donations from certain like places like for coffee for our SOVA carts. We have that for free, and a better type, and um, and you know I'm writing diversity grants and proposals and all that stuff. And then part of SOVA, like part of my responsibility like is to be like, like a leader to the students, right? So I should interact with them more and for SOVA, to make our closeness we should interact... I feel like I have to do all this stuff. Like I just, I feel like I just have to... I have to like volunteer to make a difference or something."

CHILDHOOD EXCLUSION

"I had a lot of parents treat me badly because they knew I was poor and that I was Hispanic..."	"... some people told me that the parents called me a street rat because, um, where I lived... a girl, her dad was a priest and her mother was like a stay-at-home mom... she dropped off her daughter once to spend the night at my house, and she was never allowed to come back again because my neighborhood wasn't good enough..."
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FEMALE IMAGES (CAMPUS)

"Oh, we, um, what's weird is, ah, in the Art Department I think there's like way more females than men. It's strange because in every art class I have there's like one or two, maybe four men in each class if you're lucky, you know, if they're lucky or whatever. But most of the artists that are famous are <i>men</i> or making money are <i>men</i>. And I wonder if it's, um, because like I've heard some studies that like Ivy League schools, a woman will go there and they'll get like scholarships and stuff and they give them like a survey later, they say that they would give up their career for a family and marriage and a family..."	"... my painting teacher right now... he's very old-fashioned, and he's--when he says things he is kind of sexist. He told me yesterday, I should learn how to cook... that it was essential that I should learn how to cook. I was like, Oh my God, I could vomit."
"Most of the, most of the, yeah, most of the students are female [in the Art Department], most of the teachers are male."	"Um, like I said... there's not that many, um, female teachers in the Art Department, which is kind of discouraging."
"... many female teachers in the Art Department, the ones who are there, are very strong, positive role models."	"... just the fact that there were so many girls in the art class not a lot, you know, more successful me-male artists was interesting to me, so like I just, I was--like I always wonder... like how many women are here just to get their MRS degree?"
"Image of women... like for some reason like sorority comes to mind [laughs] or something. Which isn't a positive image for me... the Sam Spady thing... I felt that she's just revered because she was, you know, blonde sorority chick. Who would have cared if she was like the ugly fat chick or something?... that image projected, that projected a very bad image of women's seriousness in school."	[In reference to women on campus who started dressing more slutty] "I think appearance... can change people... I don't know, you dress that way, people see you in a different way and in return you act that way."

FEMALE IMAGE (PERSONAL)

[After saying she thinks women will give up their careers for marriage and a family] " ... I don't know, it kind of makes me feel like maybe I have a better chance because I don't [laughs], I don't want to get married and I don't want to have kids much... so I'm like, man, maybe I'm at an advantage because I'm not gonna get married and have kids."	"... one challenge of being female is that, um, um, well, I don't really tell much people this but I'm bisexual... I've lost a lot of female friends over that. So now I just kinda hide it... my sexuality's been a challenge as a female. Just afraid that I'm gonna push women away."
"I'm tryin' to think of it more from a female perspective. I've always kind of been a tomboy at heart. [laughs]	[When asked about having or witnessing any 'female' experiences on campus] "You know, maybe I never really thought about that too much. Um, because I've always been quite the tomboy. It wasn't until recently that I, I started looking like a girl [laughs]... I didn't buy a purse until like last year, you know? So I've been, like most of my guys--my friends are guys. And I've always just kind of thought of myself as one of the guys..."
"I don't, I don't know. I just never, um, until recently I didn't even really enjoy a lot of things that girls do. I don't--I hate shopping. [laughs] Um, I hate--I think I always didn't like it 'cause women were--they seem more backstabbing... then probably, um, my weight... Not having the body that I wish... Like they have the body that I want so maybe that was another reason I just like, you know, play it down."	"Do I think it [campus life] is the same for men? Ah, <i>no</i>."

RACIAL IDENTITY

"...all those kids were rich and White [emphasized] and it, it, oh, it bugged the hell out of me. I got like, like, um, I had a lot of parents treat me badly because they knew I was poor and that I was Hispanic..."	"It's something that's really important to me. Having a diversity just everywhere. I think it's every type of diversity... um, ah, so, I don't know, that kind of challenged me and not feeling like I <i>fit</i> in at first [at CSU]."
"... in the Art Department--I look White because I'm half and half, so it's nice like I--well, I guess it's not like, well I guess I kind of blend in so people don't like, exclude me, kinda thing. But then because I do blend in, I'll hear people say racist comments... I'm like, 'Excuse me. I'm Hispanic,' shut-up kind of thing."	"So I think that makes it even more important for me to finish. Especially as a Hispanic like to set, to be a good role model to other Hispanics, like not like, like I can't believe I've had so many cousins start and quit. And that looks so bad, like the stereotypical Hispanic..."

Table 4. JJ's Themes

Interpretation

These themes represented the core of JJ's narrative. It may appear I have included, perhaps, too many references. And yet I could have included an even greater number since there were so many rich, stirring descriptors. These details--I almost want to call them JJ's internal and external ecology, her bio-network--often overlapped, somehow bleeding into another theme and yet not fully belonging to that other theme. I felt JJ, more than any other participant, had certain identities and levels of personal understanding that seeped into the next and the next layer of meaning. The separation of themes, therefore, became more complex, more challenging.

As I said earlier, JJ's energy, her sense of purpose in a head-thrust, push-onward fashion toward what she wants for herself is what epitomized JJ for me. This sense, I

think, truly captured for me how complex our lives are and how certain experiences become "defining moments" in our lives, moments that then have the capacity to direct our personalities and life journeys depending upon how we internalize them.

For JJ one such defining moment was the exclusion she suffered because of her and her mother's financial "lack" set against a backdrop of seeming financial abundance, of a "rich" elementary school with well-to-do classmates. I think this was one early life event that fueled her ambition to "be the best" and JJ's "I'll show 'em" attitude. She has taken what she perceived to be a negative and made it a positive, made it work *for* her in her life. I found this admirable.

The disparity or binary gap would likely not have been so great (or so felt?) in a school or with friends from more similar circumstances, or where there was greater ethnic diversity ("... I was like one out of four Hispanics."). From JJ's perspective, the parents of some of these friends had condemned her on both economic and ethnic grounds ("... I had a lot of parents treat me badly because they knew I was poor and that I was Hispanic, like I'd always get blamed for stuff..."). Had some friends or their parents acted more accepting, perhaps such incidents would not have been quite so memorable for JJ, but as it stood these *are* signature events she remembered and selected and shared after I asked, "What societal characteristics influenced you in regards to your educational advancement?" so these experiences are obviously historic for her.

Along with this was the reality that there was a more "middle-class" existence in her dad's household than in her mom's poorer household, where she apparently spent most of her childhood. There was also a self-ascribed sense of "half-and-half" as far as JJ being half Hispanic and half White. And she also identifies with being bi-sexual. I have

to say that as we continued our discussions, the high frequency of the dual patterns in JJ's narrative continued to emerge.

In addition, because I was aware that I was looking toward employing a feminist lens, as I listened to JJ's story, I was also taken with another apparent duality in how she saw her own female image: she referred to herself as more *tomboy* than somehow *true* female, thus denying part of a more traditionally perceived or culturally cultivated *real female* nature. For instance, one of the explanations JJ shared after being asked if she thought males on campus experienced college life differently than females was, "You know, maybe I've never really thought about that too much. Um, because I've always been quite the tomboy. It wasn't until recently that I, I started looking like a girl... And I've always just kind of seen myself as one of the guys..." Later she added, "I don't, I don't know. I just never, um, until recently I didn't even really enjoy a lot of things that girls do. I don't--I hate shopping [laughs]. Um, I hate--I think I always didn't like it 'cause women were--they seem more backstabbing." JJ goes on to talk about how women are less directly confrontational (which she would prefer) and relates this to some vague incident with her stepmother, or her stepmother's personality:

I would rather you tell me the truth than, than start rumors or gossip behind my back. It's like--you got a--yeah, I'd rather be in a fight than be behind a fight with words. Like that's so much more hurtful to me. And I think women always, um, especially because of my stepmother, maybe, like they've always just seemed like I didn't like 'em a lot when I was younger. Like I thought they were just all really mean... um, my weight, stuff like that. Not having the body that I wish--like you

know? Like they have the body that I want so maybe that was another reason I just like, you know, play it down. I used to [laughs] dress completely like a guy so--when I was real little so--maybe that's why.

Just reading this again, I can't help but notice the denial of some culturally promoted concept of what is *supposed* to be *Female* in our society. JJ set herself apart from this perceived femaleness: she is "tomboy" and therefore on some inner and outer level *not like them*--not like "girls" or this cultural notion of girls or what women are to be like if they are to be *Woman*.

Along with the dual nature of JJ being "tomboy" yet female, there was this young woman sitting before me who was so aware of herself as a sensual being. JJ had her own definition of what constituted "slutty" and what it meant to be "sexy," and she had no problem enjoying being a woman and being sexy:

Sexy I see as more elegant, very feminine. I think it's, you know, if you're a woman it's great to be feminine, it's, you know, enjoy it... I see slutty as more a little girl thing, like a teenager, you know? Sexy is more of a mature woman, you know? And so I think it's great to show off your woman-ness, but just don't, you know, go around wearing *nothing*.

And yet there was also her bisexual nature, something she gets to hide if she wishes to because she has a boyfriend. This seems to again represent another duality in her life:

"Um, I don't know, um--for me a, one challenge of being female is that, um, um, well, I

don't really tell much people this but I'm, I'm bisexual... I've lost a lot of female friends over that? So now I just hide it?"

There is also the dual nature she experienced in her art classes. There is a dominant population of women students, yet there are more male art teachers in the department. There are more female art students, yet more successful, professional artists are male. There is a particular male art teacher who does not like her work unless it emulates his and this has her making the choice to do her own art her own way and receive a "poor" grade or conform her art to his standards and receive a "good" grade. Thus JJ said, "Um, he is the reason for a lot of my stress right now... He told me yesterday, I should learn how to cook." Later in discussing this situation she said,

Every painting we do is what he would do. We have no freedom in that class... you have to do painting exactly how he would do them or you're not gonna get a good grade. This last project we were doing, I was so frustrated and I wasn't getting anything he liked. And finally I just kinda looked at like what his favorite students were doing and I--which actually looked like what his paintings looked like--and I started doing that and all of a sudden he likes my paintings right now... I have absolutely no freedom as an artist in that class, and on top of it, he makes me feel like a really crappy artist.

Control issues also cropped up for JJ as far as safety on campus. While she at first hesitated, as though she hadn't thought about anything like this, she then explained,

Oh-h... you know what? I always call my boyfriend when I'm walking around at night 'cause he stays up late all the time. Um, and I make him talk to me as I get to my car and as I'm unlocking my car I put him on speakerphone. Yeah--no--I'm actually quite worried about that, especially being alone at night in the art building. Um, we have the run of things, you know, we can always find a way in, and it's great because we need--'cause sometimes we need till 6 A.M. to do our projects [laughs]. So, um, but yeah, sometimes I'll be alone in the room and I'm like, someone could walk right in here at any moment and kill me, or whatever. So sometimes that's scary but I try not to think about it.

She ends with the thought that she's "a pretty outgoing person," and I read this as her positive determination that she is not afraid to be doing this, or that she can deal with people, or perhaps any obstacle. I mentally tallied this to what JJ has already said about her ability to do or get what she wants if she wants it, no matter the obstacles. And because of this emergent pattern of duality, I see this, again, as the dual personal need to go after her "art" and finish her projects set against the fear of being out and about at night on campus because she *is* female.

I did not think, however, JJ observed this safety situation as anything "special," and this was part of my motivation for believing it is telling: there is the presence of high expectation for herself, for the display and fulfillment of her own definition of her female and intimate "success-or-bust" self-image cast against the "Female" of society as vulnerable within that society, even within the "safe" confines of a university campus.

MARYCATE

First Impressions

While MaryCate contacted me via e-mail regarding her taking part in the study, I initially thought her participation might not take place at all. We arranged a time and place for the first interview but she did not arrive. About ten minutes after the arranged meeting time, I tried to contact her via cell phone only to reach her with an incredibly poor connection. It wasn't until later that afternoon, when I called on a landline from my home, that I realized she had forgotten where we were supposed to meet. Troublesome contact with her seemed to mark our communication: our e-mails to each other seemed hit-or-miss ill-timed attempts at meeting times, and I soon realized that I could not use my cell phone to call her since this produced (for whatever reasons) garbled conversations. It also came out much later that due to the automatic blocked-number feature on my phone, MaryCate would not always answer her phone unless she knew who was calling since she was concerned with people asking her for money, bill collectors and solicitors. I describe this to paint a more accurate picture when I say that I was concerned I might lose our communication for the study.

MaryCate and I did meet about a week later than our originally scheduled date. Even this meeting proved a little different than my previous interviews because she arrived earlier than anticipated, and our room was not yet available. Since I was concerned about the amount of time she had actually allowed for our interview, I verbally

explained a few basic procedure points in the hallway outside the conference room as we waited for another meeting to end, so we could have a space for our interview.

When I first saw MaryCate the word that immediately came to my mind was *rebel*. This is due to the fact she wears a kind of blue/gray/faded khaki hat that reminds me of a Civil War uniform. Her hair is an ashy blond, perhaps about shoulder length that falls toward her back. She stands nearly eye-to-eye with me, so I guessed she was about 5'3" or 5'4". I also thought she looked a little, well, a little like me: she had light blue /green eyes, had a light complexion, and a slightly crooked but easy smile. Impish. And maybe--either because of the slant of the hat down her brow or the way she seemed a bit disheveled as though caught up in a rush--there was a rough-around-the-edges, no-nonsense, no-frills current somehow spilling itself around her.

As we get settled in the conference room, she makes sure it is okay if she samples some of the snacks I set out for her. I said that of course they were for her. And as we finished reviewing the consent forms, I feel some of her "rush" give way. I also came away with a sense that MaryCate, more so than the other participants I interviewed seemed to be taking it all in, the *all* being this experience of "college" and what that might comprise.

MaryCate's Story

MaryCate's mother was twenty when she had MaryCate and her parents divorced while MaryCate was still quite young. Since both of her biological parents remarried, she has a good number of siblings: a seventeen-year-old brother, a thirteen-year-old half-

sister, a ten-year-old half-brother, and three stepbrothers. When MaryCate was ten, her biological dad died, and she adds that after he died his wife (her stepmother) became an addict and lost her children to Social Services. MaryCate has little contact with her stepbrothers, and the man her mother married has "pretty much" been her dad since her biological father died. MaryCate says that it's a pretty fun father-daughter relationship since "Um, he's only twelve years older than me." However, she also adds, "... my family is very, very poor. Ah, we were homeless for a really long time."

MaryCate hadn't really thought about going to college until her senior year in high school. She describes herself as "kinda like a space cadet" in high school but that she always got good grades. While her mother wanted her to go to college there was no family money to help MaryCate toward this goal, and the reality is that MaryCate has been on her own financially since she was sixteen. It was during her senior high school year when MaryCate was meeting with a high school counselor that she says she got more focused toward attending college. She says, "Um, I was kind of, I'm kind of a momma's girl, and so I wanted to stay close to my family..." Colorado State University (CSU) was the only college to which she applied.

She admits that at first she was a little scared because she didn't know how to be apart from her family. She says her family does not come from money, "... we are very poor. And, um, the only money I was getting at the time was from my job and from my dad's Social Security benefits." When MaryCate turned eighteen, the benefits stopped. Although she had not managed to save any money for college from her job at Albertson's, she applied, got accepted and then applied for financial aid. As MaryCate states, "I was

gonna go for it." She managed to get a job at the dining hall in Ingersoll Hall at CSU and saved a little money from that the summer before she began her first semester.

As for her family's expectations for her, while there was no pressure to excel, they were thrilled because MaryCate was the first person in the family to graduate from high school. Her mother and father both got their GEDs, so her graduating from high school was a "... really, really big thing." Everybody just assumed she was going to college because she had done so well in high school, and this helped her decide on college:

Soooo I went to college and like everybody was like sooo proud of me, like they didn't even care--just the fact that I got accepted, the fact that I got a First-Generation free ride, the fact that, you know, I was actually attending out of all my cousins, all my brothers and sisters...

However, they did not *expect* anything from her. She adds,

I guess that I should have mentioned this before but one of the main things that I wanted to go to college for *myself* was, was because I didn't want to end up like my mom or my dad. And struggling for money every day and borrowing money every day and, or owing people money all the time or you know, just all the struggling, I just didn't, I don't want to be like that. And so the only way that I won't be like that is if I go to college, you know, get an education, and make something of myself. And so that's basically what kept me going was that and, um, so the end of the semester I was just like, you

know, I'm gonna do it.

Her friends from high school didn't go to college and her boyfriend was a third year senior in high school, so there was not any great expectation from her friends towards going to college. Of her ex-boyfriend, MaryCate says, "... so he's gonna graduate high school finally when he's twenty" and explains, "I was like the only person out of all my friends just really doing the whole college experience, so I really didn't have anybody to talk to. I didn't have anybody to share it with." She does offer that "all of them" thought she should go, telling her she was "gonna do something" with her life, that she was gonna be great at it. They seemed to hold her up as the token one out of all of them that would do it. In this regard, they helped her. When I brought up the idea of her being a first-generation student, she is not certain what the definition is but says, "I guess it's kind of a big deal..." She laughs as she adds, "... and it gets me money."

When asked if she considers herself a leader, MaryCate replies that she does and mentions that she had taken on leadership positions in high school. She was a section leader in band and was also a leader in Link Crew, which she explained was an association to help high school students transition into college. She also likes being the "first" in her family to do things and sees this as leadership as well.

Her first year of college went very badly, mostly because she not only missed her family but was having relationship troubles with a boyfriend. She explains that since she was in Marching Band, she had to be on campus a week before classes began and ended up nearly getting a speeding ticket within an hour after arriving, "... for going three, it was three or five, I can't exactly remember, over the speed limit, and I didn't have insurance because I couldn't afford it at the time." The officer gave her a break because

she was crying and so upset not only because of the possible ticket but because she was on campus alone without her mother or her boyfriend.

Although she missed her mom and she found band camp exhausting, she felt more at ease when other students arrived on campus. But MaryCate and her roommate did not get along:

She partied every night. She was from Fort Collins so she knew where all the parties were. I had class at nine in the morning. She didn't have class till two in the afternoon. She would party until four a.m., come home, turn on the TV, turn on the lights. Don't give a rat's butt about anybody else in the room.

MaryCate thought her roommate was an alcoholic, and so this was another stress factor during her first year on campus. There were also the large classes and the fact that MaryCate did not get the one-on-one attention from her college professors:

... jumping into a five-hundred person class and just learning it by yourself pretty much. I mean, yeah, you get notes and stuff like that but that was a really big challenge just basically going from high school through college. 'Cause high school, I mean, you have the one-on-one relationship. You have, you know, your friends right there. The friends that you've pretty much gone to kindergarten with. You know everybody. Everybody, everybody loves you, you love everybody. That type of thing like, it's the same, it's in the same like surroundings since for four years and then all of a sudden you're in

this huge basic little town by yourself, nobody around you. None of your loved ones, in this classroom full of five-hundred people. No one-to-one student-teacher relationships. I mean you could get it, but I would take a really long time--like twenty-five-thousand students compared to your two-hundred-eighty graduating students. It was just a really, really big change. Like I love people. I love to be around people. I love to talk to people, but that was so many people at once that I didn't know what to do with myself.

She says she still finds herself trying to cope with the size of her surroundings.

During this first semester on campus, she and her boyfriend of three and a half years broke up. MaryCate felt responsible, saying, "... I blamed the fact of us breaking up on me leaving, going to college. And so I wanted to move back, I wanted to go back to Denver." She thought she could attend college somewhere closer to Denver, and it was so lonely for her at CSU during this transition. Finally, she decided to give CSU one year, but this year was extremely difficult for her. She had started her college career as a Life Sciences major only to realize she really hated chemistry ("I hate chemistry with a passion...") and had no preparation for it. Originally what had made her choose science was that she was intrigued with the television show *CSI* and wanted to go into forensic pathology: "I thought that was the coolest thing ever and like I'm totally going to school for that I just, I basically want to do something I'm gonna love. But I don't want to have to go through hell to get there." She soon realized that she "can't do" chemistry. Her chemistry professor added to her difficulty when he told her that, "... monkeys can get twenty percent" on his test when MaryCate had gotten a thirty percent. His office hours

for extra help coincided with other classes she was taking, and he was not available any other time; he was not going to "tutor" her. She says she was happy when this first semester ended: "Well, so finally first semester ends and it was, I was so glad for it, like I started sixteen credits and I finished six."

In addition to grade difficulties, MaryCate missed her family, particularly her mother, and she was trying to get over her boyfriend. During this time, she also learned she was pregnant and then suffered a miscarriage, so she was emotionally overwhelmed. She is aware that she spent her entire first semester focused on trying to get over her old boyfriend,

And, um, after we had broke up, it kinda went downhill. Like I found out I was pregnant. And that I had a miscarriage... it was just a lot of really, really hard to cope with things. And things that I couldn't tell my mom... 'Cause my mom hates him with a passion and when we broke up was the happiest day of her life even though it was the worst for mine. And so like just things that I couldn't share with her or anybody else that I just had bottled up inside. And like so I did like all that first semester. I saw a counselor. You know, to try to deal with things.

She also had a college advisor who suggested she visit the Academic Advancement Center (AAC) because the center helped first-generation students. She says that she is grateful for the free tutoring she received,

And so like I get like about, I think about five-thousand a year from them and they give me free tutoring, so that helps a lot because that's like helping me, you know, focus on if I don't study outside of class that gives me an hour to focus on it. And, um, so the tutoring is helpful...

She visited the AAC her first semester. She offers that she has not been back to the Counseling Center, that she has not "really found the time to actually get in there" even though her mother thinks she should go: "She bugs me every day about going... she thinks I have anger management problems, and I think she does too..." She says she is "planning" on making it there sometime.

One bright spot for her that first semester was Marching Band, and MaryCate credits this with keeping her at CSU. She also made a best friend, and MaryCate explains that they shared many of the same kinds of troubles that first semester. At the close of the first semester, the Marching Band went to San Diego for a Bowl Game "... and that was the funnest thing ever." But when she got home around 6 a.m. Christmas Eve, everything was not good, and she is emphatic when she says,

Like I hate going home. Even though I hated being up in Fort Collins, I hated going home just because everything's bad at my house, like money situation is bad, like I don't get along with my mom very well right now or then. Now either, but like, and especially because like I didn't want to go home and risk seeing _____ [name intentionally left blank] who was my boyfriend. I just like, it was just a bad situation.

She admits that something happened during the month she was home between first and second semester; she decided to change her attitude. When she arrived on campus for her second semester, MaryCate says, "I was like okay, well, I'm, I want an' I was like thinking I'm gonna do good, I'm gonna change around what I've been doing. I'm gonna, you know, just change it." This second semester she changed her major to Apparel Merchandizing and dropped only one class.

She felt more used to things her second semester although she knows she does not have very good study skills. She hates studying and reading. She says that during her first semester she felt,

Oh my gosh. I have no idea what I'm doing. My high school didn't help me with anything. Like get me ready for anything. I was lost and confused and torn up and [laughs] really just, you know, still trying to deal with the fact that, you know, I'm not at home anymore. I am an adult. *I need to grow up* type of thing.

She believes what truly turned things around for her was the summer after her second semester. She worked at Pingree Park and because it was isolated and she didn't get to visit home or call her mother very much, she learned to be on her own. This experience helped her move on from her past, from her high school experiences and taught her to focus on her present,

... as soon as I realized like what Pingree helped me with and what that second semester helped me with and, you know, knowing that I'm actually an adult 'cause like I turned nineteen over the summer...

MaryCate says, "I love it now." She realized she needed to "move on" and "deal with life better" and so far things are good.

Even though she is living away from her family, she is still helping them financially,

I got a thirty-five-hundred-dollar refund check this past semester. I have been ending up giving my mom about four thousand dollars, so that way they can get a house 'cause they got kicked out. And so basically I'm supporting them right now because they're in such a bad state.

A positive facet of her family's financial struggles is that they serve as a reminder to MaryCate regarding what she *does not* want in her life:

... basically that's the main thing that's keeping me going because I do not want to struggle. I do not want to worry about money... everything that makes the world turn is money, and it's pretty pathetic but--that's one of the main things.

While having or getting money is a main factor toward her staying in college, MaryCate also wants to emulate her aunt. She looks up to her mother's sister who at thirty-two, is married, but child-free, lives in Washington, D.C., works at the United Nations and "makes about a hundred grand a year." MaryCate considers her "very successful," and says of her aunt, "She's married, she loves her life, and that's exactly how I want to be." MaryCate feels both women, her mother and her aunt, have helped her with her educational advancement.

I took this a step further and asked whether or not having children factored at all in "loving you life" for a woman? MaryCate thought it depended on the woman, but she felt having kids would probably help you more emotionally than financially, saying, "Kids don't help financially at all." She thought that for herself, having kids when she was older and more established in a job would be better, easier and added that having them would still be a challenge but she thought having them would be more fulfilling.

When I asked her about what image of women the campus projected, she said, "Ah... I don't know [laughs] like I mean like I don't really, I hadn't really even thought about that." Since she seemed confused by this question even after I give her a prompt or two, I let it go. But after she had talked about the many challenges she faced during her first year on campus, I asked her if she thought there were any she faced because she was female rather than male. After a few moments, she thoughtfully responds, "Maybe if I had been male, it wouldn't be as hard to leave home." She feels this way because she had talked to her brother and other males on campus and apparently it seemed easier for them than it had been for her. Her brother specifically was "fine" with not wanting to be home.

Reflection

MaryCate's transcribed interview was the shortest of the four interviews. While our initial interview lasted a bit over an hour, our follow-up interview took place over the telephone after we had trouble connecting in person a second time. During the interval between our first and second interview, MaryCate's grandmother had died and her mother was in some trouble with the law, so MaryCate's time and energies had been consumed with family issues. In addition to this, she was trying to study for fall semester finals.

While such family circumstances would more than likely distress anyone, it did not surprise me that the *uber-connect* with family and relationships that appears to characterize MaryCate's life would capture her attention. After speaking with MaryCate, I felt that the relationships in her life, even when she discussed attempts to *disconnect* from some of them, dominate and, in some instances, engulf her. It is this relational aspect that carries the spotlight throughout her narrative.

There is a sense of her being different from her family, yet she is, of course, very much part of her family. She also seemed almost adult in her position of "saving" the family financially and in being financially self-sufficient. She also expressed her need to be "an adult" in separating herself from her family, in being able to *not* need them, to *not* call or be with them. An ongoing relationship with her mom seemed strikingly prominent.

As MaryCate spoke she would use "you know," which was reminiscent of JJ's interview. However, I did not feel MaryCate did this to either garner approval or to forge

a bond between us (as I thought JJ had). Rather MaryCate utilized it to punctuate what she meant, as in "This is how it is, you know." It was also stylistic; another person might use "er" or "um." She employed "you know" in almost the same manner that she used the term "basically," seemingly out of habit or as a catch phrase.

Many of MaryCate's challenges had to do with "freshman" transitional concerns: lack of knowing anyone on campus, homesickness, lack of "college knowledge" of what to expect. This was made all the more stressful because while she wanted to "do" college, she didn't want to leave her boyfriend or her family. As she was learning to separate, she learned she was pregnant, then miscarried. These are, to be sure, all extremely emotional components but are exacerbated when one has a decidedly relational nature. She is still processing her life and what all her experiences mean to her. And to experience all this at eighteen and yet find that strength in oneself to remain in college, I think, is remarkable.

A driving force for MaryCate was not so much being wealthy, but not being poor, not having to struggle, not having the life her parents have. She sees college as her way to a brighter future, one like her aunt has achieved. I sensed MaryCate was searching for a direction since she wanted to have a job she enjoyed. Yet the immediate goal was to stay in college, that this was needed to aim her life in a direction *opposite* of her parents' life course. To this end, she was glad for a scholarship via a First-Generation Award but did not seem overly focused on money for college. If I did derive a personal expectation from her, it was simply that she expected she was "gonna do it" and use college as a vehicle for a *better* life. It appeared she took her self-agency for granted or was less aware of deliberate planning. There is more a sense of getting on with it or getting *through*.

Analysis

While the initial questions I had developed for the study influenced my thinking at the outset, all analysis codes were induced from each narrative. As I said, MaryCate's was the shortest interview. She did not share any journal entries and her transcript included sixteen single-spaced pages of interview material, as well as the Interview Protocol sheet.

While I would have liked to meet with MaryCate in person for a follow-up interview, she chose to conduct this second interview via telephone. Prior to this, I was able to transcribe and review her initial interview and so questions related to this first interview guided follow-up questions. Follow-up questions were kept brief as I made notes on her answers. A copy of the follow-up questions are included in the Appendix.

As I had done with both JJ's and Fay's transcripts, I read and re-read MaryCate's narrative in an attempt to induce codes and possible themes.

Here is a sample of codes that emerged from MaryCate's narrative:

Family	Boyfriend as negative	Money
Very poor	First-Generation	Parents as negative
Homeless	Friends	Academic achievement
Work	Aunt as role model	Pregnancy/ Miscarriage
Expectations	Keeping things inside	Grades
Marching Band	Career	Help Centers
Chemistry	Involvement	
Adulthood	Separation	

Table 5. MaryCate's Codes

MaryCate's Themes

Again, themes from the other interviews overlapped, in part due to the thrust of the initial questions and also from first-year, first-generation related issues such as lack of knowing what to expect in college, family connections, and personal possibilities/expectations, to name a few. And again themes of a more personal nature emerged.

Following the same procedure with MaryCate's narrative as I had employed in both Fay's and JJ's stories, I took notes in the margins of the typed transcripts: to the left were codes and in the right margin I made notes for possible themes. Here are the themes I uncovered followed by representative quotations:

RELATIONSHIP/ CONNECTION

"... me and my boyfriend had more and more problems and in October we ended up breaking up... I blamed the fact of us breaking up on me leaving, going to college. And so I wanted to move back, I wanted to go back to Denver."	"Um, well, I guess I could say like my mom when she had me she was twenty. When she remarried my step-dad, who is pretty much my dad since my dad died when I was ten. Um, he's only twelve years older than me--it's a fun father-daughter relationship"
"... my family's pretty big and I'm the oldest out of <i>all</i> of them."	"... I wanted to stay in-state because I had a boyfriend who I wanted to stay close to... I'm kind of a momma's girl, and so I wanted to stay close to my family..."
"I worked up at Pingree Park... And working up there helped a lot... 'cause I was like isolated, like I didn't get to go home <i>every</i> weekend. I didn't get to call my mom <i>every</i> day. I didn't get to talk to _____ [name of boyfriend] all the time and so it really helped me move on from my high school, my past to present."	"... I would <i>die</i> without seeing my mom for three months, like I still can't do it--I can't go three months without seeing my mom. I see her every other weekend at least."

MONEY

"... my family does not come from money at all, like we are very poor. And the only money I was getting at the time was from my job and from my dad's social security benefits... And as soon as I turned eighteen, I lost that. And I pretty much had been on my own financially since I was sixteen, and so I was really scared..."	"... my family is very, very poor. Ah, we were homeless for a really long time... I have been ending up giving my mom about four thousand dollars so that way they can get a house 'cause they got kicked out. And so basically I'm supporting them right now because they're in such a bad state..."
"And I didn't manage to save any money for college... except for the summer right before I went... now I work at the dining hall in, at CSU in Ingersoll dining."	"[on being first-generation] ... it wasn't exactly defined to me but I kinda knew that I was and I know that it's a big thing, and it gets me money [laughs]."

CHALLENGES

"... at first I was kind of scared 'cause I didn't know how to be apart from-- my family does not come from money at all..."	"My first year of college was very, very bad. Um, like I said I came into college with a boyfriend. Um, we were having a lot of problems..."
"... my roommate was not a very good roommate..."	"Like I found out I was pregnant. And that I had a miscarriage and then like--so that was even worse and then like just, it was just a lot of really hard to cope with things. And things I couldn't tell my mom."
"My first semester was just like, 'Oh my gosh. I have no idea what I'm doing.' My high school didn't help me with anything. Like get me ready for anything. I was lost and confused and torn up and [laughs] really just, you know, still trying to deal with the fact that, you know, I'm not at home anymore. I am an adult. I need to grow up type of thing."	"Well, so finally first semester ends and it was, I was so glad for it, like I started sixteen credits and I finished six. I had never taken chemistry... my professor said monkeys can get twenty percent on his test. And I got thirty percent on his first test..."

EXPECTATIONS/ MOTIVATION

"Like I didn't start like really thinking about it until senior year. I mean, I went through high school and I was kinda like a space cadet but I was really good in high school... I always got really good grades..."	"Um, I'm the first person to graduate... from high school... And I graduated with honors. And I graduated second in my class. Um, and so that was a really big thing. Um, and then so everybody just assumed that I was going to go to college... you did so great in high school, you're gonna do great in college."
"And so, you know, I decided to apply anyway, get accepted, and I applied for financial aid and I was gonna go for it."	"... when I went back for like second semester, I was like okay, well, I'm, I want an' I was thinking I'm gonna do good, I'm gonna change, change it. And I ended up only dropping only one class."
"... one of the main things that I wanted to go to college for <i>myself</i> was, was because I didn't want to end up like my mom or my dad. And struggling for money every day and borrowing money every day and, or owing people money all the time or you know, just all the struggling, I just didn't, I don't want to be like that. And so the only way that I won't be like that is if I go to college, you know, get an education, and make something of myself. And so that's basically what kept me going..."	"I love it now."

INVOLVEMENT

"But the good thing that turned out for me... was Marching Band, and what kept me going to CSU was Marching Band."	"Um, well, Marching Band was a big help 'cause I love to play my instrument and I love to play music and perform."
"... and they give me free tutoring, so that helps a lot because that's helping me, you know, focus on if I don't study outside of class that gives me an hour to focus on it."	

FEMALE IMAGE

"Another main thing is like I look up to my aunt a lot. My mom's sister. Because she lives in Washington, D.C. She makes about a hundred grand a year. She, um, like she works for the UN, like she is a very successful woman, and she is like thirty... She is like thirty-two and she has no kids. She's married, she loves her life, and that's exactly how I want to be."	[From a follow-up interview via telephone: [when asked whether or not having kids factored into her idea of "loving your life" for a woman] She replied that it depended on the woman. She thought, however, that having kids would probably help you more emotionally than financially, saying, "Kids don't help financially at all." She thought having kids when she was older and more established in a job would be better, easier. She still considered having them a challenge but more fulfilling.
[when asked what image of women the campus culture projected] "Ah... I don't know [laughs] like I mean like I don't really, I hadn't really even thought about that."	From follow-up interview via telephone: [when asked if she felt there were any challenges she faced because she was female rather than male] "Maybe if I had been male, it wouldn't be as hard to leave home." She said she felt this way because she had talked to her brother and other males on campus and apparently it seemed easier for them than it had been for her. Her brother, specifically, was "fine" with not wanting to be home.

Table 6. MaryCate's Themes

Interpretation

While the above themes represented the most apparent ones in MaryCate's narrative, I cannot dispel the sense that they were all interlaced within a vast web of *Relationship* for MaryCate since this was the overwhelming "story" I received from her. I say this with the understanding that all of us have lives created with and from

relationships, that we all have relationships in our lives that encourage or discourage us to varying extents; however, for MaryCate and where she is in her life and in her development toward independence, there seemed a greater superimposed, conscious influence of her remaining intricately woven with the threads of her past relations while she sorts out a safe, "adult" place for them in her present life and in the life she wants to some day achieve.

Perhaps unlike Fay or JJ, MaryCate gave the impression of someone running away from something she didn't want, more so than aiming herself toward a specific target like, for instance, Art for JJ or Journalism for Fay:

... one of the main things that I wanted to go to college for *myself* was, was because I didn't want to end up like my mom or my dad. And struggling for money every day and borrowing money every day and, or owing people money all the time or you know, just all the struggling, I just didn't, I don't want to be like that. And so the only way that I won't be like that is if I go to college, you know, get an education, and make something of myself. And so that's basically what kept me going...

Yes, MaryCate has a "can do" attitude that the other participants share, and she does see college as the vehicle to get her "there." (Or more accurately sees college as a means to get her "away" from her parents' life circumstances.) But her actions to get to college appear more haphazard than either those of Fay or JJ. This seems especially evident when she says, "Like I didn't start like really thinking about it until senior year. I mean, I went

through high school and I was kinda like a space cadet but I was really good in high school... I always got really good grades..." and

... I never really got... exact focused to it till senior year and then I was meeting basically with my, um, counselor, my college advisor, whatever, and, you know, tryin' to pick out a good college for me..."

It is interesting that MaryCate says that she hadn't really focused on college while later, during a second interview, she shared that she achieved a leadership role in Link Crew in high school and that this organization aided high school students make the transition into college. Colorado State University (CSU) was also the only college she applied to. While she certainly could have applied the next year or possibly the next semester to a community college or Metro State or a more local-to-Denver college as she said she had thought about (since she wanted to stay in state and close to her family), this would seem more of an alternative, an unnamed plan B. But since MaryCate did get into CSU, there is no way for me to *know* what she would have done at the time if she had not been accepted; I can only conjecture from what she has shared. I did feel, however, that *she* too would not be sure what her specific next step would have been.

At present, MaryCate appeared to approach her educational future with what I would term a "wide-angle lens." That is, she views *college* as a general thing that she needs to "do" so that she may escape from a life yoked to economic struggles reminiscent of her parents' circumstances. While this may prove true for her, she did not seem to *as yet* identify a deeper personal meaning for gaining a college education, such as aiming

herself at a particular career choice or earning a college degree in order increase the possibility of future life choices (choice of career, lifestyle, social relationships, etc.). She may or may not sense this at some deeper level, but from her narrative and what she did share, I did not consider this her focus.

Yes, she did say she originally wanted to be a forensic pathologist, but this choice was informed by a popular television show, *CSI*, and once she became informed about the realities of the science aptitude necessary for a pathologist, this career choice lost its luster. MaryCate did not make another choice within a physical science-related career but instead changed her major to Apparel Merchandizing, a seemingly vastly different area. A sentiment I thought was significant was when she said,

Well, at first it was kind of *CSI* 'cause I wanted to be a forensic pathologist. I thought that was the coolest thing ever and like I'm totally going to school for that, and then it didn't work and so--but now like, now I'm an Apparel Merchandizing major, which is pretty much fashion, I guess--like I really like people, like clothes and matching and stuff like that, so I think that would be like a really cool career. I just basically want to do something I'm gonna love. But I don't want to have to go through hell to get there.

So while the thought of a particular career may have helped her decide on going to school, on going to college, I did not have the sense she had fully investigated forensic pathology as a real choice of career for her. Rather, because of what she had seen on television, it was "the coolest thing ever." When she did get further information in the

form of a class in chemistry, which she attempted twice without personal success, she switched majors. Obviously, switching majors is a common practice for many college students as they discover what they like and don't like, what they excel at and what they do not excel at. The point here, however, is that what MaryCate was going to do "later" seemed less important than "college" overall and that now Apparel Merchandizing was also "a really cool career."

Just being in college and remaining there was enough right now. And I found this hugely practical for her. Again, close relationships are a fundamental draw for her, and she credited her involvement with Marching Band as keeping her in college; Marching Band provided a smaller arena where she could belong and a place where she could share a common interest with others. I felt as though this interest in music and performing, one she had had in high school as well, acted as a transition activity for her. It was something positive she had in her past, which she now brought forward into her present. For MaryCate to be in college and to successfully remain there has been a tremendous leap, both physically and emotionally, as she has had to take a step away from her family and an oppressive past history. And this was not a small step for her. She forced herself through a barrier of personal fear in order to make her way to college.

MaryCate stressed that her family is poor, saying, "... my family does not come from money at all, like we are very poor," and later in the narrative shares that she, in fact, received a large refund check and gave nearly four thousand dollars to her mother to make sure they could get into a house. While many students worry about college expenses, her "fear" took on other dimensions; it was not only being able to afford college, I think, but also being on her own away from her family away at college in risky

economic circumstances. She had been homeless before and apparently her parents were homeless once again. Since she had been on her own financially since she was sixteen, this contributed to her fear about not only going to college, but affording college. When she turned eighteen she lost her father's Social Security benefits and this lack of money translated into additional fear of attending college "poor." She said, "... so I was really scared and my mom said, 'Well, if this is something you decide to do... I will not be able to help you.'" The point was that her mother wanted her to go to college but could not offer anything financially. Within the first few months of being in new campus circumstances, in large classes that she felt ill-prepared for, she also broke away from a three-year relationship with her boyfriend and on this heels of this, experienced a pregnancy and miscarriage. To say that all this is a lot for an eighteen-year-old to handle is would be absurd understatement.

And yet she determined she would stay in college.

MaryCate does possess the self-motivation to stick with college, but there was a consciousness on her part that understood she needed to leave certain things behind her in order to remain in college. I say *remain* in college rather than *graduate* from college because I think MaryCate's narrative pointed up the fact that she needs to take everything slowly a half-step at a time, and that extricating herself from her past appeared to take a good deal of her energy. She was aware that she approached college with a poor attitude when she offered,

... like I viewed it, I went in not wanting to go in even though I did deep down. I went in not wanting to be away from my boyfriend, I went in not

wanting to be away from my family. And it just, it didn't help being an hour away. Even though that's all it was, was an hour. It still was very hard. But now, now that I see it, you know, all those things just held me back from doing what I could do. And now that I have learned to let go, I am doing all that I can do.

Connection was vital to MaryCate's well-being. She was torn over leaving her family, torn over leaving behind the environment she knew and the people, the relationships she knew. I believe the idea of "relationship" not only encompassed a relationship with others but MaryCate's relationship with herself. She has one self-image of who she is, who she appeared to be based on her family and her past experiences and then there was her self-image of who she *can* be. I do not think it unusual for an eighteen-year-old first-year college student to feel torn; actually, I think it is a ubiquitous experience, a part of "growing up." However, MaryCate's story indicated that this separation was particularly difficult for her. She had to not only separate herself from her family, a family that apparently needed their eldest daughter emotionally and financially, but she also had to separate from that other person she was in high school, in order to "make it" in college and now become a "college" woman.

Since this is her "fight" she remained focused on it. I mention this because when I asked her a question regarding what image of women she thought the campus projected, she seemed genuinely confused, saying, "Ah... I don't know [laughs] like I mean like I don't really, I hadn't really even thought about that." I interpreted this confusion two different ways: first, she is so consumed with her own personal challenges to take note of

something like this, and/or two, thinking about this on a conscious level is simply not within her critical-thinking arsenal as yet. The first is a practical interpretation and while the second, I think, is practical in its probability, it disturbed me because I question then what this eighteen-year-old young woman's educational exposure has been to female-related issues. I think, however, MaryCate was brilliant in her simplicity when she said, "Kids don't help financially at all," which I can't help but think is what she personally experienced as one of many children growing up in an economically "poor" household. She also shows maturity of thought when she added that having kids when she was older and more established in a job would be easier, and even though they would still be a challenge that this would be more emotionally fulfilling for her. And this fulfillment-from-family may be something she experienced as well.

MaryCate was both drawn back by the undercurrent of her past and thrust onward by the memory of its harsh reality. Maybe this was the "rushing" I felt spilling about her at our first meeting.

ANGEL

First Impressions

Angel is a little late. When she does arrive she mentions some trouble finding the room, apologizes. (The room is tucked into a darkened hallway.) I introduce myself, shake her hand, and tell her to help herself to the snacks I have set out on a nearby table. After some debate, she chooses a cookie.

The moment I meet Angel, I think exactly that--she is angel-like. What strikes me the most are her absolutely wholesome good looks. From her shiny deep strawberry-blonde hair to the apples in her high and otherwise porcelain cheeks, she visually seems to me the stereotypical everyone's-girl-next-door. Slightly tall and slim, Angel would be the college girl you would trust to baby-sit your kids, the young woman you'd want your son to date, the surrogate daughter you wish you'd had.

We meet in a brightly lit classroom on the second floor of the Education Building on campus. I find myself thinking it is not as cozy as I would like. There are no windows. The overhead lights grind down on the too-white tops of the long rigid tables, lined up like canned sardines to mimic the stark, square outline of the empty walls. In the far corner along a direct line with the doorway, there is a tiny cubby area half-sheltered with an accordion-type floor-to-ceiling partition meant to separate what looks to be a self-help kitchenette break-space closeted within. It does nothing to cheer the place and looks abandoned long ago.

Yet I want our meeting to be pleasant for her, and I am relieved when she happily takes a seat to my left and seems relaxed as she munches on an over-sized cookie I've laid out in a spread before her. While I am at ease with the interviewing process, during all the interviews for the study I find myself breathing a sigh of released tension when my participants at least seem happy to be here.

I fuss a little with the cans of soda and the assorted goodies I've brought and turn my chair in toward her in an attempt to make "our space" more intimate. I think I want especially to do this because the room seems even more horrendously bleak against her apparent warm nature. Angel is laughing and continues to take small bites from the large cookie she holds as we begin.

Angel's Story

Angel has three siblings and was raised by a single father. At the time of this first meeting, her mother was in jail, "... for her sixth or seventh DUI or some kind of number of DUIs. One of her sisters is her identical twin. Angel says she is "angry at the world" and her sixteen-year-old sister is in ninth grade for the third time. As she continues to discuss her family she adds that she has a brother who is twenty, a year older than Angel, and "... he lives at home, rent free. So I'm the only one that's actually productive right now, and it's cool." Her father is very supportive since she's moved out on her own, but financially she uses "loans and stuff" to manage.

It hurts her that her mom keeps going back to jail and this colors her background because she says her mother has always been in and out of jail. She adds, "But

unfortunately, I'm the only one she has when she comes home, so--I'm kind of scared of what to do because she gets out in a couple of weeks." This is a concern in her life right now. Angel says she has always felt that she had to break away from her family and was self-motivated to "do school." She was involved in the pre-college program, Upward Bound, during high school, which she said aimed her in the direction to attend Colorado State University (CSU) since she already knew the campus (because of the program) and received a renewable scholarship in order to stay at CSU.

In high school in Greeley, Colorado, she was in the college-prep program Upward Bound, and she says that this "pretty much directed me to go to CSU because I already knew the campus well, and I got a scholarship that's renewable to come here." She just wanted to get a degree; "You want to try to be successful..." she says. She adds that she really likes Fort Collins, and did not really like Greeley, and we laugh a bit about the odor of the cattle feedlots in and around Greeley.

Her family did not have any expectations about her going to college because they all dropped out in high school. Her voice lowered a bit as she says, "So, but, I just try to be--I try to keep in touch with them about like--they do ask you know, how I'm doing, so I guess in a sense they really do expect me to do well since I'm here. And I put myself here, you know?" Later she adds, "Mmm... they seemed proud. We never really talk about it. I guess they have enough going on. Enough drama that they don't really think about it, but my dad acts proud of me..." She adds, however, that her brother says, "Yeah, you shouldn't go to college. You should just drop out like I did" and that her little sister says, "Who needs college?" Angel says that she has a twin sister who was discharged from the Navy who also saw no use in college.

And yet Angel does see college as important, "Yeah. Big time. I think it's really important." She does not remember when she decided this but knows that she was very young. She does know that she has felt this way "... for as long as I remember..." and that,

... like in school, the earliest I can remember for my childhood is like part of kindergarten and mostly like elementary school, I always got As and I, I always tried to get As, you know? And I don't know where it came from because I think I told you before that I never had parents that told me to do well and told me how important education is. It must have been from a teacher or somewhere-- I don't know.

To explain her feeling, she says she thinks attending college will help her to reach her potential: "I don't feel like a high school degree is enough for me. I don't know. Not only money but like just, you know, to feel like you've done something in your life--that's important, basically. And it's fun." She laughs after she says this.

Besides the generic definition of first-generation--first to graduate high school and go to college--she says she really doesn't know what else being first-generation means to her, but upon thinking about it for a moment then adds, "Except for the fact that I think you can call yourself a first-generation student when you're in college, but I don't think it would mean much if I were to drop out before getting a degree. 'Cause, yeah... I would be the first to go to college but I don't think it means anything until I get a degree."

Her feelings concerning her first semester at college center around the partying atmosphere: "... freshmen partying--that was a problem. 'Cause I'm not gonna say I never touched a drop of alcohol." She thinks that during second semester, after winter break, her attitude "flipped," and that she began to have better time management skills. During the second semester, she was also happier, and she attributes this to getting more used to the college and her classes and working at Cooperative Extension on campus. Since completing her first college year, Angel says she feels relieved because she is doing better managing time and handling stress. She feels the first year "... was a big learning experience." Her "balance" was better second semester, and now she is working on increasing her grade averages.

When I ask her about friendships she says,

I just found some close friends and I'm really outgoing, so I met people randomly like everywhere and we talk like in classes or when I see them and stuff, you know. So I didn't feel lonely or anything but I don't know--I just felt like--out of place kinda? Sometimes first semester--and I don't really know why cause I was involved in like Residence Hall Association and stuff. So I was involved in clubs and whatnot. I just didn't feel like I fit in here, but now I really do, so...

We discuss any family dimensions that influenced her choice to go to college:

Okay, so I think basically with this one--a lot of people that grow up with my background either like totally 180 degree turn or some people conform to like

what their family does. So I feel like I was just one of those that learned from my family's mistakes. And like, I don't know if this sounds bad but like I really don't want to turn out in their situation. Like--so I was just always motivated in school and I don't know why because--no one was ever there to tell me what to do so-- but it was cool like-- It feels like I'm more independent now because of my childhood. So that helps, um--and a lot of times like instead of dealing with their problems, I'll just go study. Which was cool. Just a good outlet.

She adds that there were some societal factors that influenced her towards pursuing a college degree,

I think the major one is obviously, like, how everyone tells you, you--to get a good job, you need a degree. So that was always incentive in itself. Just to keep with education and seeing people that were on the low end, like income made me really sad for them, but also made me more motivated to not like, if you don't have to put yourself in that situation--like I think education is definitely power. I just, I just believe in that so--that's basically what I've seen from society.

One of the first-year challenges she identifies is that her mother was "... giving it to me *a lot* because she didn't finish high school and she didn't understand that I was busy." Angel feels sadness and guilt over her mother's situation with abusing alcohol:

And it was--it made me sad because I felt like it was my fault she got in trouble again because she turned to drinking when I wasn't there for her. She turned back to like drinking and driving, which was really sad [voice gets very low and small]. So that really got me like in the Fall. And I think that's why I drank a lot with my friends--just would go through periods like just being really sad--I don't know. It was, it was kind of crazy, but I got through it, and I feel a lot better. Um, an' when she went back it was during Spring Break, during--to jail--so that was kind of hard. But I was also a lot stronger second semester. So... I don't know... like... there were, there were times when like I just didn't want to get out of bed but I did it. Like I found the strength somehow. So--I don't know... It really helped though to have my dad to talk to, like I could just call him and talk to him about my mom. That helped a lot...

It helped Angel to be at school, to be at college, and she loved Colorado State University and loved learning. She felt that attending college helped her cope by giving her something else to focus on besides her family: "Like I don't really have to think about my family a lot when I'm busy. So I really like to be busy and with classes and involvement."

Another important coping strategy that sort of found her that first semester was her Christian faith. She met a campus minister for Christ Christian Church and kept running into her. She says that she felt guilty because she never went to church. Angel explains,

... I never went to church because let's just think about Saturday night... what do most college freshmen do probably? Party. So I felt really guilty about that. And I kept running into her last year, so I felt like it was fate, like oh, kinda. And I never went to church last year and then finally I started realizing toward the end of the year that I should probably do that. So the end of the year I felt--also in her second semester I felt better about my grades once I was... back into Christianity. Like I'm grateful cause like God seriously changed my life...

Going to church has become an important piece in her life. This is a core part of her identity:

... my faith in God has increased so much just like through this fall and--I don't find it quite incidental that I'm doing better in school this year because of going to church. Like I don't find that a coincidence at all. Like I think it kind of goes hand-in-hand. 'Cause I feel like I care more about life ever since I had more faith in God. Like so I feel that's a really good aspect of my life right now.

As far as her own expectations concerning college, she says that it was all she expected it to be except for the stress. While she did expect some stress, coping with college stress in light of the dealing with her family's problems proved hard. She says that during her first year, she exercised "a lot" adding, "It got bad." She said that people thought she was anorexic because of how often and how much she worked out. Along

with that she guesses that she really didn't eat enough. As we are discussing this, we add into the tape that, just for the record, Angel is slim and tall, maybe 5'7" but she presently is not "skinny, skinny." Now she says that she is "...exactly normal if not even a little bit over average for optional body weight." Of that excessive working-out time she says that it was hard for her when people judged her and that this made her want to isolate herself.

Although Upward Bound did help prepare her for college, Angel says that she was not prepared for everything she encountered. First, she felt shocked just finally being on campus, and then multiple factors shocked her, like the pressure of grades, the close quarters of the residence halls, and the immaturity of college students:

... the biggest shocker... I can't pick one. It was just--it's not that it freaked me out or anything. It was just so weird because it seems like a community here to me, which is great. But it was also a shock knowing that, um, pressure with grades. And I thought a lot about--well, I don't want to fail in class because I've already put money into it, you know? And it was a shock in the residence halls. I didn't imagine them to be that close to everything. Like everyone's so close in living conditions. And a lot of like, like the riot-type stuff that has been--a couple of years ago--going on... that was a shock because I didn't know people were gonna be so crazy still. I mean we're in college, you know. It's where I hope people grow up, you know. 'Cause like, I got--I got so frustrated with high school. People being so immature and playing little stupid games. Like thinking violence is funny and just being angry and loud and obnoxious. So I just didn't expect that, to see that as much as I did first year.

While she admits drinking too much and exercising to excess that first semester, she says she is "over that" and does not want to "...be my mom..." During her second semester while Angel did drink socially with her roommate a few times, she realized that drinking was not for her.

Something that helped focus her attention away from this was getting involved in a campus organization her first year. She became involved with Residence Hall /Student Council and says that this was fun, "So that was fun. Um, that kept me pretty busy with a full, with more than a full-time load, so I got my wish of keeping busy all the time."

She finds it sad that she never was involved in anything to do with First-Generation activities: "This is the sad thing is I forgot to turn in the scholarship for First-Gen, so I never got that and I never was involved in any of that." [voice lowers] When I asked her which group she identified more with--first-generation, college student, or female at this point in her life, she chose a college student and believes that there is a sense of community among students as college students:

Because like although I feel women and men are so different (?) on campus, I feel like we're all, we're all in the same situation like when it comes down to it with the grades and exams and tuition, you know? Like that's why I just feel like a community... So like just like a college community. Like I just feel like any other... student in that sense.

Even as she says this, I find it interesting that she seems perplexed when I ask her about a female image on campus and then try to phrase this differently for better comprehension and say, what did you think the average woman on campus would be or look like. She still doesn't answer, so I modify this and ask "Were you ever in a classroom where you questioned anything about gender issues, or did you ever walk into a dorm room and see something that made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable as far as--I mean did you ever even think about it?" Angel seems to think I am asking about transgender issues. So I restate my question, saying,

When you got to campus, how did you think the campus itself--and the campus itself could be anything--it could be how you're treated in the classroom, by a professor, um, it could be posters on a wall in a dorm or in a classroom or in a hallway. It could be how people talk to you, if you felt that there was some, ah, maybe, difference between the way someone may have spoken to you as a female and someone else who is not female. Anything like that.

She still hesitates before admitting she doesn't know if she's going to get this "right." I tell her that whatever she says will be right. With this, she discusses living in Greeley compared to living on campus in Fort Collins:

... Um, it really wasn't much different than where I grew up, like Fort Lupton and then went to high school in Greeley. About like the interaction between people (?) But on campus I did notice that--I don't--I don't even know how to

put this--a lot of people weren't as--I don't know--accepting to someone than it seems like. Like certain places--like I'm not saying as a whole but--like certain places you would walk in or I would walk in with a group of girls and they would just--I don't know if they were staring to be--I don't know--like to be rude or not but--a lot of people just stared at me and my friends like everywhere. And it kind of freaked us out at first but then we got used to it.

Her point is that she didn't feel as if she belonged in certain places. She says, "It seemed like people were being judgmental of us even without words. But we got used to that." She got this impression the first time she and her friends went into the Student Center. She says, "... we just felt rejected there." Other than this, she said that she thinks, "... culturally, it seems like a lot of people look the same here on campus." When I ask her to be more specific she says,

Like they dress the same. Like last year I noticed that it seemed like a lot of people have school pride, which is good and--just kind of the same type of clothing so--I don't know. Except as I get a little bit older, I notice that some people do dress way too revealing... Mostly girls...

She adds, however, that in her estimation compared with what she witnessed in her high school, she thought the guys on the college campus were more respectable (towards women):

Like in high school guys would be sick and kind of twisted, and if they're like friends and whatever and grabbing each other, and here it's more relaxed and it's nice to be around people that actually want to learn. But other than that, the image... I don't know. It's hard to say cause I'm so used to--I don't know... A lot of people did dress more, um, scandalous there [in her high school]. So I guess it is a lot different. I'm just--I don't usually think about that, to be honest with you.

But as she discusses "revealing" clothing, she adds that she has seen women on campus who dress too revealing. She defines this as,

Like shirts that are--like if you ... like remember... the dress code rule that it's supposed to be at your fingertips? Like these are like mid-thigh length skirts or shorts... Shorts. And things hang out and ah...

Such attire makes her feel uncomfortable, but when I ask her to explain why it bothers her, she can't and instead says,

It just does. I like, I don't feel comfortable around... um... really like almost naked attire... I can't pinpoint why I feel that way. Like I believe that it's just --I think it's degrading to women when you dress like that. Like I don't really care what people would say about them. It's just how I feel, you know? Like I think that they should respect themselves more. I don't know, because obviously guys tend to like gawk at someone like wearing something more revealing rather

than a suit...

She recalls a time when a friend was walking around the residence halls and near the front desk wearing a lingerie outfit and remembers that this made her feel uncomfortable as well. Angel says,

Um, it was definitely like really low cut. A lot of cleavage was hanging out and [laughs] she was wearing--like it was just really short. I don't know, I just--but after awhile she was wearing it. She had been drinking. I think that has a lot to do with it.

Angel thinks that in some instances drinking and wearing revealing clothing are "correlated" and adds, "I think some people can tend to wear a little bit more revealing clothes rather than if they were sober." When I asked her if she thought women experience life on campus the same way men do, she said "No" as though I should know this for certain. When I affirm my opinion of the vigor of her quick, resolute answer, she said that she just thought that men and women were "too different to see things in the same light... I just think that there's no way we see the same way, especially on campus."

She also believes that men drink more heavily than women on campus, in general, and when I ask her why she thinks this might be true, she says that maybe it's "motivation." When asked to explain, she answers, somewhat confused, "Like studying, but morals in general, I guess. Just in life."

I ask if she thinks girls are supposed to have more morals than boys. "Yes!" she responds, then explains,

And you know, I think that society definitely has put that label on... women.

That's another thing on campus actually that I've, that I seem to notice. I don't know if this is just me being hyper-aware or paranoid or something, but I always feel girls are supposed to work harder, you know? Like, and they, they just have to work harder for the respect that some guys get. Like, for example, in, um, one of my classes--I don't even remember the name of the class. It was like two summers ago. Um... the professor just seemed to... expect more from the girls than the guys and like just kind of shrug it off if a guy would walk in late or--you know what I mean? He just seemed more, um, favorable of the males in the classroom... Like he, he wasn't rude to the point where it was like something to complain about, but it's just--seemed like he respected the boys in the class more. Like that's basically all I have to say about it, like...

She continues by saying that she does not recall why she felt this way: "No. It just was something I felt like. I don't know if I was, like I said, I don't know if I was just paranoid or being a feminist or whatever you want. I don't know." [laughs]

Since she has mentioned feminism, I ask her if she thinks there is anything wrong with being a feminist, and she says no. When I ask her how she would define being a feminist, she answers, "Um, to be just for women's rights and equality... That's about all I know."

When I continue this line of discussion by asking if she ever made a different choice or decided not to do something because she was female, Angel hesitates quite some time. I find myself trying to give her mild prompts, all the while realizing I want to aid her understanding without leading her toward any thought or interpretation. Finally I offer, "Um, can you think of any other times that you think you may have done something or maybe not walked one way and walked another way--" Angel interrupts me, sharing,

Oh yeah... Oh yeah. Like in high school--Oh, this should be about college--but in high school, I avoided so many parties because of just having things about like GHB and all those other date-rape drugs that were so big at that time. And I'm very like more cautious than I used to be, just because of things that have happened. Like I don't usually walk outside at night alone. I don't--I don't know, I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know, but I know I still do it, you know?

She is worried about walking around on campus at night, but admits that sometimes she procrastinates and then does not have a car and must still get somewhere:

Um, actually I was worried about that a lot last year for some reason, so that's why I started just riding my bike because I figure if anyone wants to mess with me I'll just try to hit 'em or something.

Since we are on the general subject of discomfort with her surroundings, we continue to talk about Greeley a bit, especially since she has commented in her journal entries regarding specific instances in Greeley that made her feel uncomfortable. In one such entry she wrote that she had firsthand "experienced the stereotype of women":

I was in Fort Lupton and it brought back memories of my childhood there... The diversity compared to Fort Collins is really prevalent. Women like my friends and I have to be careful in that culture area. I will be honest in saying, I was definitely afraid of many of the men staring at me so much. It made me a little upset when I wasn't even wearing revealing clothes and that I still feared harassment.

She added that she was grateful that she was permanently in Fort Collins and she added that being in Greeley "Creeps me out for the same reasons Fort Lupton does." She goes on to explain the circumstance:

I'm sitting alone in the truck, waiting for Courtney, and I'm worried and keep the door locked because there are group [sic] of Hispanic men standing across the parking lot and they're staring, which makes me quite uncomfortable...

Sometimes I just wish I wasn't a female due to the fact that I'm a scared person in these situations, especially when I'm alone.

After reading this in her journal, I ask her to elaborate.

Basically, um, going back to Greeley and Fort Lupton, like especially the downtown area? There are a lot of Hispanics. And I'm not racist in any form. It's just that a lot of them are the stereotypical kind of creepy, stare at you, like walk really close to your vehicle and just keep walkin' by, like they're gonna do something. Even if they don't, they just appear like that. Um, so the difference, um, growing up there, I was always used to it until I came here. And this is definitely the whitest city I've ever lived in. So I don't ever see people like that. And I'm not trying to be judgmental to the point of like saying I hate them or really dislike them. It's just, it's hard for me to go back and deal with that.

She says that it is this kind of fear that makes her wish, at times, that she was not female:

It was just in that situation, I wish I wasn't because I shouldn't have to be afraid as a free citizen an' sitting in a truck, in my property. You know? I shouldn't be afraid of groups of men. Like I felt, I just felt helpless, you know? If they were to come and do anything. I felt like, okay, I wish I wasn't female right now cause--or I wish I had a guy with me, you know?... Yeah, more protection...

On campus, she says that she does not feel threatened in this way:

I don't feel threatened here, in Fort Collins, and I never have. Like there have been nights where I've had to be up late and out walking alone and I was scared of that fact, but I've never felt threatened being here, at all.

She thinks a lot of this has to do with the "college atmosphere." (Because she is finding her voice now and continues discussing female dress issues, I don't mention that she has said that she did in fact worry about this. Since she is continuing her discussion and begins talking about it, I think her comment is interesting when held up to another comment she has made, that she did in fact worry about walking alone on campus at night, offering, "... just riding my bike because I figure if anyone wants to mess with me I'll just try to hit 'em or something.")

Angel is saying that while she does not feel threatened, there are times when she feels she has to dress or be a certain way,

... I don't know, just generally? Like for overall campus I feel like--girls are supposed to be like respectable and kinda keep quiet at certain times and, you know, not gossip as much. Like, you know, compared to high school. Like you know what I mean? Like talking and--like out at work I just feel like I have to... make sure and not wear like certain clothing, of course, like a dress code. Try to be business-attire like... So I just--they never tell me that I have to dress a certain way. I just kinda feel that way like with all the professional women there. I feel that I have to live up to the standard so--I don't know if that really... anything, but--

It is when I ask her to relate a story or a situation where she felt strong as a female that Angel hesitates again. I wait and then ask her to relate a time, perhaps, where she felt particularly weak or powerless. With this I see Angel's growing discomfort. I allow the silence to accumulate for a moment. Finally she says,

Um... I don't know. Like I don't know very many stories about where I felt that strong. 'Cause I just feel like sometimes I'm just another dot on the map, you know? [laughs slightly] So, um, I don't really like the stories of when I felt powerless... they are bad memories... but I'll pick one that... let's see... [silence]

I am ready to move on, to end her apparent discomfort when she says,

I don't, I don't--I'm sorry. I'm trying to think... um... okay, I'll pick you an easy one. Um, one of the times my mom had just gotten out of jail--like I'm the only one she has to come to--and like I'm the only one that opens my door to her. I felt really strong because I finally told her that I could not try to take care of her anymore 'cause I have to worry about my own life. So I felt really strong at that point because it's something I held onto for so long about being hopeful that she'd change and trying to get her to change and giving her support and money and--you know? So, so I felt really strong when I finally just came out to her and told her the honest truth that I can't try to raise her anymore [laughs now but the entire time she says this, she is sounding sad, her voice low, quiet] She was really upset.

It finally made her realize that she'd screwed up. Like even though she didn't say that, I know she realized it because she just got this look on her face like kind of like a look of *I'm Sorry*, you know? And, um, exactly what she said was... um, she actually kinda got a little bit angry, which I could understand. She, ah, told me that she couldn't believe I was abandoning her and giving up our relationship and ... she kept using excuses about how I'm your mother and you can't ever do that to me, you have to be there and blah, blah, blah, tryin' to put me on a guilt trip for not doing anymore. But she now knows I can't [sounds resolved here]. So that made me helpful. Like in my own life it made me feel better about--you know? Just that whole situation. [voice very small at this point]

As Angel discussed this further, she explained that her mother had gotten out of jail recently and showed up at Angel's door, bags in hand:

Um, it was last Monday, and she showed up out of nowhere at my apartment with boxes, and finally yesterday she left after saying for five days in a row that she was--that time that I got home from work or school or a meeting or blah, blah --she would tell me every day last week that she was gonna be gone when I came home 'cause it was illegal for her to be living there. She didn't get approved to be on the lease, so it was illegal. And I wasn't comfortable with that. And I finally made her realize, so it's fine.

She says that there are "very few" proud or powerful moments for her. And when asked if she has any stories or situations where she felt a particularly proud moment for her, she said,

That's hard. There's kind of very few of those [laughs]. I don't know why.

Just--I don't feel that much different, you know? So I don't feel--I kind of feel

--I know I'm a lot different than the average person, but I don't feel like I have that many moments where I'm really powerful at this point.

She is, however, proud of her family in trying to turn their lives around. It also makes her feel happy when she visits her family and feels like she is getting through to them. For instance, Angel talked to her twin sister when she had been discharged from the Navy and was not doing well. She said they sat and talked about "everything under the sun" and Angel felt like her sister went away from that a little bit stronger, "So that kind of made me proud there. It might have helped her a lot so--I'll never know for sure but it might have."

I ask her what she believes constitutes a competent woman. Angel answers,

Um, definitely someone that lives up to their potential. Like not necessarily potential that society want to give them but what they feel. And a competent woman is also someone that's, um, that tries to succeed in their life as best they can. Like go to work and school or whatever they may have scheduled.

The female role models in her life include her boss at Cooperative Extension, who Angel describes as going, "through a lot and she's making it for herself really well," and a cousin-in-law. She thinks there are women in her church who are good role models, and says, "It's really nice to look up to someone that's been through similar things and see them succeed. Then that gives you hope that you can be there someday. So it's nice." While she know that college is not for everyone, Angel also thinks that education has a place in making for a competent woman:

Um, I don't know if I'm just sucked into the whole... education is the only way mentally, but in this day and age, I don't know where I would be working, so--I'm not saying that's for everyone cause I understand that some people just don't want to do college, you know? But I totally feel that way for, at least personally. And for a lot of my generation cause that's almost the only way you can be really successful...unless you have your foot in the door in some other place.

I ask what she might change in her life if she could? There is no hesitation. "Money," she says, and then "I wish I were not taking out student loans for this year. That's probably the main thing--money. 'Cause everything's about money. And I hate it [laughs] but it's just the way it is." She knows, however, that if it weren't for those loans, she wouldn't be attending college classes: "I don't know, if I could change money then things would go, go a lot smoother. But I guess not everything can."

Reflection

Angel's interview seemed to be the easiest to conduct for some reason yet also the most intense for me because I often felt as though I had to work extra diligently not to lead her toward a certain path of thinking and answering. While she talked freely about some things, I also had the sense that she felt there was some supremely right answer she needed to find. She used "I don't know" often, and I personally felt this was more by way of an apology to me as much as I tried to assure her that whatever she shared would be exactly fine.

Unlike MaryCate and her uber-connect with her family, Angel finds that keeping herself busy with college classes helped her distance herself from family problems. As a coping mechanism, this appeared to work for her.

Angel also realized she is part of her family but that she is not necessarily one of them or like them. While she obviously cared about and for her family in a multitude of ways, she found *herself* by distancing from them, almost by insulating herself and her goals from them via mindful concentration on her schoolwork and by physically living at-a-distance from them.

I did not get the impression that Angel felt inclined to act as savior for her family even though there was her admitted sense of guilt over feeling as though she contributed to her mother's continued drinking. However, when her mother sought to move into Angel's personal space (her apartment), Angel was not willing to take on her mother's troubles, which I would think was a marker of her own growing maturity, strength, and

ability to separate. The relationship or lack of relationship with her mother did not take a lead role in her conversations.

As Angel spoke, she would often use, "I don't know" after or before offering an answer, and I think, again, she wanted to get or make things right. My guess would be that this reflects a sense of lack of control she may have felt in her home life and/ or in dealing with her mother's alcoholism versus the control she is presently not so much wielding over as *growing into* her own life now through her college studies and her separate, self-chosen college environment.

I also had the impression that there was something "alone" about Angel. This is not to say that I felt she was "lonely." However, unlike the other participants, she offered little by way of involved shared-relationship-identity: there was no mention of past boyfriends, no deeper investigation of relationships to others. Yes, she felt close to her church, but there were no telling stories there she felt she needed to share. Yes, she did have a talk with her sister, which she hoped helped her, but she offered no deep illustrations of "personal relationship" that seemed to come to the fore naturally for other participants. Instead, I sensed Angel knew she had a need to focus on herself in order to achieve her educational goals. This is by no means selfish in a derisive definition but rather a healthy commitment to her own interests so that they (and she) may prosper. I envision this as creating her own environment to the best of her present ability.

Analysis

As previously stated, the original interview questions influenced not only my thinking but the tenor for the participants' answers. Yet all codes were induced individually, that is, from each separate narrative. The transcripts of Angel's interviews included thirty-two single-spaced typed pages of material and two pages of (her) handwritten journal entries. There was also an Interview Protocol sheet.

As I had done with all transcripts, I read and re-read Angel's narrative in an attempt to induce analysis codes and possible themes.

Here is a partial illustration of the codes that emerged from Angel's narrative:

Family	Guilt for Mom's drinking	Community
Money/ loans	Love of learning	Male protection wanted
Self-Concept	Involvement	Faith
Separation from family	Image of females	Control: image of women
No pressure from family	Campus culture	Race
Self-Motivation	Comparison with high school	Professional image
Challenges	Lack of familiarity with college	Revealing clothing (of others)
Fit	Immaturity of actions (of others)	Alcohol
Habit as binding	Church as escape	Education = success
Positive outlets	The Future	"Power stories" hard

Table 7. Angel's Codes

Angel's Themes

Themes overlap due to questions asked at the outset of the first interview with each participant, but then personal themes from the narrative emerged as each participant, and as Angel here, responded to secondary questions generated by her responses.

To unearth the themes present in Angel's narrative, I jotted notes in the right and left margins of typed transcripts, allowing for codes on the left and possible themes on the right. Code repetition signaled patterns, and patterns of thought/ response led to prevalent themes. Below are emergent relevant themes and their illustrative quotations:

FAMILY

"... my family doesn't really have any expectations about school 'cause they all dropped out in like high school. So, but, I just try to be--I try to keep in touch with them about like--they do ask, you know, how I'm doing, so I guess in a sense they really do expect me to do well since I'm here. And I put myself here, you know?"	"... she's like angry at the world... freakin' out. And I have a little sister who's in a lot of trouble. She's sixteen. She's in ninth grade for the third time. My brother is twenty. He is a year older. And he lives at home, rent free. So I'm the only one that's actually productive right now, and it's cool. But anyway, um, yeah, but other than that my dad's really supportive, like not financially 'cause I use loans and stuff. But like, he's really supportive after I moved out."
"I don't know, like I guess it's kind of hurting that my mom keeps going back to jail... But unfortunately, I'm the only one she has when she comes home, so--I'm kind of scared of what to do because she gets out in a couple of weeks."	"Okay, so I was raised by a single father. I have three siblings. My mom is actually in jail right now for her sixth or seventh DUI... I have a twin..."
"... I never had parents that told me to do well and told me how important education is..."	"Mmm... they seemed proud. We never really talk about it. I guess they have enough going on. Enough drama that they don't really think about it... [her going to college]"

CHALLENGES

"And after a first year, I feel really relieved because I'm doing a lot better this year with time management and handling stress and ... so I feel like that was a big learning experience last year, and I did a lot better second semester and now I'm working on increasing the GPA."	"Um, my mom was giving it to me a lot because she didn't finish high school and so she didn't understand that I was busy. She always took it as I didn't want to come visit her... it made me sad because I felt like it was my fault she got in trouble again because she turned to drinking when I wasn't there for her... So that really got to me in the Fall. And I think that's why I drank a lot with my friends..."
"... freshmen partying--that was a problem. 'Cause I'm not gonna say I never touch a drop of alcohol."	"... college was definitely like what I expected it to be except for stress factors. Like I always knew it was gonna be stressful but I never thought I would feel--like with my family and just everything..."
"... it's not that it freaked me out or anything. It was just so weird because it seems like a community here to me, which is great. But it was also a shock knowing that, um, pressure with grades. And I thought a lot about--well, I don't want to fail in class because I've already put money into it, you know? And it was a shock in the residence halls. I didn't imagine them to be that close to everything. Like everyone's so close in living conditions. And a lot of like, like the riot-type stuff... that was a shock because I didn't know people were gonna be so crazy still. I mean we're in college, you know. It's where I hope people grow up, you know. 'Cause like, I got--I got so frustrated with high school. People being so immature..."	"Money [what's the one thing she would change in her life]... I wish I were not taking out students loans for this year. That's probably the main thing--money. 'Cause everything's about money. And I hate it [laughs] but it's just the way it is... if I could change money then things would go, go a lot smoother..."
"... I would exercise <i>a lot</i> last year. It got bad. People thought I was anorexic because how much I worked out... I guess I coped with that by not eating enough."	

MOTIVATION/ SELF-CONCEPT

"Yeah. Big time. I think it's [a college education] really important."	"Like my faith in God has increased so much just like through this Fall and--I don't find it quite incidental that I'm doing better in school this year because of going to church."
"Well, I was in a pre-college program during high school called Upward Bound, so that pretty much directed me to go to CSU... I got a scholarship that's renewable to come here... And I also just wanted to get a degree. You want to try to be successful..."	"... I think you can call yourself a first-generation student when you're in college, but I don't think it would mean much if I were to drop out before getting a college degree. 'Cause, yeah... I would be the first to go to college but I don't think it means anything until I get a degree."
"I don't know. I don't feel like a high school degree is enough for me... Not only money but... to feel like you've done something in your life--that's important, basically. And it's [learning] fun."	"... I love CSU, and I like learning. I like trying to do well... Like I don't really have to think about my family a lot when I'm busy. So I really like to be busy and with classes and involvement."
"... how everyone tells you, you--to get a good job, you need a degree... seeing people that were on the low end, like income made me really sad for them, but also made me more motivated... like I think education is definitely power."	"Um, I don't know if I'm just sucked into the whole... education is the only way mentally... But I totally feel that way for, at least personally... that's almost the only way you can be really successful..."
"... a lot of people that grow up with my background either like totally 180 degree turn or some people conform to like what their family does. So I feel like I was just one of those that learned from my family's mistakes. And like, I don't know if this sounds bad but like I really don't want to turn out in their situation. Like--so I was just always motivated in school, and I don't know why because--no one was ever there to tell me what to do..."	"Like I don't know very many stories about where I felt that strong. 'Cause I just feel like sometimes I'm just another dot on the map, you know? ... I don't really like the stories of when I felt powerless... they are bad memories... one of the times my mom had just gotten out of jail--like I'm the only one she has to come to--and like I'm the only one that open my door to her. I felt really strong because I finally told her that I could not try to take care of her anymore 'cause I have to worry about my own life. So I felt really strong at that point because it's something I held onto for so long about being hopeful that she'd change and trying to get her to change and giving her support and money... I felt really strong when I finally just came out to her and told her the honest truth that I can't try to raise her anymore..."

BELONGING

"I just found some close friends and I'm really outgoing, so I met people randomly like everywhere and we talk like in classes or when I see them and stuff, you know. So I didn't feel lonely or anything but, I don't know--I just felt like--out of place? Kinda? Sometimes first semester--and I don't really know why 'cause I was involved in like Residence Hall Association and stuff. So I was involved in clubs and whatnot. I just didn't feel like I fit in here, but now I really do, so..."	"But on campus I did notice that--I don't--I don't even know how to put this--a lot of people weren't as accepting to someone than it seems like. Like certain places--like I'm not saying as a whole but--like certain places you would walk in or I would walk in with a group of girls and they would just--I don't know if they were staring to be--I don't know--like to be rude or not but--a lot of people just stared at me and my friends like everywhere... It seemed like people were being judgmental of us even without words."
"We were going to a meeting in one of the lounges, and I don't remember what the meeting was for but we just felt like rejected there."	"Um, last Fall I did meet this lady, Andrea, who is a campus minister for Christ Christian Church on campus... And I never went to church last year and then finally I started realizing toward the end of the year that I should probably do that... Like I'm grateful 'cause like God seriously changed my life..."

RACE/ FEMALE IMAGE

"Basically, um, going back to Greeley and Fort Lupton, like especially the downtown area? There are a lot of Hispanics. And I'm not a racist in any form. It's just that a lot of them are the stereotypical kind of creepy, stare at you, like walk really close to your vehicle and just keep walkin' by, like they're gonna do something. Even if they don't, they just appear like that. Um, so the difference, um, growing up there, I was always used to it until I came here. And this is definitely the whitest city I've ever lived in. So I don't ever see people like that. And I'm not trying to be judgmental to the point of like saying I hate them or really dislike them. It's just, it's hard for me to go back and deal with that."

FEMALE IMAGE

"I notice that, um, a lot of guys, it seems like guys here are more respectable whatever clothes they wear here. Like in high school guys would be sick and kind of twisted, and it they're like friends and whatever and grabbing each other, and here it's more relaxed and it's nice to be a around people that actually want to learn. But other than that, the image... I don't know. It's hard to say 'cause I'm so used to--I don't know... A lot of people did dress more, um, scandalous there [high school]. So I guess it is a lot different. I'm just--I don't usually think about that, to be honest with you."	"It was just in that situation, I wish I wasn't [a female] because I shouldn't have to be afraid as a free citizen an' sitting in a truck, in my property. You know? I shouldn't be afraid of groups of men. Like I felt, I just felt helpless, you know? If they were to come and do anything. I felt like, okay, I wish I wasn't female right now 'cause--or I wish I had a guy with me, you know?... Yeah, more protection..."
"Sometimes. I feel like I have to act really proper in certain situations... Like for overall campus I feel like--girls are supposed to be like respectable and kinda keep quiet at certain times and, you know, not gossip as much... like at work I just feel like I have to... make sure and not wear like certain clothing, of course, like a dress code."	"Yeah, I don't feel threatened here, in Fort Collins, and I never have. Like there have been nights where I've had to be up late and out walking alone and I was scared of that fact, but I've never felt threatened being here, at all."
"It just does [bother her]. I like, I don't feel comfortable around... um... really like almost naked attire... I can't pinpoint why I feel that way. Like I believe that it's just--I think it's degrading to women when you dress like that... It's just how I feel, you know? Like I think that they should respect themselves more. I don't know, because obviously guys tend to gawk at someone like wearing something more revealing rather than a suit."	"Yes! [girls are supposed to have more morals than boys] And you know, I think that society definitely has put that label on... women. That's another thing on campus actually that I've, that I seem to notice. I don't know if this is just my being hyper-aware or paranoid or something, but I always feel girls are supposed to work harder for the respect that some guys get. Like, for example, in, um, one of my classes... the professor just seem to... expect more from the girls than the guys and like just kind of shrug it off if a guy would walk in late or--you know what I mean? He just seemed more, um, favorable of the males in the classroom... Like he, he wasn't rude to the point where it was like something to complain about, but it's just--seemed like he respected the boys in the

	class more ... It was just something I felt like. I don't know if I was, like I said, I don't know if I was just paranoid or being a feminist or whatever you want. I don't know."
"... And I'm very like more cautious than I used to be, just because of things that have happened. Like I don't usually walk outside at night alone. I don't--I don't know, I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know, but I know I still do it, you know?"	"Yeah, sometimes I'm forced to [walk alone at night] 'cause I procrastinate, you know, and I don't have a car... Um, actually I was worried about that a lot last year for some reason, so that's why I started just riding my bike because I figure if anyone want to mess with me I'll just try to hit 'em or something."
"... culturally, it seems like a lot of people look the same here on campus..."	"I notice that some people do dress way too revealing... Mostly girls."

Table 8. Angel's Themes

Interpretation

I found it difficult to select Angel's themes. I kept trying to discover more hidden messages rather than the obvious ones derived from the influence of the questions Angel was answering. Angel seemed to stop herself from going on *into* a subject as she worked to find and relate the "right" answer. This left me trying not to lead her while also attempting to prod her comprehension if she seemed unsure of how to answer or proceed with a question/ answer. So while the themes here of *Family, Challenges, Motivation/ Self-Concept, Belonging, Female Image, Race/ Female Image* are in fact the themes induced from Angel's interview, I guess I had wanted or hoped for something deeper, more cunning somehow. This is in no way a reflection on Angel or her answers but rather

a disappointment in myself for perhaps not asking questions in ways that may have been more receptive for her and therefore more evocative.

Unlike MaryCate's interview answers that seemed to integrate Relationship, particularly Family Relationship, with so many aspects of her life, Angel did not dwell on family or relationship events. Yet Angel did seek to free herself from the boundaries of her family ("... I always felt like I had to break away from my family...") as far as siblings who openly disdain a college education and a mother who is alcoholic. Angel was aware that it is her own expectations for herself that must carry her through:

... my family doesn't really have any expectations about school 'cause they all dropped out in like high school. So, but, I just try to be--I try to keep in touch with them about like--they do ask, you know, how I'm doing, so I guess in a sense they really do expect me to do well since I'm here. And I put myself here, you know?

She believes "... education is definitely power" and feels that people who come from her kind of background can either gravitate toward that background or swing in an opposite direction. She represents an example of the latter when she states,

... a lot of people that grow up with my background either like totally 180 degree turn or some people conform to like what their family does. So I feel like I was just one of those that learned from my family's mistakes. And like, I don't know if this sounds bad but like I really don't want to turn out in their situation. Like--so I

was just always motivated in school, and I don't know why because--no one was ever there to tell me what to do...

Her family had "enough drama" in their lives and do not really concern themselves, it seemed, with their daughter who is in college. While Angel received emotional support from her father, her twenty-year-old brother told her to "just drop out like I did" and her little sister said, "Who needs college?" Her twin also "didn't see any use in college." Angel, however, loved to learn and found educating herself "fun." She said, "I don't feel like a high school degree is enough for me. I don't know. Not only money but like just, you know, to feel like you've done something in your life--that's important, basically. And it's [learning] fun."

Angel focused on her involvement in her life *now* at school and her "busy-ness" with her studies. She employed this busy-ness as a successful coping device, and it also supported her motivations toward gaining a degree. There was a separation, a buffer she erected and utilized between herself and her family. And this buffer appeared to be her interest, her busy-ness in her studies. She also was aware of the role guilt has had in her relationship with her alcoholic mother:

Um, my mom was giving it to me a lot because she didn't finish high school and so she didn't understand that I was busy. She always took it as I didn't want to come visit her... it made me sad because I felt like it was my fault she got in trouble again because she turned to drinking when I wasn't there for her... So that really got to me in the Fall. And I think that's why I drank a lot with my friends...

Angel admitted that she drank too much during her first semester on campus, but then realized this was not who she was. She said, "Like I did it socially second semester with my roommate a few times but every time I was like, 'What am I doing? This isn't me,' you know?"

Even though Angel separates from her family, I did not get the impression that she is "family-oppositional" as I did in MaryCate's narrative; there was no impression that Angel heads her compass point directly opposite from her family's situation. No, she does not want to be in their situation and even refers to her family's "drama." And she does want an education and does not want to be dragged under by alcoholism or dragged back into guilty feelings regarding her mother and her mother's (apparent) need for her. But while Angel was aware of this, she is looking forward rather than checking backward over her shoulder as though something might be gaining on her. Her manner in this regard seemed more like Fay or JJ and less like MaryCate although Angel did not choose to discuss specific career goals as both Fay and JJ had done when describing their respective pursuits of journalism and art.

As with all participants, Angel had that self-propelled stamina to achieve and to want to achieve in a higher educational arena. Perhaps I viewed her as a bit more like MaryCate in the fact that education itself, rather than any specific career path, dominated her discussion with me; Fay and JJ were apparently more focused, or at least more in tune with bringing up and discussing a particular career interest.

I did find Angel's self-concept interesting. While she had that inner drive for some kind of better life through education that I found with the other participants as well,

Angel also seemed less adept, at first blush at least, of discerning her own inner strength than the other participants. This sense on my part came about because of her overall quiet manner perhaps as much as it did from her near inability to point to any "powerful" or "proud" moment for herself when initially asked. It is only after much hesitation on her part and some gentle prodding on mine that she went on to describe a situation where she finally told her mother she could not take care of her anymore:

Like I don't know very many stories about where I felt that strong. 'Cause I just feel like sometimes I'm just another dot on the map, you know? So, um, I don't really like the stories of when I felt powerless... they are bad memories... Um, one of the times my mom had just gotten out of jail--like I'm the only one she has to come to--and like I'm the only one that open my door to her. I felt really strong because I finally told her that I could not try to take care of her anymore 'cause I have to worry about my own life. So I felt really strong at that point because it's something I held onto for so long about being hopeful that she'd change and trying to get her to change and giving her support and money... So, so I felt really strong when I finally just came out to her and told her the honest truth that I can't try to raise her anymore...

But as Angel related this, there was a distinct sadness in her, as though it gave her no pleasure to have had to do this while simultaneously providing her a tinge of heightened self-regard for being able to finally separate from her mother in this fashion. And while some of her inner strength may come, in part, from being able to separate from her

family, it did not make her happy to feel she was forced to do so in order to focus on herself and her self-directed educational journey.

When asked, Angel defined what makes for a "competent woman" by saying, "Um, definitely someone that lives up to their potential... that tries to succeed in their life as best they can. Like go to work and school or whatever they may have scheduled." Angel certainly fit her own definition; however, she found it more than a little difficult to point to any personal moments of pride:

That's hard. There's kind of very few of those. I don't know why. Just--I don't feel that much different, you know? So I don't feel--I kind of feel--I know I'm a lot different than the average person, but I don't feel like I have that many moments where I'm really powerful at this point... like I'm proud of my family in trying to turn it around, kind of... like I feel happy when like I feel a little bit of fulfillment when I go visit them and talk to them and feel like I'm getting through to them about how I want our relationships to go...

Separation from her family brought her a sense of personal strength but so did her hope that she may somehow help them change their family relationships for the better.

While separation from family took on particular import for Angel, she shared some similar first-year challenges with the other study participants. All participants presented some concern with grade pressures including Angel when she said,

... it's not that it freaked me out or anything. It was just so weird because it seems like a community here to me, which is great. But it was also a shock knowing that, um, pressure with grades. And I thought a lot about--well, I don't want to fail in class because I've already put money into it, you know?

The challenge of lack of money or not enough money or taking out college loans or having to spend so much money for college was also another concern shared by study participants. When Angel was asked what would be the one thing she would change in her life if she could, she said quickly,

Money. I wish I were not taking out students loans for this year. That's probably the main thing--money. 'Cause everything's about money. And I hate it [laughs] but it's just the way it is... if I could change money then things would go, go a lot smoother...

Angel also expressed "shock" with her initial physical environment in the residence halls and an expectation that college would also be a more "mature" atmosphere than what she initially found once she was actually living on campus. (Fay, another study participant, had shared a similar expectation.) Angel said,

And it was a shock in the residence halls. I didn't imagine them to be that close to everything. Like everyone's so close in living conditions. And a lot of like, like the riot-type stuff... that was a shock because I didn't know people were gonna be

so crazy still. I mean we're in college, you know. It's where I hope people grow up, you know. 'Cause like, I got--I got so frustrated with high school. People being so immature...

At present, Angel lived on her own off-campus, which, she said, was much better for her.

A few of Angel's journal entries intrigued me, as did her interpretation of what she wrote. In one, Angel had written that there were times she wished she were not female. When I brought this up during our second interview, Angel focused on making me realize she did not mean that she wanted any transgender operation to become a male. This seemed at the forefront of both her understanding and her desire to make me understand she didn't mean anything *transformationally physical* by what she had written. That instead it was *only* she was afraid as a woman, that being afraid as a female was acceptable somehow or at least more acceptable than wanting an actual operation not to be a female anymore. Even as we discussed this, I got the sense that just being treated in what she called a stereotypical female way (when she was afraid because she was a female being stared at and surrounded by a group of males) was not so bad or as extreme as wanting to physically, really, change from female to male. She did come to the conclusion that her feeling fear was not right, or just when she said,

It was just in that situation, I wish I wasn't [a female] because I shouldn't have to be afraid as a free citizen an' sitting in a truck, in my property. You know? I shouldn't be afraid of groups of men. Like I felt, I just felt helpless, you know? If

they were to come and do anything. I felt like, okay, I wish I wasn't female right now 'cause--or I wish I had a guy with me, you know?... Yeah, more protection...

In my estimation, Angel mingled ideas about race, female imagery/ or gender issues, and fear. (And I have indicated Race/ Female Image as a separate theme to point up the import of this in Angel's discussion.) She felt fear in the situation in Greeley she described above, and also mentioned feeling uncomfortable like this in Fort Lupton, where she grew up. Compared to what she felt in these two areas, she said she does not feel threatened in Fort Collins, or more specifically on CSU's campus. In part, she attributed this to a certain "college atmosphere." I said that she mingled race, gender, and fear because of statements such as,

Basically, um, going back to Greeley and Fort Lupton, like especially the downtown area? There are a lot of Hispanics. And I'm not a racist in any form. It's just that a lot of them are the stereotypical kind of creepy, stare at you, like walk really close to your vehicle and just keep walkin' by, like they're gonna do something. Even if they don't, they just appear like that. Um, so the difference, um, growing up there, I was always used to it until I came here. And this is definitely the whitest city I've ever lived in. So I don't ever see people like that. And I'm not trying to be judgmental to the point of like saying I hate them or really dislike them. It's just, it's hard for me to go back and deal with that.

and,

Yeah, I don't feel threatened here, in Fort Collins, and I never have. Like there have been nights where I've had to be up late and out walking alone and I was scared of that fact, but I've never felt threatened being here, at all.

This last statement was particularly interesting after I asked Angel if there were any instances when she may have done something or not done something--as in walking a certain path--because she was female rather than male. After this she stated,

... I'm very like more cautious than I used to be, just because of things that have happened. Like I don't usually walk outside at night alone. I don't--I don't know, I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know, but I know I still do it, you know?

Once reminded, she then realized there were things she did differently, places she may fear or actions she may/may not take *on campus* because she is female. But she did not think of this unless it was brought to her attention. Even she said, "...it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently..." If something is so ingrained in that you live it every day, how can you then point to it and see it as a *female* issue? It simply becomes the way of things for you--and since you happen to be female, this habit you have instinctively, culturally, personally taken on as "normal," then, in a fashion, blinds you to there being any other possible way of acting or being.

When I asked Angel whether she ever walks alone on campus at night, she answered,

Yeah, sometimes I'm forced to [walk alone at night] 'cause I procrastinate, you know, and I don't have a car... Um, actually I was worried about that a lot last year for some reason, so that's why I started just riding my bike because I figure if anyone want to mess with me I'll just try to hit 'em or something.

And yet she said previously that, "... I've never felt threatened being here [on campus], at all." Compared to the discomfort or fear she felt in other situations as a female in Fort Lupton and Greeley, Angel first says she never feels threatened in Fort Collins, in "... definitely the whitest city I've ever lived in" but her statements and her actions belie *what she thinks she experiences*.

Certainly, Angel is not lying, nor do I believe she is confused. Rather she seems unaware of her reality on campus since she feels safer on campus and in Fort Collins than she has felt in other places. This translates into her saying she has never felt threatened here--that is until she has to think about being female and walking on campus at night *here*. The fact that she feels safer and that she views Fort Collins--the place she feels safe--as "the whitest city" she's ever lived in mingles the race/gender/fear issues.

In association with this was Angel's identification with being a college student, her sense of Belonging. When I asked her whether she identified most with being first-generation, a college student, female, or any other identity at this time in her life, she

actually interrupted before I could finish the question--a rare occurrence during our interviews together--and said "college student."

Angel had hesitated many times before but was sure of this. I believed this identification was in association with Angel's feelings of safety on campus because I believe she felt this identification made her part of the campus/ college community, made her belong here, which then helped her to believe it was a safe or safer environment for her. She stated,

Because like although I feel women and men are so different on campus, I feel like we're all, we're all in the same situation like when it comes down to it with the grades and exams and tuition, you know? Like that's why I just feel like a community.

The idea that in this community there are times that she feels threatened because she is female appeared to be outweighed or somehow distanced from her because she chooses to identify more strongly with being a member of the college campus community. She therefore believed herself safe(er) here on campus.

I also thought it was interesting that Angel hesitated when I asked what she thought the campus projected as far as the image of women even though I tried to define this more for her without leading her to any answer. She again thought I meant transgender issues but then after some time and thought defined this as her being uncomfortable in certain situations wherein she and her friends were stared at. She really could not elaborate and then decided she did not really know what she wanted to say.

After awhile Angel did mention that she thought some of the people on campus dressed "way too revealing." When I asked her if this pertained to both girls and guys, she answered, "Mostly girls." And while this did make her feel uncomfortable, although she said she could not put her finger on just why, she believed that the men on the college campus were "more respectable."

Again, when she explained her feelings, she compared this perception to her experience in high school where, she said, "Like in high school guys would be sick and kind of twisted, and if they're like friends and whatever and grabbing each other, and here it's more relaxed and it's nice to be around people that actually want to learn." She added, "But other than that, the image... I don't know. It's hard to say 'cause I'm so used to--I don't know--" I again got the sense that compared to what she has seen, what she sees on campus is "better."

She did think that women were held up to some higher moral code than men and said,

Yes! And you know, I think that society definitely has put that label on... women. That's another thing on campus actually that I've, that I seem to notice. I don't know if this is just my being hyper-aware or paranoid or something, but I always feel girls are supposed to work harder for the respect that some guys get. Like, for example, in, um, one of my classes... the professor just seem to... expect more from the girls than the guys and like just kind of shrug it off if a guy would walk in late or--you know what I mean? He just seemed more, um, favorable of the males in the classroom... Like he, he wasn't rude to the point where it was like

something to complain about, but it's just--seemed like he respected the boys in the class more... It was just something I felt like. I don't know if I was, like I said, I don't know if I was just paranoid or being a feminist or whatever you want. I don't know.

And yet this is the same campus where she feels she is a member of the college community where, she has said,

Because like although I feel women and men are so different on campus, I feel like we're all, we're all in the same situation like when it comes down to it with the grades and exams and tuition, you know? Like that's why I just feel like a community.

When I asked her if she thinks there is anything wrong in being a feminist, she answered, "No" and laughs. I then asked her, "Okay, how would you define being a feminist?" Angel answered, "Um, just to be for women's rights and equality" and then said, laughing, "That's about all I know." I refer to this in light of her *stressing* in another area of the interviews that she believed men and women do not experience campus life the same way.

I did not find such contradictions odd since we all live with many complex contradictions in our minds and in our lives; however, I do find it interesting that the positive emotions Angel possesses about "college" seemed to subdue any gendered

negative experiences she has had. In a sense these good feelings numb her to the not so good feelings.

Angel's good feelings about college permeated her answers. Even her comment about being around people who want to learn was interesting in the face of another of her comments about life in the residence halls where she was "shocked" because of some people's lack of maturity.

Her experience of college life--when compared to towns she has lived in before, high school situations, and, perhaps, her family life at home--appeared vastly better, safer, more enriching for her. Belonging was further enhanced because of her renewed faith and her membership in a campus church organization:

Like my faith in God has increased so much just like through this Fall and--I don't find it quite incidental that I'm doing better in school this year because of going to church. Like I don't find that a coincidence at all... 'Cause I feel like I care more about life ever since I had more faith in God.

So while she has separated in various ways (both physically and psychologically) from her "old" family, she has constructed a "new," and comparatively healthier college family (and campus church family) with which she now identifies.

CHAPTER 6: BRINGING THE STORIES TOGETHER

Once you label me, you reduce me.

~ Soren Kierkegaard ~

Perspective: The Places that Rub

Employing the Holistic-Content Perspective method not only means that one reads participant narratives several times "to form a holistic-content picture" (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003, p. 62) to obtain impressions of emerging information patterns, but also, generally, indicates that these patterns will then generate shared themes among those narratives. Equipped with this information, the researcher may then advance these shared themes as a possible way to derive how the participants not only make meaning from their experiences, but how they also, in a sense, share similar circumstances that generate their individual experiences. This process is, I believe, is meant to aid our understanding, to give us a *clearer* window, if you will, to see not only *what* may be occurring but to see the *frequency* at which certain situation-driven-experiences (and therefore possible messages) are occurring.

While I welcome such a method because it may lead to greater understanding, which is of course its purpose, I also want to qualify my use of this practice since there is

something about utilizing shared themes that for me, on some level, smacks of reductionism within a narrative inquiry where I am also focused on giving these four women students a platform to showcase their separate voices.

Therefore, the above quote by the Danish theologian is meant to remind all of us that while there may be avenues of campus circumstances that appear to overlap in the lives of these four women, the women themselves are unique individuals, as are all individual women. It is the *frequency and the similarity of the situations on campus* that greet these women students, the circumstances within the campus environment that then may carry with them certain messages that should capture our attention. One should not presume that all women *experience* (used as a feeling verb here) these situations in the same way nor that each one individually would extract the very same message.

The human brain is a pattern finder, and this aids in comprehension (Gurian, 2001; Moir & Jessel, 1990). These women may have encountered similar circumstances which suggest a pattern of experience, but this is not the same thing as labeling these as *women's experiences* or to confine these women and their individualistic experience (used as a feeling verb here) within inane gender-specific boxes of experience.

While I understand why we do this, that is, compile and categorize in order to comprehend and (hopefully) create methods or procedures that would serve the greatest recognizable need in lieu of such "overlap," I do not like the idea of saying the premise of this study is to showcase the expression of its singular female voices and then reduce these into places where their experiences slip over each other. While I understand the need to categorize and reduce to then (oddly enough) generalize some experiences, this common process creates a contradiction of purpose in my felt-sense of what is right as a

researcher and as a woman. Do I believe that these students' accounts of some of their expressed feelings and described circumstances appear to have places where they intersect? Yes, I do. Do I believe these circumstances and their apparent frequency oblige attention and investigation? Yes, I do. Hence this coming section on shared themes.

But clearly this is in no way meant to reduce these women participants to a type or to say how they inwardly experience circumstances they encounter or that their personal felt experience is somehow "the same." Therefore while all females may "experience" life as females that "female" perspective takes on idiosyncratic meaning/ relevance for *each* separate woman. I do not wish to add to the plethora of commercialized stereotypes and generalizations about WOMEN, which seems too easy a fix and too prevalent in our culture.

As human beings, none of us is the same, though some of our responses to the same or similar events or situations may be similar in various regards. However, focus should be given to the fact that the four women in this study have encountered certain similar circumstances on a college campus environment. Therefore the questions that might be asked are the following: Why are these circumstances present? Are they endemic? How can a system of higher education reduce or eliminate these circumstances, some of which appear to be accepted as "normal" yet which may dis-empower female students? How can women students positively navigate these circumstances toward positive outcomes if and when faced with them?

SHARED THEMES

The following shared themes emerged:

The Familiar

Involvement/ Belonging

Challenges

Self-Expectation/ Agency & "Other" Expectation

These have been presented in no particular order; however, I have chosen to discuss Self Expectation/Agency and "Other" Expectation last so these may be situated together for ease of discussion.

The Familiar

I actually called this theme, *Link with the Familiar* in my notes. Within this theme I grouped together the participants' interpretations regarding their families and what they, in a sense, brought with them to campus from home. For some participants this "bringing" from home may be something physical, like a boyfriend. However, this also included something more mental/ psychological than physical, like an attitude or a vision.

I segregated in this manner because the students' families, and their experiences in that family, traveled along with them in some mental or at least historical fashion as they transitioned into college during the first year. I integrated the participants' inclusion of what made them feel like they had family on campus as well. I separated this from *Involvement/ Belonging* per se because the theme of *The Familiar* served to define an *already existing way for them to move towards what they wanted* while *Involvement/*

Belonging was something they performed on campus, something they took part in or did, as in joining a group or activity in order to help make them feel like they were carving out an on-campus belonging space for themselves. In this way, while both themes had the outcome of "bringing comfort," *The Familiar* originated FROM HOME while *Involvement/ Belonging* formally began ON-CAMPUS.

#

All four women, obviously, brought psychological underpinnings from home as they moved forward toward attending college. However, what became apparent as the narratives unfolded was that while all also used *The Familiar* to both fall back on and to help drive them forward toward their college aspirations--which ultimately produced a positive personal outcome--each participant utilized this FROM HOME aspect in various degrees of negative vs. positive reinforcement.

Fay and JJ seemed to use "relationship with family" as a positive motivator while MaryCate and Angel made use of this relationship from a more highly pronounced negative perspective. For instance, **MaryCate** is extremely close to her family, especially her mother, even as she seeks to separate from various familiar relationships and says "I hate going home," her feelings/ actions often belied this: "...I wanted to stay in-state because I had a boyfriend who I wanted to stay close to... I'm kind of a momma's girl, and so I wanted to stay close to my family..." and "... I would *die* without seeing my mom for three months, like I still can't do it--I can't go three months without seeing my mom. I see her every other weekend at least."

MaryCate finds comfort from her family relationships but marries this to their financial poverty, and it is this familial/ familiar poverty that drives her to succeed in college. She says,

... my family is very, very poor. Ah, we were homeless for a really long time... I have been ending up giving my mom about four thousand dollars so that way they can get a house 'cause they got kicked out. And so basically I'm supporting them right now because they're in such a bad state...

She derives (positive) strength from her family by way of relationships yet simultaneously uses her family's relentless familiar poverty as a constant (negative) reminder of what she certainly does not want for herself:

... one of the main things that I wanted to go to college for *myself* was, was because I didn't want to end up like my mom or my dad. And struggling for money every day and borrowing money every day and, or owing people money all the time or you know, just all the struggling, I just didn't, I don't want to be like that... And so that's basically what kept me going...

So MaryCate clings to *The Familiar*--both her family relationships as a positive and their poverty-of-situation as a negative--to help provoke her drive toward a college degree. Again in MaryCate's experience, she also had a bad relationship with a boyfriend, initially brought this relationship with her to college, suffered both an emotional break-up

and a miscarriage, and runs from this emotional-overwhelm as she runs from the poverty in her immediate family. This is captured when she says, "... me and my boyfriend had more and more problems and in October [of her first-semester on campus] we ended up breaking up... I blamed the fact of us breaking up on me leaving, going to college. And so I wanted to move back, I wanted to go back to Denver" and "... um, after we had broke up, it kinda went downhill. Like I found out I was pregnant. And that I had a miscarriage... it was just a lot of really, really hard to cope with things."

While taking long strides in the opposite direction from these "familiar" may engender a positive outcome for MaryCate, they are negatives that compel her to succeed in college. What she brings from HOME is this over-arching fear, both of poverty and of a negatively charged relationship, as well as the attitude that she *must not* allow these familiar aspects into her future.

#

Angel uses her love of education and class-work to busy her mind, so it will not dwell on *The Familiar*, which for her includes an alcoholic mother and the "drama" of her family life. While she wishes she did not have to rely on student loans and wishes she could change her lack-of-money situation, Angel does not focus on her family's financial situation as MaryCate does, but instead underscores what she perceives to be their dysfunctional inter-relationships with each other:

I have a twin ... she's like angry at the world... freakin' out. And I have a little sister who's in a lot of trouble. She's sixteen. She's in ninth grade for the third time. My brother is twenty. He is a year older. And he lives at home, rent free. So

I'm the only one that's actually productive right now, and it's cool. But anyway, um, yeah, but other than that my dad's really supportive, like not financially 'cause I use loans and stuff. But like, he's really supportive after I moved out.

She says that her twenty-year-old brother tells her to "just drop out like I did" and her little sister says, "Who needs college?" Her twin also does not "see any use in college." Angel loves them, but it helps her to separate from them as much physically as she seems to do ideologically: she loves education and learning, and her siblings show disdain for it:

... my family doesn't really have any expectations about school 'cause they all dropped out in like high school. So, but, I just try to be--I try to keep in touch with them about like--they do ask, you know, how I'm doing, so I guess in a sense they really do expect me to do well since I'm here. And I put myself here, you know?

Her father lends his emotional support, but her relationship with him does not take center stage in her interview. Rather it is the self-preservation distancing from her mother and from their family drama that takes precedence:

Mmm... they seemed proud. We never really talk about it. I guess they have enough going on. Enough drama that they don't really think about it... [her going to college]

and

Um, one of the times my mom had just gotten out of jail--like I'm the only one she has to come to--and like I'm the only one that open my door to her. I felt really strong because I finally told her that I could not try to take care of her anymore 'cause I have to worry about my own life.

So in effect she brings this knowledge about family from HOME and then distances herself from it and then in order to fuel her personal success, which includes a life for herself through higher education.

#

On the other hand, Fay and JJ at least appear, perhaps, to use *The Familiar* in a more positive fashion. One caveat, however, would include the observation that **JJ** has childhood memories of being made fun of because she was poor, and I do consider these defining events for her:

... some people told me that the parents called me a street rat because, um, where I lived... a girl, her dad was a priest and her mother was like a stay-at-home mom ... she dropped off her daughter once to spend the night at my house, and she was never allowed to come back again because my neighborhood wasn't good enough...

Yet while I believe such moments of exclusion are "defining" for JJ, this seemed to spark a positive "I'll show 'em" attitude.

She has taken what she perceived to be a negative and made it a positive, made it work *for* her. This does have a driving-toward-success meaning for her although it does not *overwhelm* her in the same way that, for instance, MaryCate's present-day memory of poverty seems to overwhelm. JJ is aware of her early circumstances while living with her mother, but it does not so strenuously define her, which is the message I received while interviewing MaryCate. For JJ, memories of "being poor" while living with her mother have helped her determine not to be poor, but I never sensed the lurking desperation that I did with MaryCate, a desperation derived in part, I think, from watching her family actually *be* homeless.

JJ also has the added asset of a bit more maturity (she is the oldest of the subjects at twenty-four) and some community college experience. In addition she has a good relationship with her boyfriend, a recent graduate of Colorado State University, who lives with her, and I believe these are "familiar" she brings along with her into her first year on campus at Colorado State. And while her family of origin is, perhaps, a bit more removed from her due to her age, JJ does bring her "diverse background" and her family's unique racial heritage along with her as she navigates her college career:

Um, the way I usually describe my family is very diverse... it's diverse and divided. My parents divorced when I was four, so my mother--it's just me and her. It's always me and her... it's diverse because like my mother's side is Caucasian, my father's side is Hispanic and Chicano.

Along with her family/ racial identity, JJ brings with her to college a sense of pride for her family's artistic heritage, something she shares: "Like my grandpa's side and my father's side, um, they've, our family's been--lived in the San Luis Valley for over two-hundred years. Like if you look on some maps, our last name was on the area there..." She also has a strong commitment to her art and being an artist, and this attitude is also something that she "brings" and which sustains her towards her college success.

So while JJ remembers being "very poor" and this certainly factors in as something of *The Familiar*, which she brings to college with her, she has positive "familiar" she has brought to college, including her boyfriend, her passion for her art, and positive family relationships.

JJ had attended classes at a community college, and had a stronger sense of her career path. She also, like Fay, had a long-relationship-boyfriend in residence on campus, which she also identified as a positive "familiar" for her during her transition to a new campus environment.

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For **Fay**, her relationship with her family takes on a distinctly positive role, and she brings this attitude with her to college. She wants to take advantage of the opportunities she believes she has, opportunities she feels her parents did not have or did not take advantage of: "Well, my mom went to UNC for a semester and then dropped out because she got married" and "... my dad being from Mexico like he went to three days of school that's how long his education was in Mexico."

While she expressed the opinion that her parents have had a challenging life

("They [mom and dad] still work at the dairy. We live, um, about a half a mile away from it..."; "There's gunk everywhere, so it's definitely a change of culture [the dairy]. I mean, no one would ever look at her [mom] and think that she was a farmer or anything, but yeah, definitely a unique job..."), there was no negativity in her regard as she discussed this. She also likes to share with her family what she is learning via her college experience, and I believe this brings her another way to connect with them, to bring them into her life on campus in a positive manner that she finds helpful for them and self-comforting for herself as well.

Fay also has the added factor of having a "familiar" boyfriend on campus who is going to Colorado State University at the same time that she is, and she welcomes this physical and emotional presence that she "brought" from HOME:

Um, I--I like to think I'm, you know, easy going when I meet people, but I guess I have kind of the shy tendency to kind of get to know people before I do anything drastic, so having him here... having kind of like that friend, that acquaintance that you can go to football games with, that you can go eat with and that you can do other social activities with really helped me get to know other people.

Since she self-identifies as being shy, her boyfriend's familiar presence acts as a buffer for her in new social situations and also gives her someone she trusts to simply "be" with. *The Familiar* for Fay, therefore, seems a pure, positive motivator.

In one sense or another, all four women shared the theme of *The Familiar* and used this as they navigated their college career.

Involvement/ Belonging

As mentioned in the introductory comment under *The Familiar*, I have separated this theme from the theme of *Involvement/ Belonging* since I understand this to reference an act or something the study participants performed on campus as an activity to increase their "fit" within the campus environment.

Alternately, the theme of *The Familiar* served to define an already existing brought-from-home physical and/ or psychological element, which study participants then utilized to move them into a first-year transition. In this way, while both themes had the outcome of "bringing comfort" in some way, *The Familiar* originated FROM HOME while *Involvement/ Belonging* began ON-CAMPUS.

#

All four women employed involvement in some college activity to help them make a place of belonging for themselves on campus. All four believed that such involvement helped them to succeed in college, especially since involvement in a smaller group made them feel less lost on a large campus (and Colorado State University (CSU) has more than twenty-five thousand students).

For **MaryCate** this involvement primarily took the form of Marching Band. She stated, "But the good thing that turned out for me... was Marching Band, and what kept me going to CSU was Marching Band" and "Um, well, Marching Band was a big help 'cause I love to play my instrument and I love to play music and perform."

One of the core impressions to emerge from MaryCate's narrative was that for her just to *be* in college and *remain there* was an immense achievement. If one considers her uber-connect with her mother/ family relationships, the detrimental impact of a troubled relationship with her boyfriend, and her miscarriage during her first semester at college, MaryCate's involvement in music was a lifeline. She both found and grew positive relationships within Marching Band, and these relationships, which are a fundamental draw for her, helped her succeed in fitting in, in remaining a college student. Marching Band provided a smaller arena where she could belong and a place where she could share a common interest with others.

MaryCate also took advantage of the Academic Advancement Center and said, "... they give me free tutoring, so that helps me a lot because that's helping me, you know, focus on if I don't study outside of class that gives me an hour to focus on it." So there was an element of academic involvement outside the classroom that helped MaryCate to succeed in college by helping her to remain in college.

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For **Angel** this involvement was a bit more multi-faceted and complicated. She said there were times when she felt she was not accepted on campus,

Like certain places... I would walk in with a group of girls and they would just--I don't know if they were staring to be--I don't know--like to be rude or not but--a lot of people just stared at me and my friends like everywhere... It seemed like people were being judgmental of us even without words.

And there were times she felt "out of place" despite making friends and being "involved":

I just found some close friends and I'm really outgoing, so I met people randomly like everywhere and we talk like in classes or when I see them and stuff, you know. So I didn't feel lonely or anything but, I don't know--I just felt like--out of place? Kinda? Sometimes first semester--and I don't really know why 'cause I was involved in like Residence Hall Association and stuff. So I was involved in clubs and whatnot. I just didn't feel like I fit in here, but now I really do, so...

For Angel, finally feeling like she belonged on campus took most of her first semester. I also think that she found her inner sense of involvement within her studies, which she found not only "fun" because she loved to learn, but because classes and studying kept her busy and helped her focus away from her family drama/ alcoholic mother situation.

Angel also discovered a key "fit," a vital piece to her feeling she belonged on campus when she began going to church:

Um, last Fall I did meet this lady, Andrea, who is a campus minister for Christ Christian Church on campus... And I never went to church last year and then finally I started realizing toward the end of the year that I should probably do that... Like I'm grateful 'cause like God seriously changed my life...

So for Angel, while outer involvement helped her eventually belong since she does get a sense of belonging from her job with Cooperative Extension on campus and her activities related to Residence Hall Association, inner involvement in her faith and being able to practice this faith within a campus group helped her achieve a sense of place for herself.

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JJ is perhaps the most activity-involved individual of all the study participants, and in fact I titled one of her analysis codes within her narrative *Hyper-Involvement*. Some of her comments regarding her involvement include, "Like I'm usually really stressed out. I don't have a lot of social time... I don't even see my boyfriend who I live with." She also said,

I volunteer at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I used to volunteer two years at the Homeless Shelter until this semester 'cause it got to be too hectic and--I used to volunteer like at the Sierra Club until I went to CSU 'cause it kinda conflicted with my schedule here... I just want to ensure like--I'm very competitive. I want to be the best at everything I want to do.

JJ's ultra-involvement characterizes who she is. She derives a great personal sense of achievement from all her activities, and these in turn help her carve out places where she feels she belongs:

But then my second semester, um, I started, um, volunteering more for SOVA, Student Organization for Visual Arts. Um, and then because of that you know,

they made me the treasurer this year and... I just started to feel more comfortable here... We have this foodcart--SOVA cart in the Art Department, and I completely run that. I buy everything. I keep everything stocked. I make sure like we buy enough stuff that sells. And right now I'm in the process of getting donations from certain like places like for coffee for our SOVA carts. We have that for free, and a better type, and um, and you know I'm writing diversity grants and proposals and all that stuff. And then part of SOVA, like part of my responsibility like is to be like, like a leader to the students, right? So I should interact with them more and for SOVA, to make our closeness we should interact ... I feel like I have to do all this stuff. Like I just, I feel like I just have to... I have to like volunteer to make a difference or something.

Her sense of wanting to belong stems from, I think, four focal points: her age since she feels she is older than many students in her classes (remember that she attended a community college and is twenty-four-years-old); her desire to prove herself due to her self-identified childhood exclusion because she was perceived as poor; her racial identity as a successful role model for other Hispanics; and as an artist committed to her craft.

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Fay credits her nearly painless transition to college during her first year because of her involvement in high school/college organizations like Upward Bound, Key, and the President's Leadership Organization at Colorado State University (CSU). Such involvement generates a high comfort level for her and provides smaller venues and a sense of community where she can grow her strengths. She states,

... well, I was lucky enough to get involved with the KFW community my first year. So instead of coming into school and being, you know, not really knowing where my classes were and taking classes with people I didn't know, we, um, were grouped into clusters where we go through, we take I think it was 3 classes with a group of the same 15 people, and then we do, we kinda have a seminar that links those two classes together. And so that really helped knowing people in my classes... I don't know, I think that my first semester went a lot more well than other students' because I *was* in Key and the first semester *is* structured. I mean, you're in classes, you're in three classes with the same individuals. And so that really, really formed like a strong bond between us and between, um, our academic success.

Fay along with all the other study participants believed that finding something to be involved with, finding a corner you could call your own on an otherwise large and perhaps at times impersonal campus, became tantamount to finding a way to succeed in a college environment.

Challenges

The shared theme of *Challenges* includes aspects the participants encountered as defined by obstacles or difficulties they felt they faced. Some challenges were those shared commonly by any number of first-year students, such as academic and time pressures, insensitive roommates, difficult professors, way-finding on campus, and feelings of disconnect within a new (campus) environment.

Other challenges, perhaps more attuned to first-generation students, might be a lack of knowledge about the college "system," a lack of knowing what to expect at college (living in dorms, attending classes, the standard of work and amount of work/ study hours required), and a sense of particular pressure regarding lack of money, outstanding college loans, and family financial burden.

All students, as well as the ones who participated in this study, also find themselves faced with key personal issues they must maneuver past or wrestle with if they are to persist in their academic careers. The first year of college, the transition year, is often especially taxing because this is a monumental transition not only into a college environment, but also into young adulthood, greater independence, and emotional/ social adjustment. For first-generation students, this transition may be more challenging due to the stark novelty of not only their new college environment but the bold newness of this adventurous excursion into "college-land": a physical and psychological landscape for which their families can offer little to no knowledge and certainly no maps.

In ancient times when cartographers did not know what lie beyond certain known boundaries they would write, *Beyond This There Be Dragons*, and truly for many young first-year college students college is Unknown Territory. And they sense, at least in part, that this is something they must navigate alone. The four women students interviewed brought their own strengths and their own weaknesses to this formidable task.

While I also believe the present study's narratives demonstrate that the women students interviewed also encountered challenges as *females*, gender-specific challenges are discussed later in this chapter under the guiding frame of *Other Expectation*.

MaryCate's primary challenges grew from her personal relationships and from her family's lack of money. Many were typical first-year transitional concerns: lack of knowing anyone on campus, homesickness, problems with her roommate, the large number of students/ large size of campus, and the lack of "college" information or what to expect. But these were all made much more stress-ridden because while she wanted to "do" college, she did not really want to leave her boyfriend or her family.

The following statements helped to crystallize her difficult first semester on campus: "... at first I was kind of scared 'cause I didn't know how to be apart from--my family does not come from money at all..."; "My first year of college was very, very bad. Um, like I said I came into college with a boyfriend. Um, we were having a lot of problems..."; "Like I found out I was pregnant. And that I had a miscarriage and then like--so that was even worse and then like just, it was just a lot of really hard to cope with things. And things I couldn't tell my mom."

There was also a self-described sentiment of *not being ready* or *not being up to the task*, especially during that initial first-semester. When I was a college advisor to first-year students, I called this being "dumped in the deep." And it is usual to experience a steep learning curve in any number of new situations that lie outside one's comfort zone. For many young, new college students this curve takes the good part, if not all, of that first semester within an unfamiliar college environment. For some it takes longer. (And for some they do not find a way past the new challenges and do not then persist with their college career.)

MaryCate expressed this sense of personal un-readiness when she said,

My first semester was just like, 'Oh my gosh. I have no idea what I'm doing.' My high school didn't help me with anything. Like get me ready for anything. I was lost and confused and torn up and [laughs] really just, you know, still trying to deal with the fact that, you know, I'm not at home anymore. I am an adult. I need to grow up type of thing.

She appeared to feel a particular lack of readiness within herself (and not just with her academic preparation), which was due, I believe, to her intense emotional connection to her family, particularly her mother. While distancing from this *connect* began to take place more consciously for MaryCate after her first-semester and after she was forced to remain separated from her family because of several weeks she spent volunteering in the mountains at Pingree Park, such separation was hard-won because of her intense relational nature.

MaryCate also had to face the possibility that she could not handle the college class work itself. This became apparent for MaryCate when she took her first chemistry class, a class in which she had a professor who would not personally tutor her, nor (apparently) provide her with the one-on-one relationship she had become used to in high school:

Well, so finally first semester ends and it was, I was so glad for it, like I started sixteen credits and I finished six. I had never taken chemistry... my professor said monkeys can get twenty percent on his test. And I got thirty percent on his first test...

Not only were such subjects challenging, but the relational aspect was challenging as well. In high school, MaryCate felt she knew everyone and also had a close relationship with her teachers. The personal distance from some of her professors in college then, for MaryCate, was more distressing because she came from a place, a high school and a family, that she defined through her longstanding relationships. As MaryCate said,

... jumping into a five-hundred person class and just learning it by yourself pretty much. I mean, yeah, you get notes and stuff like that but that was a really big challenge just basically going from high school through college. 'Cause high school, I mean, you have the one-on-one relationship. You have, you know, your friends right there. The friends that you've pretty much gone to kindergarten with. You know everybody. Everybody, everybody loves you, you love everybody. That type of thing like, it's the same, it's in the same like surroundings since for four years and then all of a sudden you're in this huge basic little town by yourself, nobody around you. None of your loved ones, in this classroom full of five-hundred people. No one-to-one student-teacher relationships. I mean you could get it, but I would take a really long time--like twenty-five-thousand students compared to your two-hundred-eighty graduating students. It was just a really, really big change. Like I love people. I love to be around people. I love to talk to people, but that was so many people at once that I didn't know what to do with myself.

She had started her college career as a Life Sciences major only to realize she really hated chemistry and had no preparation for it. When MaryCate changed her major to something non-science related, her grades improved, and with this change her overall attitude about her ability to "do" college, to overcome any challenges, also improved. She also indicated that she thought her new major, Apparel Merchandizing, was more people-oriented, and that she liked people.

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Angel, on the other hand, looked forward to attending college, and she actually used moving to campus as a physical way to distance herself from her "dramatic" family. While she too experienced some common first-year challenges like not feeling like she fit in, grade and time management pressures, and stress, her attitude *coming in to college* appeared more positive when compared to MaryCate's ambiguous tug-of-war with herself. Angel said, "... college was definitely what I expected it to be except for stress factors. Like I knew it was gonna be stressful but I never thought I would feel--like with my family and just everything..." and "'But it was also a shock knowing that, um, pressure with grades. And I thought a lot about--well, I don't want to fail in class because I've already put money into it, you know?'"

Money for college costs was also a common challenge for all four women; however, three of them had received scholarships or other awards, like a First-Generation Scholarship. Angel, however, wished that she didn't need to take out loans:

... I wish I were not taking out student loans for this year. That's probably the main thing--money. 'Cause everything's about money. And I hate it [laughs] but

it's just the way it is... if I could change money then things would go, go a lot smoother...

One of the ways Angel would cope with stress was by exercising excessively. She stated, "... I would exercise *a lot* last year. It got bad. People thought I was anorexic because how much I worked out... I guess I coped with that by not eating enough."

Unlike MaryCate, Angel did not seem focused on any lack of academic preparation. For instance, although she was glad that her grades were improving in the first semester of her sophomore year (which is when I interviewed her), she did not choose to discuss any particular *problem* academic areas or difficult classes. Rather, the sense I received was that she knew she hadn't maintained her focus on her studies during (primarily) her first semester on campus, saying, "... Freshmen partying--that was a problem. 'Cause I'm not gonna say I never touch a drop of alcohol." Angel also ascribes some of her drinking to her coming to college and the effect of this on her alcoholic mother:

Um, my mom was giving it to me a lot because she didn't finish high school and so she didn't understand that I was busy. She always took it as I didn't want to come visit her... it made me sad because I felt like it was my fault she got in trouble again because she turned to drinking when I wasn't there for her... So that really got to me in the Fall. And I think that's why I drank a lot with my friends...

However, Angel knew drinking was not a positive move on her part and was aware enough of what she was doing and why, so she could readjust her focus and stop. She said that,

And after a first year, I feel really relieved because I'm doing a lot better this year with time management and handling stress and ... so I feel like that was a big learning experience last year, and I did a lot better second semester and now I'm working on increasing the GPA.

Angel, unlike MaryCate, actually sought refuge by distancing herself from family relationships and by keeping herself busy with course work and campus activities. Therefore not just circumstances but attitude, of course, towards attending college are key since MaryCate, who had a self-identified hard time adjusting did not wholly want to come to college, to be away from both her family and (at the beginning) her boyfriend, which left her feeling torn by her decision to attend college. Angel, while perhaps at first feeling some guilt because of her mother's plight, grew strong away from her family and their circumstances, which Angel considered "dramatic" and not supportive of her aims of attaining a higher education, although her father remains an emotional support for her.

#

JJ imposes some challenges on herself. All of these seem to produce positive outcomes for her even though she self-admittedly takes on so much that she has little down time. As an older student (she is twenty-four), she has a sense of direction for herself (her artwork) and also has had some past experience with college classes at a community college. Her age, direction, and experience combine to help her surpass the

challenges she seems to face. For JJ, these challenges take on the countenance of challenges she feels she has also encountered in her past and include her racial identity and her socio-economic status. Her weight figures into the mix as well, but I always got the impression that while she would like to lose weight, this "challenge" was certainly not necessarily more important than the other two.

In our interview, JJ identifies very strongly with her Hispanic roots, and even more than that, she identifies with her bi-racial heritage and the ultra-diversity within her own family. She defines her family as diverse because her mother's side is Caucasian while her dad's is Hispanic and Chicano and her stepsister is half Black/ half White and JJ is half White/ half Hispanic. She also tends to merge this with childhood feelings of being excluded due to her and her mother's lack of money and the fact that she is Hispanic:

I was like one out of four Hispanics. My sister was the only Black kid there [in the school] ... all those kids were rich and *White* and it, it, oh, it bugged the hell out of me. I got like, like, um, I had a lot of parents treat me badly because they knew I was poor and that I was Hispanic...

For JJ, these feelings help her traverse the challenges in college even though this lasting feeling of not fitting in initially followed her to Colorado State University. She described this when she said, "It's something that's really important to me. Having a diversity just everywhere. I think it's every type of diversity... um, ah, so, I don't know, that kind of challenged me and not feeling like I *fit* in at first [at CSU]."

The foremost way that JJ overcomes any perceived challenges is that she volunteers and involves herself in *a lot* of different activities. (She volunteers at the Museum of Contemporary Art, is Treasurer of the Student Visual Arts Organization (SOVA), runs the SOVA foodcart, mentors other Hispanic students, and is a member of the League of the United Latin American Council.) But unlike Angel, perhaps, who seeks to stay so busy as a refuge of sorts, JJ strives to be a role model, and, in her own description she does this to be the "... very best *I* can be." She added,

So I think that makes it even more important for me to finish [college]. Especially as a Hispanic like to set, to be a good role model to other Hispanics, like not like, like I can't believe I've had so many cousins start and quit. And that looks so bad , like the stereotypical Hispanic...

JJ said she did find CSU's often large classes and at times more impersonal classroom atmosphere daunting since she was used to the intimate feeling she received from her community college classes. In the classes she took at a community college, she said she felt she could get to know the other students and the teacher on a personal level. She also said she felt the classes at the community college were more diverse in both age of students (she calls the students in her CSU classes "young-ins") and their ethnic make-up. Therefore this added to her "challenges" when she first came to Colorado State University. Because of this she didn't feel like part of the art community she wanted to belong to her first semester. By her second semester, however, she became more active in the Student Organization for Visual Arts (SOVA) and said, "... I just started to feel more

comfortable here..." She also does not seem to view her "first-generation" status as a negative and believed that,

Well, I think personally it means you have a little more power to do good things.

Um, 'cause I think, you know, we're a determined group obviously...my dad didn't go to college so he, you know, neither of them had any information on, you know, what to give me or what to expect for school... I don't know, that you're more determined. I don't have this information and I still, you know, find a way to make it work...

So while she did admit that she had to work to find the information she needed to attend classes at CSU since she could not rely on family to have such information, this only made her more determined.

Another personal challenge for her, in part, is her sense that she needs to catch up with other students, that since she is older she should be "further" along. However, she seems to overcome this by being so involved in her activities and her art, which is a driving passion in her life.

#

Although **Fay** discussed worries about her grades and the typical pressures from coursework and deadlines, she was perhaps the student who appeared the least affected by the first-year challenges she faced. Her quiet, calm demeanor during our interviews added to this impression. And she was the first to acknowledge that her transition was eased because of the potent structure built into her first semester on campus: high school

college prep programs like Upward Bound, TRIO and COSMOS and the continued value of these mentoring programs as she navigated CSU's campus and classrooms fully aided her transition.

Such structure afforded her a smoother, *mentored transition* that may not be accessible to some first-generation students or may not be fully appreciated by some students. For instance, Angel commented that she neglected to get in the paperwork for the First-Generation Scholarship: "... the sad thing is I forgot to turn in the scholarship for First-Gen, so I never got that and I never was involved in any of that." While JJ said that the two organizations that helped her to fit in the most were the Student Organization for the Visual Arts (SOVA) and the First-Generation Office. The information and the optional meetings and receptions with positive speakers helped JJ feel as though she was "doing something really important. However, JJ gravitated toward her artistic nature and thus became more fully involved with SOVA, where she could "build community" with other artists. And MaryCate was grateful for the free tutoring she was able to receive as a first-generation student and that being a first-generation student "... gets me money."

However, Fay more than any participant seemed to be in the central flow of the structure, mentoring, scholarship funds, and focused involvement organizations like the First-Generation Office could provide. She was aware of how much this mitigated common challenges, especially during that often chaotic first-semester on campus:

I had a mentor that sat me down every, you know, semester, half semester and said this is what your--here's all your grades. This is how you're doin', you know, you want to identify what you need help with. And, um, I know a lot of students,

you know, would never have that. They would never go out and seek that, and so that really helped, um, and just being in like the classes with the other students, um, I got comfortable with college level classes and having people around me that were going through the same thing. So, that really helped a lot.

Fay also belonged to an organization called Key and the President's Leadership Program. Key gave her a built-in community when she first arrived on campus and which positioned her for success during this first transitional year. Fay took advantage of all the first-generation aids available to her.

This guiding support radiated into her living environment on campus; students involved in the programs Fay was involved with lived together in the same residence hall, which made for further community-small-pond-relationships in the otherwise (possibly) overwhelming sea of college-campus life: "... if we ever needed help with like group assignments or homework, we were all right there together, and so that really helped."

She does admit, however, that she suffered some disorientation during her second semester because of the lack of structured classes to which she had grown accustomed. But due to the structure she received during her first semester, she knew what to expect, had some experience with college life and knew how to navigate any difficulties or knew where she could get help. And, like JJ, her supportive on-campus boyfriend helped her transition as well.

However, one challenge for Fay before coming to college was her family's self-described "low-income" financial profile. Though she earned several scholarships in

order to see her through approximately her third year of studies, the worry about money remains:

I don't want to jeopardize, you know, wasting the education that's being paid for... I mean it's being paid for and I should take advantage of that *now*.... because I mean you're paying for it, I mean you're paying thousands and thousands of dollars so you might as well get something really decent out of it.

Making sure she has the funds to complete her college education seems the greatest psychological challenge for Fay. I say psychological because she does have several scholarships to provide the funding she requires, yet she carries a sense she needs to complete the degree *now*. Like JJ, she feels "behind"; she knows there are students who came to college with a number of already-completed college credits, thus affording them upper-class status. Even Fay's supportive boyfriend was a credit-wise sophomore though he began attending college when she did. While Fay faced the least *transitional* challenges among the four participants, there were still personal challenges to navigate.

Self-Expectation/ Agency & "Other" Expectation

I defined *Self-Expectation/ Agency* as the inner self-concept of the participant wed to the ability to physically bring about her vision of a college education for herself. *Other Expectation* is not so much what others think but rather what some others (females and males) in our culture, including a campus culture, may often accept or regard as "female"

behavior. (*Other* may also include what the participants have internalized as so-called "female" behavior.) Worthy of attention when these two themes emerged was their frequency, their oppositional nature, the negative female positioning reinforcement of *Other Expectation*, and the dual or *dueling* messages these themes brought with them.

#

MaryCate's narrative probably contained the least references to what I have termed *Other Expectation*, references rife within the stories of other study participants. I cannot help but feel that part of this scarcity is due to our difficulty in our connecting for a second face-to-face interview, her decision not to share journal entries, and the somewhat limiting nature of our second telephone interview. Empirically, however, I utilized what information I had. For each of the participants I began with *Self-Expectation/ Agency* followed individually by *Other Expectation* as it was encountered.

As a first-generation student and a person who had been homeless for at least part of her childhood, MaryCate's very presence at a university spoke to her inspired *Self-Expectation/ Agency*. She considered herself a leader and liked being the "first" in her family to do things; she viewed this as characteristic of her being a leader. Although MaryCate admitted she did not really map out going to college and that she "... didn't start like really thinking about it until senior year..." she *believed* she would go. She thought it might be difficult for her to get accepted and to pay for college, but she said, "... I was gonna go for it." Her positive *Self-Expectation/ Agency* was supported by the fact that she graduated with honors, graduated second in her high school class, and that she was the first person in her family to graduate from high school.

What becomes transparent in MaryCate's motivation toward college is her desire to "do college" as she said, for herself. She clarified this when she stated,

... one of the main things that I wanted to go to college for *myself* was, was because I didn't want to end up like my mom or my dad. And struggling for money every day and borrowing money every day and, or owing people money all the time or you know, just all the struggling, I just didn't, I don't want to be like that. And so the only way that I won't be like that is if I go to college, you know, get an education, and make something of myself. And so that's basically what kept me going...

While her parents' severe financial struggles fortified her resolve, she also owned an inner belief that not only did she *want* to "do" college but that she *could* do it. It was this decisive *Self-Expectation/ Agency* that enabled her to believe in her abilities and then act toward accomplishing her goal of matriculation, to "go for it."

She continued in her pursuit of a college degree in the face of personal and academic challenges during her first semester, which included a miscarriage and grade pressures leading to a change in her major. Self-admittedly, she had a poor attitude when she arrived on campus: while she wanted to attend college, she did not want to physically leave her boyfriend or her family.

In order for her to persist in her college studies, MaryCate knew she needed to change her attitude. She said, "... when I went back for like second semester, I was like okay, well, I'm, I want--an' I was thinking I'm gonna do good, I'm gonna change, change

it. And I ended up only dropping only one class." While MaryCate shared the "Can Do" *Self-Expectation/ Agency* all interviewed participants possessed, she was also pragmatic in what she was prepared to endure in college as far as aiming herself toward a career. In this regard, she stated, "I just basically want to do something I'm gonna love. But I don't want to have to go through hell to get there."

As stated in a previous section, for MaryCate to be in college and to successfully remain there was a tremendous achievement since she had to step away from her family and an oppressive past history. There was a consciousness on her part that understood the need to leave certain things behind her in order to remain in college and pursue a new future. Extricating herself from her past appeared to take a good deal of her energy.

While I have said that MaryCate shared the least information concerning what I have identified as *Other Expectation*, I think some of what she did share regarding what I came to know as her ideas of the *Female Image* bear discussion since these reflect her sentiments regarding what it means to be female.

When I asked what image of females she thought the campus culture projected, she appeared perplexed. Finally she answered, "Ah... I don't know [laughs] like I mean like I don't really, I hadn't really even thought about that."

Concerning MaryCate's own image of a successful woman, she said this of her aunt,

... I look up to my aunt a lot. My mom's sister. Because she lives in Washington, D.C. She makes about a hundred grand a year. She, um, like she works for the

UN, like she is a very successful woman, and she is like thirty... She is like thirty-two and she has no kids. She's married, she loves her life, and that's exactly how I want to be.

I added to this the comment she made via telephone when I conducted a follow-up interview and asked MaryCate whether having kids factored into her idea of "loving your life" for a woman. She replied that it depended on the woman, but she thought that having kids would likely help more emotionally than financially. She said, "Kids don't help financially at all." She did consider having children a challenge but believed that having them was more fulfilling.

When I asked whether she felt there were any challenges she encountered because she was female (rather than male), she stated. "Maybe if I had been male, it wouldn't be as hard to leave home." She said she felt this way because she had talked to her brother and other males on campus and apparently it seemed easier for them to leave home/family than it had been for her. Her brother, specifically, was "fine" with not wanting to be home. I got the sense that MaryCate saw this need for home/family as not just a personal preference for her but a need that women in general had to varying degrees.

MaryCate is in a fight, I believe, between who she appears to be based on her family and her past experiences and who she *can* be. Many eighteen-year-old first-year college students wage this battle, but MaryCate's narrative indicates this is particularly difficult for her.

Since this is her "fight," she remains focused on it. I mentioned this again because when I asked her the question regarding what image of women she thought the campus

projected, she was genuinely confused even after I offered more explanation. I interpreted this confusion in two ways: One, was she so consumed with her own personal challenges to take note of something she felt she need not concern herself with? Or two, was thinking about female imaging on campus on a conscious level simply not within her present critical-thinking arsenal? The latter possibility concerned me because I then question what this eighteen-year-old young woman's educational exposure has been to female-oriented issues that could affect her physically and psychologically, especially as she places herself in an unfamiliar environment where she must not only learn but live.

#

Unlike MaryCate's narrative, **Angel**'s story contained numerous references to her own *Self-Expectation/ Agency* versus *Other Expectation*. Concerning *Self-Expectation/ Agency*, Angel (like Fay) participated in Upward Bound, which helped to direct her toward college. This also specifically helped her to attend Colorado State University and provided her with renewable (scholarship) financing for college. But, like MaryCate, Angel wanted a college education for herself. She said, "And I also just wanted to get a degree. You want to try to be successful..." While her father supported her emotionally, her siblings regarded education with open disdain. Her mother's alcoholism and stints in jail on several DUIs also provoked a draining effect on Angel's emotional reserves. Yet Angel possessed the positive personal image, the personal motivation to *expect* college for herself:

... a lot of people that grow up with my background either like totally 180 degree turn or some people conform to like what their family does. So I feel like I was

just one of those that learned from my family's mistakes. And like, I don't know if this sounds bad but like I really don't want to turn out in their situation. Like--so I was just always motivated in school, and I don't know why because--no one was ever there to tell me what to do.

Angel did not believe a high school degree was enough for her and saw a college education as "really important." She wanted more education for herself and believed college was the avenue toward "success" for her. However, when I asked her to relate any stories about when she felt powerful, she had a difficult time responding. Finally, she said,

Like I don't know very many stories about where I felt that strong. 'Cause I just feel like sometimes I'm just another dot on the map, you know? So, um, I don't really like the stories of when I felt powerless... they are bad memories... Um, one of the times my mom had just gotten out of jail--like I'm the only one she has to come to--and like I'm the only one that open my door to her. I felt really strong because I finally told her that I could not try to take care of her anymore 'cause I have to worry about my own life. So I felt really strong at that point because it's something I held onto for so long about being hopeful that she'd change and trying to get her to change and giving her support and money... So, so I felt really strong when I finally just came out to her and told her the honest truth that I can't try to raise her anymore...

Angel *is* strong. This is evidenced by her very presence in college, her dexterity in separating herself from her family's struggles ("I don't really have to think about my family a lot when I'm busy. So I really like to be busy and with classes and involvement."), and her capacity to physically and psychologically (and verbally) begin to separate from her alcoholic mother. However, Angel does not exude this power, for instance, the way JJ does. It appears that Angel must work to reach this perception of herself. Yet clearly she is a young woman who has had to overcome immense personal obstacles in order to *will* herself into college.

Along with the positive aspects of Angel's *Self-Expectation/ Agency*, there are prejudicial *Other Expectation* images she encountered before arriving on campus and then within the college campus culture. These images run counter-productive to the strong self-image this young woman possessed in order to place herself in this higher educative environment. While some of these encounters slip off-campus for Angel, all such encounters make up the possible *Other Expectation* image of female Angel then carries along with her wherever she goes, on or off campus. And it is this sense of what I have termed *Other Expectation* that, in my opinion, battles to detriment with this tough-but-relatively-inexperienced *Self-Expectation/ Agency* of this young female student.

For Angel, once on campus, she is shocked by the lack of maturity demonstrated in the residence halls. (Fay echoes the same sentiment in her narrative.) Angel said,

... And it was a shock in the residence halls... like the riot-type stuff... that was a shock because I didn't know people were gonna be so crazy still. I mean we're in college, you know. It's where I hope people grow up, you know. 'Cause like, I

got--I got so frustrated with high school. People being so immature...

Angel's positive expectation was that she was entering into the more mature world of college where others who were also interested in achieving an education would act "better" and certainly more maturely than some students in her high school. So Angel's expectation was that she would encounter higher-order thinking. The reality, however, altered her initial positive expectation.

Angel also said, "I notice that some people dress way too revealing... mostly girls." Again, I thought Angel was "struck" by the difference between the positive education-minded thinking she thought she would witness and what she sees some of these "other girls" exhibit. However, at the same time, she feels that the guys on campus are more respectable toward females, especially when she compares this to what she experienced in high school:

I notice that, um, a lot of guys, it seems like guys here are more respectable whatever clothes they [women] wear here. Like in high school guys would be sick and kind of twisted, and it they're like friends and whatever and grabbing each other, and here it's more relaxed and it's nice to be a around people that actually want to learn. But other than that, the image... I don't know. It's hard to say 'cause I'm so used to--I don't know...

So although there was disappointment at the image/ behavior she encountered in the dorms, although some other women she sees may dress "too revealing," to her the guys

seem "more respectable" on campus because when she mentally compares the past behavior she witnessed in high school to the present behavior of some of the campus males. She added,

It just does [bother her]. I like, I don't feel comfortable around... um... really like almost naked attire... I can't pinpoint why I feel that way. Like I believe that it's just--I think it's degrading to women when you dress like that... It's just how I feel, you know? Like I think that they should respect themselves more. I don't know, because obviously guys tend to gawk at someone like wearing something more revealing rather than a suit.

Angel also said, "... culturally, it seems like a lot of people look the same here on campus..." This apparently gave Angel a feeling of safety, which grew, I believe, from her tendency to mingle "White" with safe and specifically "Hispanic" with feeling personally threatened due to a prior experience with a group of Hispanic men walking near her as she was sitting in her vehicle:

Basically, um, going back to Greeley and Fort Lupton, like especially the downtown area? There are a lot of Hispanics. And I'm not a racist in any form. It's just that a lot of them are the stereotypical kind of creepy, stare at you, like walk really close to your vehicle and just keep walkin' by, like they're gonna do something. Even if they don't, they just appear like that. Um, so the difference, um, growing up there, I was always used to it until I came here. And this is

definitely the whitest city I've ever lived in. So I don't ever see people like that. And I'm not trying to be judgmental to the point of like saying I hate them or really dislike them. It's just, it's hard for me to go back and deal with that.

Since she believed the Colorado State University campus reflected a predominantly White aspect, she *felt* safer. Of this past experience, she said,

It was just in that situation, I wish I wasn't [a female] because I shouldn't have to be afraid as a free citizen an' sitting in a truck, in my property. You know? I shouldn't be afraid of groups of men. Like I felt, I just felt helpless, you know? If they were to come and do anything. I felt like, okay, I wish I wasn't female right now 'cause--or I wish I had a guy with me, you know?... Yeah, more protection...

Here is a strong female who willed herself into college through hard work and self-determination, yet this encounter left her wishing she were not female.

In this encounter Angel is full of fear *because she is female*. It is gender specific. She believes she may be preyed upon because she is female and therefore as a female is vulnerable to the actions of others, particularly males. This expectation renders her personal will or strength of will inadequate (unless, perhaps, she had had special training in personal combat or defense).

Angel also stated that she never felt threatened on campus. However, she then explained,

Yeah, sometimes I'm forced to [walk alone at night] 'cause I procrastinate, you know, and I don't have a car... Um, actually I was worried about that a lot last year for some reason, so that's why I started just riding my bike because I figure if anyone want to mess with me I'll just try to hit 'em or something.

Angel said she did not feel threatened on campus... yet she did not want to walk alone at night (and seemed to blame herself if she must, "... 'cause I procrastinate, you know, and I don't have a car...") and "worried about" walking alone at night on campus; she started riding her bike thinking, expecting, anticipating that if someone did "mess" with her, she would try to "hit 'em or something." So there was a threat that she perceived, and yet she also believed, or wanted to believe, she was safe on campus.

Angel also has received other messages about being female and what to *expect* because she is female. She said,

Yes! [girls are supposed to have more morals than boys] And you know, I think that society definitely has put that label on... women. That's another thing on campus actually that I've, that I seem to notice. I don't know if this is just my being hyper-aware or paranoid or something, but I always feel girls are supposed to work harder for the respect that some guys get. Like, for example, in, um, one of my classes... the professor just seem to... expect more from the girls than the guys and like just kind of shrug it off if a guy would walk in late or--you know what I mean? He just seemed more, um, favorable of the males in the classroom ... Like he, he wasn't rude to the point where it was like something to complain about, but it's just--seemed like he respected the boys in the class more... It was

just something I felt like. I don't know if I was, like I said, I don't know if I was just paranoid or being a feminist or whatever you want. I don't know.

I believed Angel when she said, "I don't know." Her *Self-Expectation/ Agency* of "being able," able to do the work, get the grades, in fact, to do *whatever* in order to get herself to college as a strong person is countered by what she experiences as a female--even on her "safe" college campus. Yet this is "just something I felt like."

She also, again, accepted the onus of possibility that this perception-of-threat is due to her "just being paranoid or being a feminist," which casts doubt on her "ability" to know that what she is, in fact, experiencing is "real." Here, she seemed to take on the *Other Expectation*: since it is said that today males and females will be treated equally in our culture, there must be some other personal (and perhaps self-critical) reason she perceived any difference in the way the teacher in this classroom treated males versus females.

I also thought it was an interesting comment when she said she didn't feel threatened on campus and yet reported,

And I'm very like more cautious than I used to be, just because of things that have happened. Like I don't usually walk outside at night alone. I don't--I don't know, I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know, but I know I still do it, you know?

This came in response to a question concerning whether she acted differently because she was female rather than male. But again, she said, "I don't know" then added what I thought was an illuminating afterthought--"I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know..."

It has become such a habit for Angel to act defensively, to be fearful and yet to say she does not feel threatened on campus, or to believe she does not feel *as* threatened on campus when she compared this to feeling threatened in other towns or in other circumstances.

#

For **JJ**, her *Self-Expectation/ Agency* had a few more years to mature since at twenty-four, she was the oldest of the study participants. JJ always "wanted to do something really important" with her life. More so than any other study participant, JJ also verbalized a strong identity with her Hispanic heritage, though she is both Hispanic and Caucasian.

This identity as well as the fact that she is first-generation seemed to provide JJ with additional impetus to prove herself in both arenas. She felt that the fact she is first-generation is an asset and a testament to determination:

Well, I think personally it means you have a little more power to do good things. Um, 'cause I think, you know, we're a determined group obviously...my dad didn't go to college so he, you know, neither of them had any information on, you know, what to give me or what to expect for school... I don't know, that you're

more determined. I don't have this information and I still, you know, find a way to make it work...

She also felt she was excluded and made fun of as a child because she was Hispanic and poor, and this fortified her resolve to be the best. Her *Self-Expectation/ Agency* included knowing she can do it, and that "it" also included anything upon which she sets her sights. She stated,

I may be poor, but I'm not like some dirty, uneducated street rat who's gonna be a bum her whole life or something. Or a drug addict or something. So this is kinda my way to be like you know what, um, yeah, I'm not gonna be what society has dealt me, keep me in that position. I'm gonna do whatever it takes to do better...

JJ is an artist and intended to get her Master's degree. She set her sights on Stanford.

While she has devoted herself to her volunteerism and her art and *knows* she will make it as an artist, there were distressing situations within the Art Department for her, which referenced gender. For example, when I asked JJ about the Art Department, she shared that "Most of the, most of the, yeah, most of the students are female, most of the teachers are male." She found the fact that there were not as many female art teachers "kind of discouraging" but believed that the ones who were in the Art Department were "very strong, positive role models." When I asked her why she thought there might be so many female art students and yet more male art teachers as well as, it seemed, more acclaimed artists who are male, she offered this explanation:

Oh, we, um, what's weird is, ah, in the Art Department I think there's like way more females than men. It's strange because in every art class I have there's like one or two, maybe four men in each class if you're lucky, you know, if they're lucky or whatever. But most of the artists that are famous are *men* or making money are *men*. And I wonder if it's, um, because like I've heard some studies that like Ivy League schools, a woman will go there and they'll get like scholarships and stuff and they give them like a survey later, they say that they would give up their career for a family and marriage and a family...

and

... just the fact that there were so many girls in the art class not a lot, you know, more successful me--male artists was interesting to me, so like I just, I was--like I always wonder... like how many women are here just to get their MRS degree?

JJ believes that while so many more women seemingly study art, they are, for the most part perhaps not serious enough about their art or choose to put the idea of having a family before a career or in place of a career as an artist, thus *choosing between* a family or a career. Rather than being personally deleterious, this fact gave JJ hope because she found a way to give this a positive spin:

... I don't know, it kind of makes me feel like maybe I have a better chance because I don't [laughs], I don't want to get married and I don't want to have kids

much... so I'm like, man, maybe I'm at an advantage because I'm not gonna get married and have kids.

This seemed to solidify her notion that if a woman artist wanted to make it as an artist, she must be serious, and that to be serious may or must mean giving up marriage and/ or a family. In her estimation, this seriousness did not seem expected of a male artist.

JJ also felt some of the male teachers in the Art Department were "older," which could account for the sexism she encountered. She stated,

Um, he [one of the male art teachers] is the reason for a lot of my stress right now... I--well, I get the feeling that he's--he's been here since 1965--so he's very old-fashioned, and he's--when he says things he is kind of sexist. He told me yesterday, I should learn how to cook... that it was essential that I should learn how to cook. I was like, Oh my God, I could vomit.

JJ also said,

... male teachers can be very flirtatious. I think that's... I've met a lot of them in my college career. Um, like the ____ [name intentionally omitted] teacher, he--his two favorite students are the two most gorgeous girls in the class. I guess that he's very old-fashioned.

JJ equated "old-fashioned" with sexism, and while she does not (apparently) like it, she has come to "expect" it, categorizing sexism as "old-fashioned," which then somehow *allows* for it to exist.

When I interviewed JJ, I found her ideas about *Other Expectation* particularly interesting because she seemed more consciously aware of these female gender expectations than, say, Angel appeared to be. Yet she had also found a way to separate herself from being one of *those* females who either surrendered to *Other Expectation* or who somehow fell victim to it.

I believe her bisexuality aided her in this separation, as did her self-identified "tomboy" nature, which abdicated some of the more commonly held expressions of overt femaleness. For instance, when we discussed the idea of how she thought the campus projected the image of female, or if she had ever witnessed or had any "female" experiences on campus, JJ hesitated and then said, "I'm tryin' to think of it more from a female perspective. I've always kind of been a tomboy at heart." JJ disconnects from what she, and perhaps what some others, culturally define as "female." She went on to say that it wasn't until this last year that she even bought a purse, as though this provided further evidence of her decidedly non-female-like nature:

You know, maybe I never really thought about that too much. Um, because I've always been quite the tomboy. It wasn't until recently that I, I started looking like a girl [laughs]... I didn't buy a purse until like last year, you know? So I've been, like most of my guys--my friends are guys. And I've always just kind of thought of myself as one of the guys...

Maybe I never really thought about that too much... I've always just of kind of thought of myself as one of the guys... Inwardly, I found myself asking what was it that JJ wanted to disassociate from so deliberately? Was it a specific "image of female" she internalized that she then must divorce herself from in order to be herself, or be serious, or... what? She proffered some insight when she said,

I don't, I don't know. I just never, um, until recently I didn't even really enjoy a lot of things that girls do. I don't--I hate shopping. [laughs] Um, I hate--I think I always didn't like it 'cause women were--they seem more backstabbing... then probably, um, my weight... Not having the body that I wish... Like they have the body that I want so maybe that was another reason I just like, you know, play it down.

There is some negative (for her) image of female that she does not want to be and there is an idealized part of that *Other Expectation* female image that she feels she cannot be because of her weight.

Like Angel, JJ experienced fear while walking across campus at night:

Oh-h... you know what? I always call my boyfriend when I'm walking around at night... and I make him talk to me as I get to my car and as I'm unlocking my car I put him on speakerphone. Yeah--no--I'm actually--I'm quite worried about that,

especially being alone at night in the Art Building.... So sometimes that's scary but I just try not to think about it.

However, JJ really did not discuss this as a distinctly female challenge. Rather, when she did discuss any perceived challenge (for her) *as a female*, she brought up a situation that involved others casting her--rather than her male friend--in a sexually provocative role and also brought up her bisexuality.

Of the first, she said that one thing she noticed was when she jokingly flirts with a male friend of hers and he is flirtatious back, *she* is the one who gets the label of being slutty, while no one mentions his behavior. JJ explained, "... we both know it doesn't mean anything serious at all. And of course everyone projects that onto *me* as being slutty.... no one says anything about *him* being slutty or anything. It's just all put on *me*."

Of her bisexuality, JJ said,

... one challenge of being female is that, um, um, well, I don't really tell much people this but I'm bisexual... I've lost a lot of female friends over that. So now I just kinda hide it... my sexuality's been a challenge as a female. Just afraid that I'm gonna push women away.

As a human being, JJ appreciates the company of those of her own gender, but this is hampered if she discloses her bisexuality. JJ mentioned that today it is easier for her to hide the fact that she is bi-sexual because presently she has a boyfriend.

My perception was that JJ realized there was an *Other Expectation* of what it meant *Out There* to be female. At the same time, JJ adopted a personal negative expectation/ definition of female, which did not support her positive *Self-Expectation* of the determined female she is, and so she resisted the self-perceived negative image by being opposite from it. Part of this "being opposite" may include adopting more male-like behavior as a form of honorary male behavior, which may then grant her greater (self-believed) probability for success.

#

Unlike JJ, **Fay's** responses seemed uncomplicated, and perhaps this is why I chose to present her narrative information last within all sections of the Shared Themes category: her clarity seemed to bring me a sense of clarity as well.

As stated previously, from Fay, I received a compelling sense of her own advocacy for her future, which included a college education despite this lack of academic history in her own family: "So I think just pushing myself, I graduated as Salutatorian, and so I think that it was kind of like empowering myself to strive for something rather than depend on others..." Her *Self Expectation/ Agency* was that she is a strong-willed person, and she made sure she personally applied for several scholarships to gain the funding she would need to bring her expectation for herself into physical reality.

Fay also benefited from a solid, uplifting relationship with her boyfriend who began attending Colorado State University at the same time she did. While Fay described herself as a leader and is involved in leadership projects, she also self-identified as being shy. Her boyfriend's familiar presence afforded her a way to ease into the social aspects of college life.

Fay's transition into college life during the first year seemed the smoothest by far of all four study participants. What became apparent, however, was that while she did not seem disturbed by many of the more common transitional challenges like adapting to classes, finding friends, or leaving home, Fay was bothered by some of the negative female images she felt greeted her on campus.

For instance, when Fay related her first few days on campus, she said,

When I first came in like it was seriously a problem my first couple of days and, um, I was in the library writing on my blog and I was just talking about how fake our society--I have a big issue with how demoralized, especially the women in our society are becoming, and, I don't know, I don't like girls that are dressing slutty.

She added,

... and it seemed coming to campus that everybody was like that and even going to the rec seein', you know, all the machines full of girls that are, you know, venemently [sic] working out when they're already tiny. And so that really bothered me right off the bat, like it really bothered me at first. Um, so that kind of gave me, you know, like a negative perception of the campus...

Of course, Fay may be keying in on images she personally takes issue with, but she--as a self-possessed woman--may take issue with images that oppose the constructive *Self-Expectation/ Agency* that helped her attain her place at a university in the first place. For

example, Fay shared that she finds certain "slutty" dress or behavior troubling. She described some girls' behavior at a football game:

They were just acting stupid, and, um, the girls--there was like three of them--they were like pulling their shirts up and one of the girls like pulled her shirt up and like tucked it above her bra and was like lookin' around and waitin' for people to look at her.

She said the girls were cursing, and she thought they were drunk, but this bothered her enough to discuss it and to admit that it made her feel particularly uncomfortable in front of her boyfriend. She found herself wondering if he was looking at them or if he expected her to act or dress that way. She went on to say,

I don't know, it seems like a lot of girls take advantage of being, you know, skinny, and pretty, and having money and they kind of use it to be like sex objects to, you know, you know, in the eyes of guys...

I believe there is an *Other Expectation* at play here. It appears that if there were not an expectation that some females would or could act this way or expose themselves in this way, the young women Fay spoke of would not be exhibiting themselves and *expecting something positive(in their estimation) to come of the exhibition*.

Of other female images Fay has seen on campus, she said,

You'd see like the stereotypical... the girl, you know, some guy coming out of a girl's room at seven o'clock in the morning or, you know, the girls that get dressed up for their eight o'clock classes and so I mean it was like the stereotype--I mean, I expected it because, you know, it goes on in high school. You see it at the malls. You see it in the stores. So it wasn't anything I didn't expect. It was just a little unnerving to come in and see all of these people that look so much like each other and are so... I guess engrossed in looking good and looking good for others. Seeing them like in your classes, going to the rec, seeing them on campus. And so it was just a little unnerving to see, you know, just to see 'em.

Fay said, "So it wasn't anything I didn't *expect*." This expectation should not go unnoticed or unchallenged. Fay sounded resigned to this image appearing in the campus culture. It is not that she likes it or condones it, but the fact is that she does expect it, which seemed to render it an inevitable behavior/ image of and by a certain number of female students. Fay summed it up when she said,

It's more of a... tryin' to... I don't know, be what you think other want you to be and try to be like the whole--like sexy, especially with Halloween comin' up, you know that 95% of the female costumes are gonna be like, I don't know, little go-go dancers... Um, just a little like... scant costumes and I think it's just because they want people to look at them more than anything.

Fay also emphasized a sense that there were many other women on campus who she felt did not look like her and who tried to both look sexy for the males on campus and to compete with other females. It made Fay sad that this existed on campus. Such female behavior, what she termed "slutty" behavior, distressed her.

Fay said that she did not, at first, expect this behavior to have a place in a higher academic setting. However, then the "reality" of what she had seen in other venues--high school, malls, stores--and the reality of behavior she observed on campus *adjusted her expectation* of what was accepted behavior on campus--which mimicked what can be seen in popular culture.

CHAPTER 7: FOCUS GROUP INSIGHTS

The Gathering Room

Three students, Fay, Angel, and JJ, participated in the Focus Group session. We met in a classroom, and this group session lasted approximately one hour. The procedure was informal. I used several questions to prompt the discussion. These questions focused on the participants' female perspectives regarding college and campus activities. These questions stemmed from comments the participants made during the first and/ or follow-up interview(s) or stemmed from the flow of the focus group discussion itself.

What follows here are what I believe to be the participants' main impressions of their various campus experiences, thought-provoking quotations, and then running notes and various quotes from the audiotape of the session as I transcribed it. This last piece was not a word-for-word transcription of the discussion: due to the group format, it was difficult at times to distinguish specific words and/ or identify the speaker as participants agreed, spoke in unison, or spoke over each other. However, it was important to include this last piece in order to afford a connection with the actual session and an overall sense of how the actual real-time discussion emerged.

Main Impressions

Participants experienced worry or fear walking alone across campus at night.

Their worry does not arise from another woman attacking them.

They feel college years are prime years when college women are expected (by society in general) to look good, go a little crazy and experiment sexually.

All Focus Group participants had been exposed to posters of scantily clad women in male dorm rooms or apartments, which made them feel uncomfortable.

They believe Society in general thinks males are the superior ones.

Gender-related issues are, for the most part, not a priority for them in college; they are more likely to stress about studying or exams/ performance.

Feelings of safety increase if there are other females present in a room/ classroom.

One participant said college women are expected to be sluttier, and other participants agreed.

Participants felt concern/ obligation to watch out for "sheltered" college students who drank too much.

Participants linked pressure to drink with wanting to make friends and fitting in.

Thought-provoking Quotes

"I'm not afraid to walk alone, but I do usually stay on the phone or, I don't know, carry something heavy."

"Especially in the, um, Art Department. Um, it's open all hours of the night. So, um, you're encouraged not to be there alone at night, especially if you're a woman."

"We (women) don't kill as much, we don't rape as much, we don't molest as much. That's something we should really be proud of."

"It just seems like college women are so objectified, like, like, it's like these prime years where you're supposed to be like going crazy... "

"I think generally society looks at girls that way. Like we're supposed to keep up our appearance. Like when it comes down to it we're really just worrying about our grades... our life, our career, I mean."

"You can exude confidence whether you look good or not, people are still going to respect you, but I don't exude confidence unless I do look good."

"The first thing (a poster) that my boyfriend put in his dorm room last year was *How beer is better than women...* It was totally like the scantily clad, like, whore... stiletto heeled..."

"... one thing is, um, I think that just people in general look at you differently, especially being a girl in college. Like statistically how much more do guys honestly make a year, no matter what the jobs? Like I don't know, I've been doing some reading in social work lately about that. And I just think in general--It's so driven into everyone's head that guys are superior, and that we're the inferior ones."

"I always thought it's weird, there's more girls in the Art Department but more successful old men--male artists."

"You know there's always chance that we could be here for our MRS. degree. And there are girls who do that, so it makes all of us look bad."

"A lot of people feel like they have like this like misconception that all us females are here just because we want a degree and that after college we're just gonna get married and be housewives."

"I don't really think about how being a female will effect the outcome."

"In a lot of ways we're (women) a minority as well."

"I would be really uncomfortable if I was in a room full of guys, like three-hundred class size? I'd probably be scared if I was with all guys."

"I think it's degrading to all females when some women act that way. I think it makes it seem like we're all just easy. Oh, there's another label for college girls."

"That's true... you're expected to be sluttier. You're supposed to be sexually experimenting. So men expect you to be a little sluttier now... and they're gonna get laid... a lot. It's gonna happen when they're in college."

Notes & Quotes

What is presented here is a suggestion of each question (indicated by bold italics) followed by examples of the content of various answers during the Focus Group session.

If the information presented is a direct quote, the participant's name appears in parenthesis next to the statement.

Some of you mentioned that there were particularly female issues that you encountered. If you did have any particular female issues, did you have particular female ways of dealing with these challenges? For example, two of you had issues with walking across campus alone at night.

Boyfriend might think it's goofy but accommodates me but still doesn't understand why I need to stay on the phone while I get to my car--doesn't understand why it's a necessity.

A lot of rapes happen in parking lots.

My boyfriend understands but I know he definitely would not do the same thing in the same situation, like if he were walking alone. I think we definitely approach things differently, like in parking lots and stuff.

Girls do things that boys do not because of the rape statistics.

Crazy people come out at night

"I'm not afraid to walk alone, but I do usually stay on the phone or, I don't know, carry something heavy." (Angel)

Keep your keys in your fingers.

"Especially in the, um, Art Department. Um, it's open all hours of the night. So, um, you're encouraged not to be there alone at night, especially if you're a woman." (JJ)

I guess there's been things that have happened there... but I haven't seen anything.

Art students have to work all hours of the night
Anyone can into it [Art Department/ Building] at any time.

Does it effect your work?

"Ah, no, I should let it effect my work more but I'm just like I really need to get done.
Like, um, yeah, but I should think about it more." (JJ)

When you worry about walking across campus or being in the Art Building, are you worried that another woman will attack you?

They all laugh and say no.

"We (women) don't kill as much, we don't rape as much, we don't molest as much. That's something we should really be proud of." (JJ)

We (women) are just more compassionate

Do you think females in general on campus are treated somehow differently than males on campus? Any specifics?

"It just seems like college women are so objectified, like, like, it's like these prime years where you're supposed to be like going crazy... " (Fay)

"It's like, it's just like, it's what's expected of college years, kind of... Like college guys, I don't know, I guess they're thought of kind of like drinkers and partiers. But, you know, whenever you think of women it's more, like appearances and just like objectification, kind of." (Fay)

"I agree." (Angel)

Women more appearance oriented (the expectation). Supposed to always look good.

She's so cute, she's in college.

Back in the day when she was in college she was cute--supposed to always look good and dress nice and impress people--society looks at women this way too--prime years when you are expected to go crazy and wear these little tops and skirts.

Women are supposed to impress people--it's more an appearance thing.

"I think generally society looks at girls that way. Like we're supposed to keep up our appearance. Like when it comes down to it we're really just worrying about our grades... our life, our career, I mean." (Angel)

Working out just one more thing to worry about -- effects confidence--try to look good to boost confidence-- if I'm social that day, I try to look better, more make-up, dress better for security...

"I try not to do it for other people (look good), but I'm sure subconsciously I do." (JJ)

Keeping up on appearance and working out and everything

"You can exude confidence whether you look good or not, people are still going to respect you, but I don't exude confidence unless I do look good." (JJ)

Have you ever walked into a dorm room and seen any posters or anything that made you feel uncomfortable?

All laugh

"The first thing that my boyfriend put in his dorm room last year was *How beer is better than women...* It was totally like the scantily clad, like, whore... stiletto heeled..." (Fay)

If you walk down the hall, in Edwards, all the guys, you know, you see like some kind of depiction of like scantily clad girl.

Don't usually see girls with like big naked Abercrombe posters.

Girls can get just as easily aroused by seeing Johnny Depp in a pirate suit

Girls like personalities

Chick posters everywhere--okay, that makes me feel insecure--does not make me feel good--I do not look like this.

Asked brother "why" as to posters of scandalous model Playboy girls--Brother says because they're "hot"

And yet I wonder how he would react if someone put your picture up...?

Oh, he would go crazy

Brother doesn't like her to have boyfriends

Brother gets jealous and drinks and wants to fight the guy--looks through her phone list

Doesn't want her to date--you were talking about testosterone--he's even started texting people...

Have you ever been in a classroom or a class situation where you think you were looked at differently because you were female rather than male?

Silence at first

"I don't really see that much, I don't know about you guys, but one thing, is um, I think that just people in general look at you differently, especially being a girl in college. Like

statistically how much more do guys honestly make a year, no matter what the jobs? Like I don't know, I've been doing some reading in social work lately about that. And I just think in general. It's so driven into everyone's head that guys are superior, and that we're the inferior ones." (Angel)

"I always thought it's weird, there's more girls in the Art Department but more successful old men--male artists." (JJ)

"You know there's always chance that we could be here for our MRS. degree. And there are girls who do that so it makes all of us look bad." (JJ)

Why take her seriously?

Do you think that males are given the benefit of the doubt in certain situations?

Yes

Like they can think we're the ones that are going to have to support the family, so they're (men) are the ones who need an education.

"A lot of people feel like they have like this like misconception that all us females are here just because we want a degree and that after college we're just gonna get married and be housewives." (Angel)

"A lot of people that have said that to me--I don't know why--but they do. They're like, 'Oh why are you tryin' so hard? You're just gonna get married and have kids and take care of them' and I'm like, no, actually I don't see that happening." (Angel)

If someone, a woman wants a happy life, how do or don't kids figure in to having a "good life"? Do they impact a female's life any more than a male's life?

Impact you (female) in getting a job--getting hired--men don't have to think about this because an employer assumes the female will take care of the kids.

Do you think issues you may consider female or gender-related take a secondary place to other issues in your life right now as college students? Some of you talked to me about other loyalties or pressures, earning extra money, racial issues, families, and not so much female issues—is it less prominent in your life?

Silence

Right now I'm stressin' out about exams. [the focus group met the week before finals]

I don't think about my gender... I worry more about studying and what I'm doing.

Think about how well I've done.

I don't regard gender until it comes to aesthetic things, like appearances or abilities...

"I don't really think about how being a female will effect the outcome." (Fay)

I make sure all these things are done for other students in volunteer capacity, also for minority status as ethnicity

"In a lot of ways we're (women) a minority as well." (JJ)

Diversity seems more important defined as different ethnicities

Rather have variety

"So it's really weird to me to be in a White city." (Angel)

I think it's weird that we all say we'd also look for females, too

Do you think you feel safer when there are females in the room?

"Oh God, yes." (JJ)

"I would be really uncomfortable if I was in a room full of guys, like three-hundred class size? I'd probably be scared if I was with all guys." (Angel)

"Yeah." (JJ)

Why do you think that is?

"It'd be way out of your comfort zone... 'Cause it'd be more, not like physical fear, 'cause I don't know if ... in class... but kind of like what are they thinking..." (Fay)

"Yeah, not in a classroom." (JJ)

So the environment changes the danger level?

Yeah

And drinking

I'd probably be scared in a classroom just full of guys--what are they thinking, do they take me serious.

Have there ever been times you have felt uncomfortable like that at parties or...?

Yeah, because they're putting me at the same level as some superficial... you know... hot chicks.

I want to talk and be respected so...

"I think it's degrading to all females when some women act that way. I think it makes it seem like we're all just easy. Oh, there's another label for college girls." (Angel)

"That's true... you're expected to be sluttier. You're supposed to be sexually experimenting. So men expect you to be a little sluttier now... and they're gonna get laid... a lot. It's gonna happen when they're in college." (JJ)

"It's disgusting." (Angel)

Oh, yeah, that's a big one.

Like you are supposed to be sexually experimenting now while you are in college--drugs, sex--like different groups.

I've even heard adults say to experiment with sex with different partners.

Like in that whole 18-24 age bracket--you're in your prime

Like look at the college movies...

Do you think that those college movies are made for a more male or female audience?

"Male." (JJ)

I was watching... I swear, my IQ went down five points just watching it because it's just totally like sex in college and...

Everybody loose and having sex.

Girls who get drunk and are loose--sluttier.

My professor was talking about boundaries... She said, "I'm not expecting that this whole room of college students have not smoked pot at least once in their life" -- like as a whole we're supposed to be crazy.

It's been encouraged

Any thoughts about Frat parties?

Let's get her drunk and...

Frat houses-- makes me think of Sam Spady--that made me feel like they don't care about women--they should have watched her--who would not watch her? I'm not saying all guys are ignorant jackasses but...

As a friend you always make sure your friends are okay...
She had thirty drinks at least

Have you ever been at a party where you've had a few too many and so you were more careful or told yourself this would never happen again?

Jungle juice-- really careful because there were a lot of guys there... so we stayed outside the party... We were just really careful.

"We thought there's no hope in going inside, someone's just gonna try and take advantage..." (Angel)

Beer is safer

Wonder about free drinks nights for female--want to get us wasted

Date rape drug

Put a lot of alcohol in so you don't taste it

Do you think guys worry as much about getting something slipped into their drinks?

I've never seen guys worry

No

Did you ever think college would be different--expect something else--people would be more driven or?

I'm from a little podunk town--I didn't see it a lot--but people drank in high school... and a guy in college called us, he was drunk in a field... at preview we went through alcohol education so I sort of expected it...

A lot of people live on campus the first year.

A lot more freedom for the people who had been very sheltered

Obligated towards the sheltered kids who seemed to go crazy and drink too much... they don't know how to act

A lot of social pressure

They get all crazy

Like they set foot in the dorm room and that's all they want to do is party and get drunk.

Pressured to drink at parties? Did you think there are times people cave in to peer pressure like they're supposed to be drinking in college?

You really want to make friends--really want to fit in

Even more pressure when you are from somewhere else and can't be home

Do you think women feel the need for more relationships/friendships than males do--or are those relationships different? Some of you have strong ties to friends here or to family, someone you can relate to. Are relationships second nature for females?

I think so

I like to keep in touch with high school friends... haven't made so many close friends in college.

Didn't really bother her boyfriend not to talk to or be with old high school friends--

"He really didn't talk to his high school friends." (Fay)

I know I pride them (relationships) more than guys

Men just like to share activities

Women like to share emotions and not just good times like guys

Might smaller classes be easier for you even though you will be called on, can't hide, etc? More one-on-one?

I like smaller art classes

Smaller classes easier...

I'm just weird--more self-conscious in a big class like people are looking at me or judging me--would rather have one-on-one and questions answered when I put my hand up...

Impersonal with big classes

Academically I like bigger classes cause I know I won't get called on so much/ I can lose myself in the crowd.

Leadership classes are smaller and they watch you and make sure you are doing it a certain way. In bigger classes I can kind of like lose myself.

Paranoid --I was concerned I was gonna screw it up

"Used to bother me but not so much now." (JJ)

Depends on the personality (of the woman)

Does it bother you when someone says something is a Female issue?

All the time.

I'm a tomboy

Was never girly

"I don't like conforming." (JJ)

"I don't either." (Angel)

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

Dueling Images

Mirrors create illusions. In a house, mirrors are often utilized as an artifice, a trick to make us believe something is so, which is not really so. The introduction of a mirrored wall can create the illusion of a larger room or more space. Mirrors set within line-of-sight vision to each other on opposing walls can create the illusion of countless reproductions of that mirror image, like secret portals to other worlds. And if you stand between these mirrors, you too find your way into the illusion as your image is telegraphed into infinity.

Mirrors can also allow us to see our own image. But like a photograph, this is really only a representation of our image. Depending on the mirror or the camera used, the lens, the image may resemble what we have come to believe we look like or it may distort like a carnival funhouse. In any case, however, these images are not us; they are merely models or *versions* of us we may choose to believe or not believe.

I focus here on mirrors and images and illusions in order to establish a premise with which to frame my perspective. What stayed with me as I immersed myself in the narratives of my study participants was the chasm between the apparent strength of these first-generation women's *Self-Expectation/ Agency* in order to achieve a position at a university set against the *Other Expectation* they were met with in a campus setting. This *Other Expectation* appeared to represent a negative female image for them, an image unrepresentative of who they knew themselves to be. It was a commercially stimulated female image they had come to expect, but not one they could personally relate to nor wanted to relate to.

These images of *Other Expectation* did not represent them as women or as individuals. These images did not mirror back to them the positive *Self-Expectation/ Agency* image they had of themselves. Therefore, this image as a whole or these individual images they may have encountered in classrooms, residence halls, and on or off campus were something to be resisted.

This is not to say that the participants did not also see positive images of female leadership and pride. Fay, for example, was a member of the President's Leadership Program and also received powerful, positive guidance through her association with the First-Generation Office. JJ found strong leadership and friendship from the female professors in the Art Department as well as positive role models in the various organizations for which she volunteers. Angel considered her female boss at Cooperative Extension a positive role model and also experienced female leadership through her association with her church. And while MaryCate did not actively discuss any positive female leadership on campus, she did find a positive model in her aunt.

However, their *Self-Expectation/ Agency* brought them affirming energy, while *Other Expectation* brought them down. At least three of the participants provided illustrations of resistance to *Other Expectation* images as they sought to maintain their female/ personal self-esteem. They appeared to feel in some positive operative control of their lives and their self-image within the bounds of their personal *Self-Expectation/ Agency*. When confronted with *Other Expectation* in the form of female images that did not reflect who they considered themselves to be, they exerted some control by avoiding these images, denying them, and/ or striving to be as *unlike* these images as possible.

It is this schism between their personal female image and a commercial, culturally induced female (negative) image that embodies a *duel*. The existence or awareness of this duel is not novel; however, the premise that such continuing resistance may trigger a limiting pattern of habitual resistance-behavior for some women bears scrutiny, as I suggest in the section, Implications for Future Research.

Mirrors do create illusions, but they can also create an illuminating effect. Precise placement of large mirrors outside the entrance of an archeological excavation site can reflect sunlight to similarly placed mirrors deep within the excavation, bringing light to the darkest spaces, giving us new eyes.

Interpretation: Expectations & Looking-Glass Girls

'... how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-glass House!'
... In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down
in the Looking-glass room. The very first thing she did was to look whether there
was a fire in the fireplace, and she was quite pleased to find that there was a real
one, blazing away as brightly as the one she had left behind. 'So I shall be as
warm here as I was in the old room,' thought Alice; 'warmer, in fact, because
there'll be no one here to scold me away from the fire. Oh, what fun it'll be, when
they see me through the glass in here, and can't get at me!'

~ Lewis Carroll ~

Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass

I defined *Self-Expectation/ Agency* as the inner self-concept of the participant wed to the ability to physically bring about her vision of a college education for herself, while *Other Expectation* was not so much what others think but rather what others (females and males) in our culture, including a campus culture, may often accept or regard as "female" behavior and imaging. I focused this interpretation on these divisive images because these did not reflect the images and expectations most study participants had for themselves and because three of the four narratives also indicated an active resistance or personal maneuvering against or in avoidance of such *Other Expectation* female imaging,

which they considered negative or contradictory to their positive *Self-Expectation/Agency*.

For three of the four study participants, their narratives contained examples of *Other Expectation* as well as their negative feelings or resistance to this. The fourth participant, **MaryCate**, did not directly discuss female images she considered negative, which she then chose to resist, but I did include what she did, in fact, discuss.

When I asked what image of females MaryCate thought the campus culture projected, she appeared perplexed. Finally she answered, "Ah... I don't know [laughed] like I mean like I don't really, I hadn't really even thought about that." My question would be why she doesn't think about this. The core of my question concerns her preparation for coming into a college campus situation *as a female*. Should women students be equipped with more information about what they may encounter on campus *as females* or do educators risk biasing them in some fashion? Are females at a physical and/ or psychological disadvantage without such preparation?

Personally, I would think we should educate our young women as much as possible since not only are they often marginalized in our culture, but they are also often physically at risk in our society. They are not immune to this risk on a college campus, although they may, in fact, feel insulated from Society-at-large because they are living more communally with other "students."

In addition, while it had been discussed previously how ultra-relational MaryCate was, I received the impression that she may have seen this need for relationship as *personal-and-female*, rather than perhaps weighted more toward the *personal-for-her*, that is to say, what she personally finds simultaneously comforting (family) and

constricting (the *need* for her family). I thought MaryCate also made a quiet, personal statement about how *women* may achieve "success" when she maintained that her aunt had no children and was financially successful. In her narrative this came in contrast to her mother's acute financial struggles along with her mother's history of having three children. It seems that MaryCate has absorbed the *Other Expectation* that women, more so than men, must choose between family and finances, or should put off having children until one is "established."

Since MaryCate is in a fight between who she appears to be based on her family and her past experiences and who she *can* be, she necessarily focused on this conflict in order to remain in college. While numerous eighteen-year-old first-year college students wage this battle, for MaryCate this proves particularly stressful. In light of this, her uncertainty regarding the image of women on campus seemed a particular concern. I felt she was either too consumed with her own challenges to notice how women were perceived on campus, or I thought, perhaps, that thinking along these lines was not a part of her critical-thinking skills as yet.

Again, what has this eighteen-year-old young woman's exposure been to female-related issues, that is, on a social, economic, and global scale? What is the history of the university system and the positioning of women? How does the university she is now attending enact and enforce safety parameters for its students, male and female? These are just some of the answers all new students should have before placing themselves in an unfamiliar environment. Perhaps for first-generation women students with little to no lived family history of going to college and what this might be like, this would be additionally essential.

Angel found herself in a situation in which she felt threatened as a female, and this resulted in her wishing that she were not female. Granted, this experience of being surrounded by a group of Hispanic men while she was in her vehicle, did not take place on a college campus. But she brought this experience with her to campus. And she wanted to not be a female because of the vulnerability and fear she experienced *as a female*.

Yet here is a strong young woman who willed her way to college past the emotional guilt wielded by an alcoholic mother and siblings who denounced higher education. Angel's hard work and determination and belief in herself both created and was simultaneously created by her positive *Self-Expectation/ Agency*, yet this encounter had her wishing she were not female. Why?

Because in this encounter with the group of men, Angel was full of fear *because she was female*. It is gender specific. And it is *Other Expectation* oriented: she may be preyed upon because she is female and therefore as a female she is vulnerable and open to the good intentions or lack of good intentions of others in our society, particularly males. This *Other Expectation* renders a woman's personal will or strength of will inadequate unless she has had, perhaps, special martial arts training.

Will this feeling of being inadequate *because she is female* transfer to other situations where Angel feels inadequate *because she is female* in a society where numerous women routinely face such encounters?

Angel also at first said that she did not feel threatened on campus. It was not until I asked her specifically about walking across campus at night that she "remembered"

feeling worried. Then she said she had started riding her bike when she had to travel alone at night, anticipating that if someone did "mess" with her, she would try to "hit 'em or something." So an expectation of a possible or likely threat existed; she knew this. Yet Angel also believed, or wanted to believe, she was safe on campus within the "safe" college community environment.

Angel does not feel threatened on the *surface of campus* but she also received a very different *Other Expectation* or *underlying latent message* of being threatened as a female. It almost comes down to the adage of *Hoping for the best but expecting the worst*. But if this is the case, an aware woman is always to be on guard. The environment of campus as a community of (hopefully) like-minded learners brings Angel a sense of a safe harbor (as does her view that the campus and the town is predominantly White) but this is countered by the cultural message, the *Other Expectation* that there is reason to fear *because she is female* and that females in general as a population may be more readily preyed upon in our culture, and that this expectation extends to the inside community of her college campus.

Alone, at night, Angel worried about traveling across a campus environment. However, in broad daylight and swaddled within the safety-in-numbers of a college classroom environment Angel also experienced an *Other Expectation* that she, frankly, wasn't sure what to do with. In this instance, she witnessed that her teacher treated males in the class differently than females in the class, but since it was something she felt more than something blatantly concrete, she had a hard time describing it and, thus, making it real. She said of the teacher in this class,

Like he, he wasn't rude to the point where it was like something to complain about, but it's just--seemed like he respected the boys in the class more... It was just something I felt like. I don't know if I was, like I said, I don't know if I was just paranoid or being a feminist or whatever you want. I don't know.

The *Other Expectation* here it especially interesting. Present day word-of-mouth and our laws supposedly affirm that males and females are equal, or are to be treated as equal. Yet here is a presumably educated teacher within a culture of higher education, apparently favoring one gender over another.

The likelihood is that Angel expected the teacher to treat all college students alike --and yet this teacher breaks from this positive expectation. So in this case, the *Other Expectation* of equal treatment lives with the opposing reality of unequal treatment. Yet alongside this positive expectation that males and females will be treated alike there is also the *Other Expectation* that females are vulnerable in our culture, as was expressed in the fear of walking across campus illustration.

Confronted with a demonstration of unequal treatment, Angel doesn't *logically* know why she feels the way she does. The message she received was subtle but certainly felt. Angel said, "I don't know." Her *Self-Expectation/ Agency* of "being able," able to do the work, get the grades, in fact, to do *whatever* in order to get herself to college as a strong *equal* person is countered by what she experiences as a female--even on her "safe" college campus.

In addition, how can a classroom be unsafe? There are so many people there and there is the teacher, the well-educated authority there to keep her safe. However, in this

classroom, under the individual auspices of this particular teacher, Angel felt the boys were favored. Yet since she can't put her finger on enough logic, she must somehow be mistaken or her feelings must somehow be "her fault." She accepted the onus of possibility that this perception-of-threat is due to her "just being paranoid or being a feminist," which casts doubt on her "ability" to know that what she is, in fact, experiencing is "real." It also devalues her "feminine feelings" and places them in doubt.

Angel also said,

And I'm very like more cautious than I used to be, just because of things that have happened. Like I don't usually walk outside at night alone. I don't--I don't know, I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know, but I know I still do it, you know?

She said this after I asked whether she thought she ever acted differently because she was female rather than male. Again she said, "I don't know" but then added, "I don't--I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know..." *It has become such a habit* for Angel to act defensively, if you will, to be fearful, and yet to say she does not feel threatened on campus, perhaps because this is how she lives each day as a female person. If there is some other way of being, how would she know it?

I also found it interesting that she said of her actions, "things that I do differently *because of things*" rather than saying specifically *because I am female*. My impression

was that being female brought along with it *Other Expectation*--for example, some girls would dress revealingly (for men) and there are situations in which being female means being vulnerable--and that these were so accepted to be rendered invisible unless Angel was reminded of these situations or she had reason to pay close attention to them. Angel expects more of herself and for herself and there is an Other Expectation she must either consciously (or unconsciously) navigate.

#

JJ was the artist in the group and devoted herself both to her art and to her volunteer activities. She saw herself as a leader and a role model, especially as an Hispanic first-generation female. Throughout her narrative, she repeated the idea of wanting to be the best at whatever she intended to accomplish. She had set her sights on earning a Master's degree at Stanford University and had taken on leadership posts in various organizations, increased her grade point average, and created a working portfolio of her original paintings toward this goal. She used the early childhood exclusion she felt was due to her being both Hispanic and poor, to positively motivate herself toward a college education, toward being a role model to other Hispanics, and toward her chosen career as a professional artist. Her industrious *Self-Expectation/ Agency* is more than apparent.

Yet JJ's narrative also shed light on female images on campus that were not uplifting, ones I would place under the banner of *Other Expectation*. Interesting also in JJ's narrative was the image of female she appeared to have internalized. There were facets of this internalized image that appeared so negative for her, that she matter-of-factly denied these as having any place in her personality.

JJ's denial of many of these so-called female traits was the strongest and most active of all the study participants. For example, JJ said,

I don't, I don't know. I just never, um, until recently I didn't even really enjoy a lot of things that girls do. I don't--I hate shopping [laughs]. Um, I hate--I think I always didn't like it 'cause women were--they seem more backstabbing... then probably, um, my weight... Not having the body that I wish... Like they have the body that I want so maybe that was another reason I just like, you know, play it down.

There is some image of female that she does not want to be, and there is also an idealized part of that *Other Expectation* image that she feels she cannot be because of her weight. She also self-identified as being a "tomboy" and thus when I asked her about female issues or experiences on campus, she replied, "I'm tryin' to think of it more from a female perspective. I've always kind of been a tomboy at heart."

She disconnects her real self from her internalized *Other Expectation* of "female." She went on to say that it wasn't until this last year that she even bought a purse, as though this provided further assurance she was not *really* female or at least was not a *regular* female. Not being a regular female was to be seen as positive. Certainly, one could argue that likely no one, male or female, would welcome a trait like "backstabbing" in their character resume, but JJ seems to regard this as more a female than a male trait. Granted, this is due to some negative experiences she had with her stepmother, as well as childhood and present-day female relationships. But she saw this

as general female trait when she said, "... 'cause women were--they seem more backstabbing." Thus, JJ gravitates toward what she perceives as a male, and therefore a more straightforward, way of being. Since JJ sees herself as non-backstabbing, she is also, to some extent, non (regular) female, which in this case would be a "better person" way to be. She also shared, "... I've always just kind of seen myself as one of the guys." In this way she is, perhaps, to be seen as an "honorary male," a good thing to be in her worldview.

JJ also questioned female art students and their "seriousness" about their art. This came up as part of a discussion about the Art Department where, she had said, there were "way more" female art students while there were more male art teachers as well as more "earning money" professional artists who were male. Explaining this discrepancy, JJ felt that more female art students might not be serious about their art in that they wanted instead to get married and have a family. She stated that this made her feel like she may "have a better chance" because she doesn't want to get married or have kids that much, and she thinks "... maybe I'm at an advantage." Here again JJ is not *so* female as to want these things she associates, the *Other Expectation*, with being *truly* female. And again, being *unfemale* may place one at an advantage in our society.

I did not find JJ's feelings at all out of the ordinary. I believe images like these are cultural *Other Expectation* of the commercialized and generalized *Female*. While this does not mean that everyone believes all females are these things, the expectation that females generally are like or that they generally or commonly act in a certain fashion are accepted cultural perceptions that are perpetuated as commercial Standards or as Standards-of-Behavior. When one does not fit this image or one seeks to resist or deny

such an image or one simply knows one is so much more than this image--especially if one perceives this image as negative or alien--one may deny parts of real (female) Self or may deny being *truly* female.

Of her bisexuality, JJ said,

... one challenge of being female is that, um, um, well, I don't really tell much people this but I'm bisexual... I've lost a lot of female friends over that. So now I just kinda hide it... my sexuality's been a challenge as a female. Just afraid that I'm gonna push women away.

As a human being, JJ appreciates the company of those of her own gender, but such relationships are hampered if she discloses her bisexuality. She feels this way because she has lost female friendships in the past after revealing her bisexuality. So here is another face of her female self, which she feels she must *change* in order to somehow "fit." If she does reveal this aspect of her own true female self, she risks losing female friendships. Bisexuality, I submit, is not wholly accepted within *Other Expectation* for a *real* female in our culture. JJ also mentioned that today it is easier for her to hide the fact that she is bi-sexual because presently she has a boyfriend.

Touching on the subject of her boyfriend, I am reminded of something JJ and Angel shared. Both women experienced fear while walking across campus at night; however, both had to be reminded of this "normal" feeling by my asking, "Ever have any problems walking around campus at night?" Although JJ often separated herself from "female," she immediately said,

Oh-h... you know what? I always call my boyfriend when I'm walking around at night... and I make him talk to me as I get to my car and as I'm unlocking my car I put him on speakerphone. Yeah--no--I'm actually--I'm quite worried about that, especially being alone at night in the Art Building... So sometimes that's scary but I just try not to think about it.

But I just try not to think about it. So what signals "stereotypical female" for JJ, that vulnerability perhaps, is something she would rather not think about. Fear is something she would rather not think about, which I believe is understandable for anyone, but especially for this (otherwise) strong woman. Angel, in similar fashion, had said, "I don't --I really--it's become such a habit that I don't necessarily pick out certain things that I do differently because of things, you know..." In my view, both women had way of denying a ubiquitous and expected "female fear," walking across campus at night. *Other Expectation* signals that women, in general, who travel alone, and who travel alone particularly in the concealed realm of night *are placed, and/ or are placing themselves* in a vulnerable position (in our culture), which may bring them harm. If some harm comes to them, who then is to blame? Who is taught to feel blame?

More than any other narrative, I found JJ's story rich with complexities and what I might term female-in-disguise qualities: tomboy nature; bisexuality; female but not so much as to want marriage and kids like so many other *regular* females do. And while I have not focused on it here or within this study, there is also JJ's self-identified ability to "blend in" as White because while she is half White/ half Hispanic, she looks White:

... I really felt like, um, you know, in the Art Department--I look White because I'm half and half, so it's nice like I--well, I guess it's not like, well I guess I kind of blend in so people don't like, exclude me, kinda thing. But then because I do blend in, I'll hear people say racist comments and they won't like understand... I'm like, 'Excuse me. I'm Hispanic,' shut-up kind of thing.

Like so many women, JJ can "fit" within a variety of environments, but are there faces of the female self that must be hidden in order to do so? How do we come to "realize" this? What makes one woman a good "female fit" in our culture while another is not a good female fit within our culture?

Our culture's past history concerning females comes into play as well as the *value* culturally placed on female versus male characteristics. I felt that for JJ, there was some *Other Expectation* of what it means *Out There* to be female, as well as her own personal negative expectation or definition of "female," which does not support JJ's positive *Self-Expectation/ Agency* of the determined woman she is; yet this vibrant image IS totally female because JJ is Female.

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Fay's Self-Expectation/ Agency, like JJ's was quite direct. Fay appeared so in control of the outcomes she sought as she planned her way to college and navigated the applications for the scholarships she would need to fund her education. She stated,

Like I don't want to sound egotistical or anything, but I... [laughs] um, but I

applied for all the scholarships myself. I applied for over two-dozen scholarships in the extent of like, I think I started the end of my Junior year and went on to about the middle of my Senior year.

Fay is a competent young woman who is more than adequate.

And yet during her first days on campus when she saw girls dressing "slutty" she said it "was seriously a problem" for her. She believed women in our society were becoming "demoralized." When she is beset by what she considers crude female behavior on campus, she found herself disheartened. She recalled a football game where some women were drunk, cursing, and revealing themselves by pulling up their shirts:

... you could tell they were really drunk. They were just acting stupid, and um, the girls--there was like three of them--they were like pulling their shirts up and one of the girls like pulled her shirt up and like tucked it above her bra and was like lookin' around and waitin' for people to look at her. And then... it was just, I don't know, it's--I don't like girls that show off like that and they--I'm assuming it was the alcohol and the atmosphere but I don't know...

Fay has "this whole thing about girls that dress scantily." It seems to her that "a lot of girls take advantage of being, you know, skinny, and pretty, and having money and they kind of use it to be like sex objects... in the eyes of guys..." This bothers Fay although she said it wasn't anything she didn't *expect*.

While Fay ties this stereotypical female image with her feelings about those girls who have money and can use that money to "dress up," she doesn't see anything wrong with looking "pretty" but "... not to the extreme where you're just dressing up to look good for others." She thought there were girls who just want to "catch guys' attentions."

Such behavior makes her feel uncomfortable, as does seeing girls who are already "tiny" continually working out at the gym, which seemed to make her feel somewhat inadequate. After she experienced what she termed a "breakdown" during her first semester where she felt she could simply not do everything she felt she was "supposed" to do, she realized,

...that it's not realistic to work out at the gym, you know, every day of the week, you know? I mean, you just don't have time. There are other ways to do your own thing. And I figure for me, um, as long as I'm healthy in my own way, um, I'd rather focus on academics and things that are really important in the long run. Then, you know, just working out to be thin, and, you know, beautiful for everybody else...

There was an *Other Expectation* for a female that Fay had to set aside if she wanted to concentrate on "things that are really important in the long run," like her academics.

Of the women who took part in this commercialized image, she said,

I don't know, it seems like a lot of girls take advantage of being, you know, skinny, and pretty, and having money and they kind of use it to be like sex objects to, you know, you know, in the eyes of guys...

There is an *Other Expectation* at play here. If there were not an expectation that some girls would or could act this way or expose themselves in this way, these young women would not be exhibiting themselves. Such displays are a currency of our culture. There is some expected positive pay-off that is at least *possible* or these other girls would not be displaying themselves this way. They may also feel the positive pay-off (perhaps in the form of attention in general or male attention) is preferable or worth more than any possible negative pay-off in the form of a slight to their positive reputation. One might also posit that since our culture often performs a bio-reductionism on women, the "revealing" behavior of these women allows them to display their bodies or their *currency*, that is what is of supposed female-value in our culture.

Fay appears to confront this self-identified negative image of female on campus, feel both disheartened and threatened by it, feel at one point overwhelmed by all that she is supposed to be or do as a college female student, and then, after a "breakdown," realigns herself and focuses on her goals and the positive path she believes she has chosen.

#

Mirrors allow us to view images of ourselves we can either believe or deny. The truth is that we can never really see ourselves fully or at least with our own eyes without the use of a cheat--a mirror, a photograph, an incomplete reflection in a glass, a shine of

water. Or perhaps a model *out there* that might reflect who we might become. Sometimes these reflections prove rather short-sighted not only as regards how we really *look* but who we truly *are*.

The college experience should not be short-sighted. The forgoing discussion concerning Self and Other Expectation points up how these women students confronted negative female images every day. They resisted the negative images in the female mirrors on campus; some denied aspects of their female-ness to achieve this.

Whether rubbing up against these negative images polishes their positive self-concept or pulverizes it remains to be seen. The point is that a college education should provide all students with a place of developing their shiny self images, a place of *becoming*, and of becoming more not less. The belief that a higher education can foster this should not be an expensive, elusive illusion.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Fens Behavior

Students who arrive on campus to pursue a higher education do not drop the baggage of their social identities, beliefs or biases at the gates of the college before ambling inside. Professors, administrators, and staff personnel as well may not unpack their baggage at the gate. Nor does our culture-at-large cease to exist because we have all now decided to arrive at a place of higher learning and higher expectations for ourselves. In reality, we carry this larger social culture inside along with us.

While this view is not earth shattering, one of the more significant observations I made while conducting this study was how the reach of some culturally induced societal expectations of Female opposed the self-images the women in this study possessed. Stated another way, while certainly more complex than a black-white binary, the affirming self-expectations of the women in this study often came up against the non-affirming, often negatively perceived commercial or culturally induced and perpetuated image of Female.

These negative images were more apparent and more distasteful to at least three of the four study participants. What they hoped of this higher educational environment

and what they expected of themselves as they had labored to achieve a place in this higher educational environment bumped up against a more general cultural expectation of Female.

The existence of this dichotomy, this dual or *dueling* image of a perceived positive set against a perceived negative was, again, not startling. In educational psychology and learning theory, feminist literature, and Black literature such duality or double consciousness is well documented (Du Bois, 1973; Fanon, 1952; hooks, 1994).

What was perhaps more worthy of attention within my study, however, were the emerging narrative illustrations supportive of how three of the women in this study repeatedly fended off these images in order to keep their more positive sense of self intact and how some share of their authentic self concepts of "female" may be denied in order to do so. A vital task for us as human beings is the preservation and enhancement of our self concept (Rodgers, 1990b). As I listened to the participants' narratives and then found more illustrations of resistance and/ or avoidance behavior, I imagined it as a kind of swordplay or a fencing move they felt they had to execute.

Eventually, only for myself at first and going back to my roots as an English major, I termed this back and forth motion *Fens* or a fens motion, fens being the Middle English short version for *defens* (sans *e*). I also thought the word *Fencing* was appropriate because given another context, it is a structure used to keep something in or keep something out; in either case it functions to separate or ward off. And because of several childhood summers spent on a working "vacation" farm, I believed that "fencing" was also an attachment on a piece of farming equipment meant to help limit its function and improve its safety. When I sought to confirm this definition, the *American Heritage*

Dictionary (1979) definition read, "an attachment on a machine or tool that directs, regulates, and limits its action." As I worked with the narratives and the final format for the dissertation, I found myself calling the push-pull of *Self-Expectation/ Agency* and *Other Expectation* either Fencing or Fensing or FensBy (*Behavior.*) We all defend our particular self-concept, male or female, in any variety of ways, so for me FensBy just meant any kind of defense of self-concept or self-expectation. Looking over some handwritten notes, I saw that I'd jotted "femaledefencing" in a transcript margin and the *Fem-Fens* tag stuck when I found myself thinking about this kind of fending-off behavior when attributed to the female students in my study.

Implications of *Fens* Behavior

What are the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students? This was the central research question of my study. The four women who participated in this study had a spectrum of experiences, and certainly all were neither wholly negative nor positive. In fact, this dueling incongruity I mention is nothing new. The discrepancy fundamentally amounts to a positive self-actualization, full-strength, multi-dimensional *person* image model contrasted to a negative, culturally sponsored and often sexually charged, one-dimensional image model of *Female*. However, as I moved outward from the image of study subjects "fencing with" these perceived negative female images on campus within the sea change of first-year experiences, as I analyzed the narratives, and as I revisited literature concerning first-year, first-generation students and person-environment behavior theory, I also wondered if a Fens maneuver had a possibility of

limiting, in some fashion, the personal creative movement of these young women to strike out in personally innovative ways because on some level they were occupied with this motion of opposition. *If* one is occupied with being the opposite from or unlike a perceived negative female image, is it possible that this sets up a limited perspective (like the fencing on the farm equipment), thereby limiting the scope of creative personal action? May it limit identity development choices?

For 18-22 year-old students the developmental task of creating an identity, a sense of self, is primary (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Marcia, 1993; Waterman, 1993). And within the frame of a first-year college experience, this task runs headlong into the "culture shock" (Feldman & Newcomb, 1994, p. 276) of the transition into college.

The critical nature of this first-year and the programs in place to aid students during this transition into college are well documented (Erickson & Strommer, 1991; Gardner, 1998; Gardner & Jewler, 2000; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Soldner, Lee & Duby, 1999; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 1996; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Thus, the first-year experience has received systematic study because what happens during this time can make or break a student's path to success in college (Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Stovall, 2000). Researchers studying the first-year experience also often utilize Erikson's (1968) notion of crisis and identity development and focus on the import of students' ongoing identity development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Robinson, 2003Jan.). I mention the preceding to put into perspective two points: first, the impact-import of this first college transition year, and second, that because this first year is so crucial, it presents a structurally and psychologically essential slice of a student's academic life.

During this time, if one is repeatedly engaged in being "not" like some image or "not" behaving in some manner, can this limit new thinking and action beyond this "defense?" If one is kept busy being "unlike" the negative image, may this then reduce autonomy? Can the focus on "not" being something set up a restrictive push-pull or *fensing* motion whereby one cannot see or move beyond, or is limited in seeing or moving beyond, this performance? Does this then become a curious control issue wherein a woman may become an accomplice to her own constraint?

Add to this the context of entering this first critical year of college as a first-generation student. Many researchers studying first-generation student dynamics agree that students who are first in their family to attend college are less likely to graduate compared to students with one or both parents who have baccalaureate degrees (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin & Nunez, 2001). Often, when one reads about first-generation students, rather than spotlighting their new possibilities and sense of determination, research underscores their likelihood of failure.

First-generation students know this. They know their families have little to no first-hand knowledge about college to pass down to them. In high school they may have been directed toward "first-generation programs" to "help" them, thus there is the subtext that they require help. They are, at least in a general sense until they individually prove otherwise, at a deficit. A deficit model encompassing various first-generation students (Johnson-Bailey, 2002b) abounds, with stories about their "lack" and how they are "at risk." Critical theory supports that how groups see themselves are influenced by how they are viewed from the outside by others (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

There is also the question now of "fit" within the environment of college. A student's ability to "fit" includes navigating the pressures of college life (academic, physical, emotional), and Napoli and Wortman's (1996) meta-analysis correlated student success with such academic and social integration. Although published more than a decade ago, *The Freshman Year Experience* (Upcraft & Gardner et al., 1989) is still considered a benchmark publication today, and in it contributing author James Banning further discusses the environment by way of an ecological perspective and how it can impact first-year students. Banning is not alone in acknowledging the import of environment on college students (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Craik, 1981; Cook, 1987; Little, 1987; Ferguson, 1992; Salter, 1996; Schneider, 2001). The campus, and more specifically, the college campus during this first year is a complex environment. There is a "fit" that is needed between environment (and all that entails) and the person. "Fit" may not only effect behavior (Strange & Banning, 2001) but success and adjustment (Brown, 1978; Cook, 1987). Person-environment interaction (PEI) remains a significant discussion within student affairs practices (Strange, 1994). And within developmental social psychology, an ongoing interest exists in "person-context interactions, whereby various types of persons approach and experience the same context differently" (Cote & Levine, 2000, p. 58). Such "developmental contextualism" concerns person-context interactions and how different types of persons experience different "fits" in any given context (Lerner & Kauffman, 1985; Lerner, 1995; Strange & Banning, 2001). Stern's environmental press (Strange & Banning, 2001) concerns the ecology of the individual self and the outer environment, and how these must mesh or be complementary for that "good fit." An integrated paradigm of student development constitutes a

personenvironment interaction model, according to Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) classification of student change. In the field of human development it constitutes a goodness-of-fit model of developmental contextualism as applied to higher-educational settings. In addition, it provides an approach to an issue that has plagued past research, namely whether "the environment should be defined objectively, as a reality external to the individual, or perceptually, with reality being whatever the individual perceives it to be" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 39). How one perceives "fit" within an environment may also lead to the utilization of various coping strategies: "Problem solving, information seeking, cognitive restructuring, seeking understanding, catastrophizing, emotional release or ventilation, physical activities, acceptance, distraction, distancing, avoidance, self-criticism, blaming others, wishful thinking, humor, suppression, social withdrawal, resigned acceptance, denial, alcohol or drug use, seeking social support, seeking informational support, and use of religion." (Compas, Connor-Smith, Salzman, Thomsen and Wadsworth, 2001, p. 92). A basic student development concept is that students "grow in their capacity to make more differentiated response to the challenges of their environments" (Banning & Cunard, Aug. 1996, p. 40). So can Fens maneuvering limit differentiated responses to situations? Can it impact, for example, the "cognitive restructuring" and some of the more negative coping mechanisms as noted above? Drum (1978) pointed out various life systems for student development: cognitive development, development of the self and social development. The point is that environment--physical, social and psychological--can *shape*.

Along with the designations of first-generation and first-year, and while considering the "fit" of the college environment, the students in my study were female.

Women may be even more sensitive to the pressures and changes they experience within a new educational environment since they are transitioning into an institutional setting originally created for male attendance (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Timpson, Cannetto, Borrayo, & Yang, 2003). Nunez (2005) asserts the need for women-centered first-year, first-generation studies yet states, "... none have emphasized the experiences of women" (p. 88). "Others," including women, who attend a university, are expected to integrate into already established social and educational norms of the institution, and the unspoken but understood assumption is that "male" is the accepted universal. From an educational perspective, the broad-stroke is that adolescence is a challenging period, and it is even more challenging if one is expected to fit into a pre-established box that is ill-designed and ill-fitting, as it often may be for female students in a male-oriented university.

Researchers Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) assert, "Members of any group value themselves to the degree that their group is valued" (p. 294). Ambient devaluation of women and how they "know" their world then, can have detrimental consequences on women as they both absorb and reflect this devaluation in a self-perpetuating deprecation. In some cases, people rebel against those labels, but too often such labels can be accepted and lived (Fraser, Davis & Singh, 1997). Women must be persistent in their own positive self-concept, but women can be isolated (as can anyone) if they are different from the general community of women or the accepted standards of communal thinking. There are levels of female awareness. For example, while I found the women in my study certainly to be vibrant, "aware" people, they also seemed to evince a reluctance to be feminists while also retreating from the stereotypes of "expected"

femaleness, especially when those stereotypes included bio-reductionism. Yet gender is part of identity. Padesky and Hammen (1981) reported that women appeared to show higher rates of depression and experience depression in different ways than men do. Women are more likely to evince self-deprecating behaviors and possess a stronger connection for being responsible for their troubles than men do. In general, women are also more concerned with career issues, social issues, health and safety, and the threat of failure than are men (Bishop, Bauer, and Becker, 1998). Reisberg (2000) found that college women were experiencing more stress than ever before and more stress than their male counterparts. Feminist writers Banyard and Graham-Burmann (1993) proposed an alternative model of coping theory that would shed new light on women's coping. A new theory would understand that one's environment can dramatically reduce the kinds of coping options that are available.

While I am not a psychologist and this study was not pursued in order to explore female identity issues, per se, as the study participants shared their narratives, at least a portion of their identities emerged through their stories. Within three of the narratives, the defense of *Self-Expectation* against *Other-Expectation* was apparent. How participants used various means to resist or avoid what they construed as negative female imaging was illustrated previously in *Interpretation: Expectations & Looking-Glass Girls*. In addition, Le Compte and Schensul (1999) stated, "what people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed--or made up--as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings" (p. 48). Other researchers have echoed the idea of a constructed environment (Strange & Banning, 2001).

The importance of expectation and how this relates to the lives we construct was further discussed by Kolbe (1990), a theorist on instinctive patterns that can shape human behavior. Much of Kolbe's research concerns environments that run counter to our natural inclinations and force us into molds, or force us to mold ourselves into what is expected. She determines that in doing so, one may never feel a true sense of mastery. She even considers that this may lead women to feel like imitations of men and considers that women may be discouraged from implementing their own, individual natural behaviors. Add this to what Belenky et al. (1986) and Gilligan (1982) found: women may have different ways of knowing and different means of needing to connect personally with the information they are receiving and women's knowledge may be connected to self-concept, experience and self-reflection and that these may be vital for a woman's education. Worell (1999) states that "... by early adolescence they [women] begin to doubt their abilities" (p. 22) and Basow and Rubin (1999) add,

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..." (p. 37)

Being female is part of an identity; *Female* is also an environment that surrounds and permeates women to varying degrees. Numerous feminist writers have sought to advance, explain, and expose the lives and experiences of women (Anzaldua, 1987; Foss, 2004; Daly, 1978; Gearhart, 1979; Griffin, Foss & Foss, 1999; hooks, 1996; Lorber, 1994;

Schaefer, 1981; Starhawk, 1993). The “difference” therefore, between males and females is well referenced. Feminist legal theorist MacKinnon (1987) makes the point, however, that if all the fuss were really about (just) the differences between men and women, there would really be no fuss at all. The issue is really about how that difference feeds inequality in a power-play of dominance since “women and men are equally different but not equally powerful” (p. 51). This power differential is also present among women; not all women are equally powerful.

Nor are all women “the same.” Therefore, one woman may utilize *Fens* maneuvering differently than another woman, one may internalize it differently, and one may feel greater or lesser stress, awareness, or capitulation. “Social identity” is actively produced in interactions between self and others (Fraser et al., 1997, p. 222). Again, whether or not any limitations result, or whether those limitations are conscious and/ or subconscious remains for further study. However, I think that sensitivity to this possibility is especially significant on a college campus where women are not only living and learning in an environment predisposed to a male dominant lens ((Belenky et al., 1986; Timpson et al., 2003) but are, of course, nurturing their identities and individualism.

Women’s developmental differences, their socialization under a patriarchal construct, their ways of coming into knowledge for and of themselves effect how women may experience a university setting and how, to varying degrees, *Fens Behavior* may impact their lives. Denzin (1989) said, “As social actors, we are all involved in retelling our experiences and lives. In doing so, we chronicle our lives in terms of a series of events, happenings, influences, and decisions” (p. 68). So how does this repeated

resistance/ avoidance behavior in protection of self-expectation/ self-image skew with such influences and decisions? What is their take-away?

How we learn and actual brain functioning also relate to the possible influence of *fensing*. Smilkstein (1993), for instance, offers the following:

... research seems to suggest that learners have to grow their own brain structures. We can't grow their dendrites for them. Our telling, showing, demonstrating won't grow them nor will their listening, watching, and reading grow them if they don't have pre-constructed dendrites to which new ones can be connected. This suggests that in order to gain higher level knowledge students need opportunities to use their innate thinking and learning capability over time and through *increasingly refining* (emphasis in original) stages of active, thoughtful processing of experience. (p. 6)

How are young college women processing their experiences concerning their encounters with negative female imaging? The possible influence of *fensing* for first-generation women during their first, oftentimes developmentally tumultuous and socially emotional transitional year within a college campus environment deserves further attention.

Erosion of Resilience

The other implication following this chain of influence was my consideration of *Erosion of Resilience*, a phrase borrowed from ethnographic studies. In ethnographic

research, for example, the resolve to keep a wall clean and free of graffiti may erode if even one person uses it to display graffiti: existing graffiti then invites others to perform the same behavior. As I use it, *Erosion of Resilience* may be a weakening of defense resolve after continual exposure to negative images or behavior. If one is engaged in the pursuit to keep the wall clean or to keep the negative imaging at bay, may the continuing onslaught of negative images eventually erode or wear down a female student's resilience or persistence to defy or erase these images? What effect may this have on her identity or as Kroger and Green (1996) suggest, her identity change perspective and the shifts in identity during college? Ongoing identity development is important (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Robinson, 2003Jan.).

I regard this as a question of a kind of persistence behavior in the face of what may be presented to our female students in their everyday lives. Often in the culture and language of academics, "persistence behavior" refers to retention of students in order to graduate; the retention I consider, however, is retention of guardianship to a self-vision one holds, to persist in the face of the "reality" of images a female student may be exposed to each day. True, all these images are not counter-productive to the gains in female status. For instance, our first-year, first-generation women students will be exposed to female professors, hopefully some female-oriented courses, and impressive female leadership in various organizations they may join. They might also find achievement on female sports teams and in their own academic or creative achievements. Yet their positive self-expectations must also persist to counter the onslaught of negative media stereotypes exploding on television and print ads and in music lyrics; they must also persist to counter the sexism they may find in classrooms and in textbooks, and in

the gauntlet of "female" posters that too often decorate male dorms and fraternity houses. And they must persist when others' attitudes and expectations mirror such female exploitation and sexualization.

This persistence for positive self-identity must also be able to thrive during a time when gender issues are often accentuated because of an emerging sexual awareness. This is further complicated by this first year, this transition year into a new environment where "fitting in" may take center stage. As I said, ongoing identity development is important (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Robinson, 2003Jan.), yet females, who some researchers believe crave connection (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982) may then fall into old male-female conditioning to achieve such belonging within this new, and perhaps frightening, socially-charged campus environment because it may offer a certain familiarity. Further, according to Belenky et al. in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, women's knowledge is deeply connected to self-concept. Therefore, experience and self-reflection become vital for a woman's education (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 5). Does Fens Behavior impact self-concept? Does a herding instinct take over for some? Do some women begin to believe what they see, what they hear they "are" by accepting negative cues? If women refuse negative stereotypes can they fall prey to locking themselves into this "struggle against"?

While female students, in general, may find means to "counter" this positioning, to do so may distract and sap their energies that could better be used elsewhere. Such Fens Behavior may also assign a mindset where they may become locked into an oppositional frame of "fighting against" rather than allowing their independent image free range. On the other hand, I would be remiss if I did not offer the argument that such

continued exposure to negative cues one then strives to counter may *build* resistance. Chickering's (1969) challenge and response dynamic where an environment can provide the challenge of stimulation, which then may cause or determine a new response warrants consideration. This new response to the perceived negative cue can then be elevating or dismal: whether such exposure-resistance builds or corrodes is at least partially dependent on the person as the "receiving" environment of the negative sending environment and how these repeated messages and their influence are managed. The question becomes one of whether poison introduced in repeated small quantities over a length of time builds resistance/ immunity or has a cumulative toxic outcome?

In addition, such resistance takes place in a behavior setting (a university) driven by the educational intent to expand thinking and life options. This last point is not a throw-away. Female students may expect that a university is a level playing field, that we have dismantled gender disadvantages, that this environment, above others, is where they "count" equally. I would hazard a guess that most first-year female students do not consider the long male history behind the university as an institution (Belenky et al., 1986; Timpson et al., 2003) nor any female positioning within this context. If they do understand this context, they may trust such positioning is now "over," which may serve to make them feel safe. Does this belief put them at a disadvantage? Their persistence toward their positive self-concept, may not be so simple. No one, I believe, likes to appear vulnerable, and this may be particularly true for females, for whom vulnerability is both a physical safety and a gender issue.

New Additions: Recent Research

Recent studies further frame the possible influence of *Fens Behavior*. McGlone (2007), for example, investigated methods to aid female students in coping with "stereotype threat" (p. 119) and demonstrated that an achieved identity, like that of attaining the position of college student can lessen the threat of an ascribed identity, like being female. Utilizing a math test as a task, McGlone considered results after giving subjects one of three coping messages: one encouraging perseverance, one planting the seed of stereotypical threat yet telling participants *not* to think this way, and another which also planted this stereotypical seed but provided a substitute, positive stereotype. Outcomes indicated that when prompted with a positive achieved identity, (like being a college student), stereotype threats from an ascribed identity (like being female) could be subdued. I believe distinctly positive communication, then, rather than neutral or negative (that is stereotype threat here) communication may aid in a resistance to stereotypical behavior.

In another study Enochs and Roland (2006) probed the connection between gender and the environment as they considered a student's overall adjustment to college and in particular investigated the social adjustment of freshmen. They found that males had a higher overall adjustment level than females no matter their living environment. In residence halls that housed first-year students together, however, there was no overall difference between males and females. They also found a significantly better social adjustment in first-year residence hall students compared to traditional residence hall

students. This finding supported the idea that female college and social adjustment is aided by the establishment of relationships for first-year female students. Again, environment and connection to that environment proves important for freshmen, particularly for female first-year students.

In 1997, Tweedell considered the college experience of females as regards barriers to their achievement and why women alter their aspirations while attending college. Using historical analysis of female students, Tweedell found that both overt and subtle sexism erected barriers to women's achievement. Tweedell also found that women students were more likely to leave college studies because of social relationship problems and because of family responsibilities. Part of what emerged from this study was that women responded to such barriers in individualistic ways; obviously these various ways cannot be predicted. The point that remains, however, is that such manifest and latent barriers exist. Tweedell states,

Women today encounter barriers to achievement in higher education. They respond to these barriers in a number of ways. Some become angry and are determined to achieve in spite of these barriers. Others adapt by becoming marginal students, pre-occupying themselves with social achievement through attractiveness and romance. Some women become frustrated and leave higher education. Such lowering of aspirations leads to the relatively low achievement of women in society. What happens on the college campus to produce such a change in aspirations and achievement?

How women respond to these barriers, negative cues or negative subtext is a complex, individual matter. The similarity I am attempting to draw is that negative female imaging or stereotyping can be construed as a barrier to resist or not to resist or in some other way "adapt" to, as Tweedell suggests.

And yet in some ways Manuel's (2001) work and Mihok's (2005) study seem to suggest being female does not negatively impact college experiences so much as to decrease persistence. Manuel (2001), for instance, found (at the Midwest public university studied) that while first-generation males and females attended college for different reasons and viewed the supposed end result of a college education differently, there was no difference between the retention rates for first-generation men and first-generation women. Mihok (2005) reported that being female, in addition to being a low-income borrower (for academic purposes) *increased* the probability of persistence toward academic goals. Yet Mihok also offered that first-generation status *reduced* this probability.

So what of the first-generation female student? Lujan (2005) explored the narratives of self-identified 'successful' non-traditional first-generation female students and advanced that the Community College of Denver's hegemonic perspective and deficit model concerning first-generation called for building a greater responsive and inclusive caring culture on campus as she counters the perception of such students as being "at risk." Are they at risk? Does being female aid persistence? Detract from it? Is this too simple a question, and is it really a question of gender, personality, goals and efficient support?

I note these seemingly incongruent findings to remind us that while all these factors may have some imprint, individual perception and response to these factors, that is how the individual responds to the environment she finds herself in, is key. Her resistance to perceived negative female imaging then is also a personal matter, as is her ability to navigate these negative cues both physically and psychologically. And the lasting impact of these negative cues and/ or her accompanying levels of resistance to these cues, that is how this may alter present or future decisions she makes or alters identity development, is also individualistic.

I believe negative cultural messages can impact female college students in a variety of ways. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) interviewed college women who focused on hyper social involvement and romance to lessen their perceived pessimism about their future possibilities. Again, Tweedell (1997) suggested this pessimism can be traced to cultural messages concerning the seemingly inescapable difficulties of having both a career and a family, and Faludi (1991) speaks of mixed cultural messages concerning womanhood and feminism. Still other researchers believe that sexism and women's experiences of sexism in higher educational environments has actually solidified stereotypes and diminished women's ability to define their personal reality (Soloman, 1985; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). I also found it interesting that Tweedell (1997) found "strong reluctance among students to identify themselves as 'feminist,' even though they adhere to the ideals of equality between the sexes" (p. 4) since I sensed a similar reluctance in my study participants. This led me to question what negative and positive aspects of feminism are reported, absorbed and actually understood by young women college students today.

In consideration of female resilience or its lack, LePage-Lees (1997) conducted a study on the educational resiliency of disadvantaged girls. While participants had come from low-income homes and had been first-generation students, all were academic high achievers. Although LePage-Lees researched older students (24-54), the focus of her study concerned what contributed to these female students' resilience. Contributing factors included adaptation into a majority culture, in part by concealing what they considered to be their negative (first-generation, low-income, etc.) backgrounds. However, another contributing factor their educational resilience was their *belief in themselves* as special or intelligent. Thus self-concept figures in to persistence towards goals, and as I have suggested, Fens Behavior may influence female self-image.

Pena (2004) explored male-female stress among Hispanic college students due to the acculturation process and found that females experienced greater levels of stress compared to males. Espanola (2004) in a five-year longitudinal study of 5,000 Community College students in Los Angeles, reported that while first-generation status did not impact involvement, grade point average, academic preparation or retention, gender as well as age, and ethnicity did significantly impact these aspects. I found it interesting that females were found to have generally higher grade point averages and that higher grades favored retention. Again, I mention these studies to lay further groundwork for the perception that gender can matter in a significant way, and the individual perception and response to circumstances enters in regarding persistence to accomplish one's goals. Also other outside factors can have influence on *inner* resources. If one is presented time and again with various negative images and/ or cues to which one therefore must offer some response, does this repeated exposure and resistance to a

negative impose a change of some sort, perhaps to identity or thought processes or to resilience to resist?

Green (2005), for example, studied achievement among first-year gifted female honor students and non-honor students to explore underachievement in gifted females. Green found societal stereotyping contributed to females taking on traditionally assigned roles rather than developing their academic potential. Further, Green believed that gifted females faced internal and external barriers, one barrier being how to achieve acceptance by society yet meet their own ambitious goals, which were found to decrease with age. Certainly cultural "accepted" images/ behavior impacted these women's choices, and I wonder at the relationship between how often various women encountered a *negative processing*, that is how often did individual woman encounter and then come to resist cultural messages and at what point did resistance, if it was employed, lose its vigor?

The young women in my study were not only first-generation students but were also undergoing their critical first year as they transitioned into the environment of college life. Hayes (2006) researched college adjustment and the differences between first-generation and non-first-generation first-year students and found that first-generation students *in some cases* experienced a more challenging adjustment concerning academics and family concerns. Again, individual circumstances and perceptions and responses naturally impact different people in different ways, which is my point. Reynolds-Shaw (2006) studied the adjustment of first-generation students compared to second-generation students and found that both adapt to college similarly well. This study used the Baker & Siryk's (1989) Student Adaptation College Questionnaire and found little statistically different measures between first- and second-generation students in the areas of

academics, social and personal-emotional adjustment, goal commitment and institutional attachment and just general overall adjustment. And yet first-generation students as a group are often labeled "at-risk" as discussed in Lujan's (2005) study. Another study conducted by Karl-Lam (2006) suggested that first-generation non-traditional students who had advanced academic standing *may be more resilient* to various challenges to graduating from college than traditional first-generation students and continuing generation students. Analysis further suggested that as students age and/ or advance in their college years, they develop greater ability to persist in their studies. This would suggest then that first-year students are the most vulnerable when compared to *more developed/ older* students. Female students were also shown to have a more positive relationship to the university if had good access to positive role models. An interesting point was that the same female students also appeared to believe it would be more difficult to persist in their studies in order to reach graduation if faced with challenging external problems like gender discrimination when compared to more internally based problems like family-job conflicts. I present recent studies to suggest several points: what one sees/ finds is dependent on what one chooses to look at; this "view" is dependent on one's lens; gender appears to be a telling characteristic in at least some of the studies; being a first-year college female may carry particular stress; female resistance/ avoidance behavior may impact present/ future identity, choices, or resilience and this is dependent on individual perception.

Therefore studies concerning gender and possible *Fens* Behavior and its influence merit further attention.

CHAPTER 10: RECOMMENDATIONS

To Institutions

They can because they think they can

~ Virgil ~

One of the main concerns of a university is, I believe, the glad retention of its students: the university will be glad when and if the students are glad enough with the university environment to stay, pay, and graduate. To this end, universities provide various means to support their student population.

This qualitative study explored some of the experiences of first-generation women students during their first college year. And the culture of a campus ecology comes to bear, both positively and negatively, on those experiences. That culture is not only physical but psychological. The campus also provides "psychological homes" (Saleebey, 1997, p. 203) to its students, and this first transition year is a critical time in students' lives (Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Stovall, 2000). While it may be standard business practice to "fit" the students to the school through various "adjustment" programs, it should be paramount that the school fits the students

(Smith, Bar, & Burke, 1976; Strange & Banning, 2001). Banning in *The Freshman Year Experience* (1989) states,

... an institution's environment was identified as a powerful determinant of freshman success. Most freshmen enter into a campus environment quite unknowingly. They have little idea what to expect, and little understanding of how the collegiate environment can affect their lives. If we want to enhance freshman success, we must understand the powerful impact of the collegiate environment. (p. 53)

As well as dorm rooms and classrooms, students expect, rightfully so, room to grow.

A university's commitment to respect is key and so is, I believe, commitment to students' positive expectations for themselves. Commitment to helping *all* students *discover, grow and groom* their own positive expectations is a fundamental task for an institution devoted to providing every student with an *education* and not just a degree.

The idea of expectation came to emerge as a significant piece in this study. For the female student participants, their positive self-expectations sometimes came up against stereotypical negative imaging of females. As indicated, this conflict is not new, but since the arena is a college campus, and since the underlying mission of any institution of higher knowledge should be to promote *higher knowledge* and the education of *all* students, the university might consider a more proactive approach to helping young female students to help themselves more effectively. One way to do this may be by

providing female-oriented *core* classes and not just relegate these to special interest electives within, perhaps, Women's Studies.

Administrators and curriculum development professionals may ask themselves, for example, as they consider core, general education classes, whose achievements are examined in *standard* textbooks and in history classes? Whose authorship is studied in writing or literature classes? Are all races and genders considered *equally*? Schaef (1981) stated that the university environment operates under direct influence of a "white male system" and that "this system influences the assumptions about events, dictates a language, and in general sets the tone for its functioning" (pp. 5-6). Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) suggest that women's outsider label within the historical underpinnings of higher educational institutions has them responding by becoming overly occupied in social activities, by allowing themselves to slip into becoming marginal students or by leaving the institution altogether.

Yes, students who are interested may take elective *female* classes. But what if these young women have not been exposed to anything more than hearing the word "feminism" or perhaps hearing it in its most negative or disapproving sense? Faludi (1991) considers that negative media portrayal of feminism as a source of societal and personal female-related difficulties contributes to young women's lack of support of feminism. How would young women know to seek out information that enthusiastically supports their gender? To assume that they would just naturally do this because they are women is, I believe, false unless they already have developed a guiding interest in female achievements. What is the likelihood of them doing so if standard high school classes were also predominantly dedicated to the achievements of white males or only offered

token "sections" on the history and achievements of "other" populations? And what of the male students who have not been positively and/ or adequately exposed to various perspectives? How does this influence their education, their mindset?

In addition, the women in this narrative study were first-generation students. For the purposes of this study, first-generation students were identified as those college students from a primary family where neither parent attended college or where parents only had some college experience but did not earn a degree. Often, when one reads about first-generation students, rather than possibility and determination, there is the assignment of the probability of failure. Yes, they are first-generation students, but this should mean only that they are the first in their families to attend college. It is the university that places a particular plus or minus value on being first-generation. *Higher* education, then, takes on other socio-class meaning. A deficit model encompassing various first-generation students (Johnson-Bailey, 2002b) abounds, with stories about their "lack" and how they are "at risk." In fact, the *first-generation* label begets the preexisting connotation if not the denotation of meaning "at-risk," and of likely failing to persist in order to graduate.

While some first-generation students may come from humble beginnings, the university assumes a paternalistic hegemonic perspective with such labeling (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In their early form, universities were closed to all but wealthy white men (Timpson, Cannetto, Borrayo & Yang, 2003) and some might refrain that this positioning of females within a university setting still exists (Andre, 2001; Collins, 2004; Gamble, 1998; Jacobs, 2003; Lansley, 2004; Tierney, 2000). First-generation female students may be "sorted out" by gender and class distinctions.

Critical theory supports that how groups see themselves are influenced by how they are viewed from the outside by others (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). "First-generation," then, positions these students as potential retention problems to be watched, or managed, or somehow fixed in order to carry, or push, or pull them up, if you will, to some "standard student status" the university envisions. It is as if every student who comes from "university parents" are okay, are the standard "correct" form while those first-generation types are the potential problem children.

Baxter Magolda and Terenzini (2003) state there are no easy answers, certainly none for altering the university's "long-standing assumption" (p. 5). Merisotis and Phipps (2000) state,

Those halcyon days when all students who enrolled in college were adequately prepared, all courses at higher education institutions were 'college level,' and students smoothly made the transition from high school and college simply never existed. And they do not exist now. (p. 69)

Granted, first-generation students may not have the family academic history, which, if passed down, *could* ease their first-year experience of college life. But what they do bring to the university experience is so much rich heritage (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reinharz, 1992). And they may also bring multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). It seems that first-generation students, perhaps like females in general, are essentialized in similar ways and this serves to rob them of, or at least under-value,

the gifts they *do* bring to the table like individual identities, curiosity, unique visions, and diversity--all which serve to expose others to lush, multihued, rich learning opportunities.

The university may view first-generation students through too little a lens. Fuss (1989) conceptualized essentialism of this sort as "the invariable and fixed properties, which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (p.xi). First-generation becomes a not-so-secret code that means something is *lacking* if held against *pure student models*--as if such individuals actually exist *and* make up the university's majority of students. Labels like "at-risk" and "under-served" and "first-generation" are perpetuated as though the mythical perfect college student exists (Baxter Magolda & Terenzini, 2003, p. 4).

Such labeling, therefore, attributes to them a lack. This is often a lack of a certain knowing that then predisposes them toward needing help, being somehow weaker in a host of ability aspects that, if possessed, ascribe a power. Add to this the gender of female within a university system that displays male as the standard and this further serves to separate such students.

First-generation students also represent nearly half of all college students (TERI, 1997). And yet there exists (apparently) this myth that standard college students are white, middle to upper class males who go to class full time and have rare to no academic unpreparedness. They glide.

"First-gens," on the other hand, seem to be the places that rub.

Imagine if that "rub" were a good thing. Imagine if they came to University not with lack but with leverage--with a knowledge that they have *something extra* because they managed to figure out Life to get themselves here. What a rush.

The university cannot control everything, but it can become more skilled.

Acknowledgement that the university system is a male system and that this system needs changing may be a positive step. Strange and Banning (2001) contend,

Dominant campus features reflect the influence of dominant groups. The essential challenge in the achievement of campus safety and inclusion is the fact that those who share the dominant characteristics are more likely to feel safe and included, while those whose characteristics differ may be at risk. (p. 122)

And "risk" takes on psychological as well as physical parameters. There are numerous theories and models concerning the student-college relationship and how the influence of college experiences affect student outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Volkwein, Szelest, Cabrera, & Napierski-Pranci, 1998; Volkwein, Valle, Blose, & Zhou, 2000). A university and its campus and classrooms are alive, living spaces. The student's experience is more than just fitting in with the social and academic environment of the institution (Robinson, 2003Jan.). To paraphrase Wheatley (1999), those who are other than monied white males are invited in now, but this is not the same as having those others create a new shape, which they can then *own*.

My overarching suggestion would be for a university to ask, What is our dominant *shape*? What shape is reinforced? Rather than adding yet another program to help students "adjust," maybe the design, the shape of the house needs adjustment.

Advice from First-Generation Women: Doorways & Circulation

How do you teach someone to see with better eyes? To see the possibilities of what they can build for themselves? The women in this study somehow were born with or grew the ability to see *possibility*.

The first-generation women in this study also saw college as the door leading to more breathing room in their lives, more choices for what they wanted to build for themselves and their families. I believe their advice to other first-generation students telegraphs their determination.

(I asked all the participants what factors would empower other first-generation women entering their first college year.)

Fay's Advice

Probably just don't be worried. I mean if you're first generation, um, especially if you're female, that is no reason to not pursue--I mean there are more women in higher education now than men, than there have ever been and so, I mean, those shouldn't be factors as to why you shouldn't pursue, um, because there's so--like first generation award, there are resources available, you know there's scholarships, there's programs. So it's, um, it's not like you're going to come in and be a minority or that you're going to be looked down upon because you're first generation or that your going to come in and

not have any idea because--even if other people's parents did graduate, you know, they're all coming in, they all--most of you haven't been in a college setting, and so it's--you're all in the same boat. And so you can use that first generation you know to, like I have been, to go through it and take it back to your family and share it with them because they probably won't ever have that opportunity to do it themselves. And so, um, just, you know, use your opportunity. Being female or first generation is no reason to not pursue what you want to do...

MaryCate's Advice

I would offer, don't come in with a boyfriend. [laughs] ... I don't know... it depends on the person. Like cause I met a couple of first generation that are coming from Michigan or, you know, Massachusetts, and they're fine, they love it, they didn't even go back for Christmas. Like they love staying here. And then I met other people who are worse off than me like, so it really just depends on who you are and how you cope with you know, being away from your family...

... if you don't mind being away from your mom, if you don't mind just talking to her once a month or once a week or your whole family, not just your mom like, I guess some people don't have moms, you know, then. However you want to deal with it. However, I guess basically your experience is entirely how you view it. And that's pretty much how mine was. Like I viewed it, I went in not wanting to go in even though I did deep down. I went in not wanting to be away from my boyfriend. I went in not wanting to be away from my family. And it just, it didn't help being an hour away. Even though that's

all it was, was an hour. It still was very hard. But now, now that I see it, you know, all those things just held me back from doing what I could do. And now that I have learned to let go, I am doing all that I can do.

Angel's Advice

Mmm. Um, well I'll start like with what I would give advice to someone in the same situation is that they need something to--I don't know--someone to vent to or someone there for them that's close or some thing that they do to help them get through like just the change, like, it's a huge change if, if you're not used to growing up around people that have gone to college. It was a shock for me. Like somewhat like I had the program for, um, pre-college but um, it's kind of shocking knowing like how much money you've got to put into it and like how hard you need to work and basically it's just good to be really prepared before you come. So I would recommend that to anyone.

... Both mentally and ... financially, ~~that's~~ the biggest one. That's a stressor. Yeah, um, I would definitely recommend to people that don't pay for college, or that their parents don't pay for college, to make sure that you have it all covered before you come. Cause it's hard to think that you're gonna work this many hours during school and pay for all the food and rent and utilities, you know? It's a lot harder that way than versus if you have to get a loan. Cause you need to live well.

JJ's Advice

Okay... first generation... what advice would I offer... well, probably the same that like Barbara [from the campus First-Generation Office] offered or you know, just get involved as much as possible. Actually that's something that I was just, we were just talking about in my last psychology class. Um, about , um, about, we were going over loneliness, and, um, like transitional periods is when you are [stressed] the most lonely. And, um, or it's the most likeliness to be lonely is in any type of transitional period in your life. Um, and she pointed out that, you know, one reason why colleges started organizations and groups and activities is so that, um, people who didn't know anyone would feel, or would find a way to meet people or to not feel lonely or--and even if they didn't keep it up the next year or whatever but they just had the foundation in the first year to like find people who are like them. Or just, um, have people to be around, some interaction, cause you know, yeah. So I was thinking if I moved from another, um, state to here, oh my God, I'd be so lonely. Like I'm gonna be doing that for my Masters and I'm, I'm so scared cause it's your whole life so, um, um, I would tell them to, like one thing my dad's told me cause he knows I'm scared to move to California is that, um, just to look at it as a complete adventure. Yeah, everything that happens is a complete adventure. And one thing that's always given me, made me feel better about things, is that everything changes. Even if something's crappy in your life right now, it's it can get way better. I mean if things are doing really good, it can get worse. But at least you know that whatever you're going through at the moment, it's gonna change. So, whether it's for

worse or better, it's just not gonna stay the same. You're not gonna have to feel that way all the time. Um, let's see... empower the first generation women... maybe just to volunteer and do organizations and I know you can feel nerdy at times doing stuff like that, or at least I do, but, um, I think it motivates me cause I'm thinkin' like, gee, look at all these good things I'm doing. Look what all the good things I'm gonna do later in life. ... maybe just to, I know it's important that when you're in a transitional period to be import--or it's a important to, um, to make sure you stay true to yourself (?) To not let certain things influence you and to make sure that the groups that you're around, um, don't influence you in negative ways or influence you in ways that aren't true to yourself. Um... and just to, I don't know, not to worry too much about fitting in. Just to be confident, um, like I think confidence is key. I think confidence is the most attractive thing in people. I think confidence is the key in people listening to you. Even if you don't have it, if you come off as you have confidence, people are so gonna respect you more. That's my thing, so--I think that's about it [laughs].

... And like [laughs] well, my dad didn't go to college so he, you know, neither of them had any information on, you know, what to give me or what to expect for school. Um, so I don't know, I think it [being a first-generation student] means that I don't know that you're more determined. I don't have this information and I still, you know, find a way to make it work or [laughs] my first--before I applied here, I went to every single department and, um, ah what was it? And I wanted to check out, um, I wanted to find out exactly what I needed to apply an about scholarships and I went to like just different departments and I found out what kind of services that they provided. Just-- a lot of the ones around the Oval. Um, an just, on my own, because I wanted to find out all the

information possible, and I'm not a big computer person, so I rather go in personal and actually talk to that person that like okay, so what do you provide? How can you help me kind of thing. And I did that on my own. Um, what else does it[being a first-generation student] mean to me? Pretty much that you're, you can be a role model to people.

CHAPTER 11: POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE STUDIES

While the image of some of my study subjects "fencing with" these perceived negative female images on campus remained, as I analyzed the narratives I also found reason to consider the premise that this Fens maneuver could also limit, at least in some fashion, the movement of these young women to otherwise strike out in innovative ways their personalities might create because they were, so to speak, occupied with this motion of opposition. *If* one is occupied with being the opposite from or unlike a perceived negative female image, is it possible that this sets up a limited perspective (like the fencing on the farm equipment), thereby limiting the scope of creative personal action?

In other words, if one is repeatedly engaged in being "not" like some image or "not" behaving in some manner, can this limit new thinking and action beyond this "defense"? If one is kept busy being "unlike" the negative image, *may* this reduce autonomy? Does focus on "not" being something set up a restrictive push-pull whereby one cannot see or move beyond, or is limited in seeing or moving past, this performance? In this way may it impart control?

Further study into this area may include ideas from the following table:

Exploration as to whether such behavior exists beyond the (limited) parameters of this study	exploration as to the frequency of such behavior	exploration regarding male student image-defense behavior
whether the close setting of a college campus impacts this behavior	whether the ultra-social setting of a college campus impacts this behavior	if or how such behavior impacts depression and/ or adjustment issues
if or how such behavior impacts stress or coping strategies	how such behavior relates to the psychology of "the other" or "the outsider"	how the dynamics of personality impact Fens Behavior

Table 1. Research Possibilities Concerning Fens Behavior

As I considered fensing behavior from a possible control perspective, I was led to consider if Fens maneuvering also introduced a possible Erosion of Resilience, a phrase borrowed from ethnographic studies. Employed in the way I suggest, Erosion of Resilience is a weakening of defense resolve after continual exposure to negative images or behavior. In ethnographic research, for example, the resolve to keep a wall clean and free of graffiti may erode if even one person uses it to display graffiti: existing graffiti then invites others to perform the same behavior.

If one is engaged in the pursuit to keep the wall clean or to keep the negative imaging at bay, may the continuing onslaught of negative images eventually erode or wear down a female student's resilience to defy or erase these images? Future study into this area may include consideration of the following:

If such erosion exists
Whether this sum imaging is cumulative and frequent enough to bear quantitative effect
What the conscious and subconscious possibilities may be, ie., must the "defense" be limited to conscious efforts to affect resilience
Whether any correlation exists between such erosion and defensive identification within physical/ psychological situations of abuse

Table 2. Research Possibilities Concerning Erosion of Resilience

A contrary consideration to investigate might be whether such image defense behavior may actually *strengthen* the pursuit to defend a positive self-image in future contexts and/ or whether this depends on the individualized outcome for each successive defense. In short, does the continuing practice of defense build psychological muscle? Do challenges to the positive self-image/ self-expectation create opportunities to strengthen resolve and greater reservoirs of resources with which to overcome oncoming and/ or future perceived obstacles to that positive image?

I cannot help but also wonder whether this *Fens* behavior pattern becomes what is normal for some or for many women, and if so, whether they cannot then see it as a chosen action on their part but instead view it (context-behavior response) as the way life simply is. If they do believe it is simply the way life is, do they feel it is this way for *all women*, or just for *women like them* (self-defined), or just for them as *individuals* (due to personality or personality and gender)?

There has also been much research done concerning the first (transition) year into college (Erickson & Strommer, 1991; Gardner, 1998; Gardner & Jewler, 2000; Odell, 1996; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Soldner, Lee & Duby, 1999; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 1996; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). Future research may

consider whether the *Fens* Behavior pattern has more or less relevance during this first college year compared to other college years, since this transition year is also a time of particular emotional and psychological crisis and growth for many students.

Another research possibility might explore personal identity development and how *Fens* Behavior affects this or how the ultra-social context of college, especially during this first critical transition year, affects such image-defense behavior. The work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) or Robinson (2003Jan.) concerning crisis and ongoing identity development may provide a jumping off point for research considerations.

Person-environment interaction (Strange, 1994) could also provide a rich avenue for further studies; there is ongoing interest in "person-context interactions, whereby various types of persons approach and experience the same context differently" (Cote & Levine, 2000, p. 58) and person-context interactions and how different types of people experience differing "fits" in various contexts (Lerner & Kauffman, 1985; Lerner, 1995; Strange & Banning, 2001). Female-oriented institutional interventions concerning "fit" (Fried, 1994) and *Fens* Behavior may also be investigated.

Certainly, this study led the way for numerous possible research endeavors.

CHAPTER 12: TOWARD FEMALE LEADERSHIP

Arranging Success & The Furniture of Gender

You arrange furniture a certain way in a room and it inspires a certain movement. If you *say* a room is meant for one thing but organize the furniture another way so that functionally it says something else, the stated verbal intention become a moot point--it is how people will use the space as it is set up by the arrangement that *speaks* for the space.

Who do we want our women to be?

Who do they want to be?

How do we enrich the female experience?

It is not just about gender or about how culture may allow or impose certain expectations because of gender but how women see themselves *through* gender. That statement contains an intended dual meaning: to see clearly who they are even through the lens of gender and all its cultural messages, and also to see themselves through gender as envisioned by succeeding on through to some perceived, preferred other side.

As I said earlier, so much of what emerged from this study concerned expectations, both those cast upon the women in the study and those they both internalized and imposed upon themselves. In addition, throughout this dissertation, I

have touched on the metaphor of building a house to building one's life. And I borrow again from Sarah Susanka (1998) author of *The Not So Big House* and numerous other books in the *Not So Big* series, when I say that some of us build hiding places under the floorboards in our own houses... I would hazard a guess to say that most of us do.

I do not think anything is wrong with that. We may feel safer when we have private places into which we can retreat. My concern, however, is that if an educational institution is committed to the crafting of female leaders, whether they be leaders in their own lives and/ or leaders in a public venue, those institutions need to show women how not to hide too much of themselves under those floorboards. In order to do that, women must be nourished on female strengths and accomplishments when they are still children.

I think of the women in my study as I write this. MaryCate who had a difficult time separating from her past, JJ who wants to be an exception among women and who believes she may have a better chance of succeeding as a female artist if she does not want marriage and a family quite as much as most other women, Fay who is discouraged by how often women on campus devalue themselves, and Angel, who at one point wished she were not a woman because then she would feel less vulnerable.

How much of our womanhood gets hidden under the floorboards? How many dreams and possibilities are crammed into the cracks? What compelling pieces are lost? As I interviewed the women students in this study, I was often struck with the sense that their happening to be female needed to be overlooked, not ignored, but overlooked. As if this somehow would help them fit in. The idea of seemingly wanting to be disaffected by their gender came to my mind again and again.

Women are not just reductive versions of men, nor the opposite of men, nor the anything of men. To compare women to men is fatalistic, I believe, because such vision, then, is male-oriented. An authentic sense of Womanhood may get left behind, and this fosters, I believe, a disconnect from "female," a disconnect often considered a positive, a fitting in. And this fitting in is all the more important in an emotionally-charged campus social arena and a challenging, possibly turbulent first-year transitional period.

A female model of leadership is needed.

Obviously, this study was not focused on female leadership, *per se*, but one avenue that did emerge was the need for *early* and *continuing* educational efforts around female-oriented history and achievement. As I interviewed participants, I sensed that they did not want to discuss how they felt as females or that they had to somehow push themselves to "switch gears" to "think female." I often found myself prompting them, all the while maintaining distance because I did not want to lead them in answering. It was as though femaleness was something *not* to be showcased. As if equal was "blending in," and I was reminded of past racial images of "passing" for White. I began to wonder if "passing" for male was interpreted as resisting what they perceived as negative female stereotypes. It was only after the women in the study began to discuss "female" issues that it appeared to become easier for them to breathe and speak and think "female." This was, however, more immediate during the three-participant focus group discussion.

I am not spotlighting this for effect; I received this feeling of reluctance over and over as I interviewed the young women in this study and as I analyzed their transcripts. In some way it was as if their female-ness should be rendered invisible. As if to forget they are women in many instances ensures equality. As though gender differences are

supposed to have been evaporated in the educational atmosphere of *University*, and that they are to *know* this.

It is not so.

As stated earlier, even the term “freshmen” while widely accepted almost without thought, makes female first-year students invisible in a language sense, as though they are just meant to fit in. And women are continually told they are treated equally now--no worry. This is the stated verbal intention, but how the furniture of gender is arranged and lived each day does not always support this. If women complain, they don't appear strong (as they actually must be in order to speak up) but instead may appear weak: "You're equal and yet you need more massaging?" Or they may appear overbearing, which casts them into yet other aggressive, unpleasant stereotypes.

It is all about how women see themselves. The first-generation women in this study, for example, had a certain self-expectation/ image for themselves or they would not have pursued a college degree. But I think to speak of female leadership as though it is some short course women can take would be fundamentally doomed to failure. Female children need to grow up within a medium of female power so they do not have to necessarily spend so much time trying to unlearn false or negative female imaging.

As I interviewed the participants, I sensed a loss or a theft of their own agency; the self-agency that helped them navigate their way to college had to endure the onslaught of various negative imaging that they both saw on campus *and* had already internalized. Hence the need for early childhood *core* classes.

From this study, I also found that gender issues may not seem so immediate when first-generation, first-year students are trying to make their way through so many other self-identified "serious" concerns. These students may have cunning cancers in their lives like family poverty or parental alcoholism. Gender issues? This gender thing seems so benign when compared to the "real" troubles they must pilot their way through every day just to remain in college.

As I worked through this study, I often thought of a comment in another study exploring the lives of first-generation white working-class women. Poast (2002) asked her study subjects whether they thought gender mattered in their pursuit of higher education, and they'd said it did not. However, Poast was not formally researching gender, per se. And as I listened to my study participants hesitate at first about female images on campus and female-oriented concerns and discuss the more immediate day-to-day challenges they had to navigate, I could easily see how they too would not think gender "mattered" unless they focused on these issues since:

They are disconnected from their families of origin on educational pursuits.

They are "other" within their family because of this perhaps.

They are often "other" than many of the female images plastered on television and projected at them from many ads, lyrics of songs, video games.

They are "other" from males.

They are "other" from "regular" college students who may be seen as monied or wholly white or more college "appropriate."

In addition, in an "equal" system, gender is not *supposed* to matter. We are told to believe that the furniture of gender has been arranged in such a way as not to impede movement and that it is--as far as equality standards--invisible.

And yet all four women were quick to say that, no, males did not experience college the same way that females did. Three went on to describe what they saw as negative female stereotyping on campus, situations where females were vulnerable, and classroom sexism favoring males.

My sense was that at least three of the study participants may feel they practice resistance to negative female stereotyping in different ways. Becoming "smarter" by gaining an education may be a form of resistance. But if one must resist either negative images or perhaps sexist behaviors, I believe a woman's sense of value comes under self-scrutiny. How strong, how resistant can one be? And again, does this erode or build the resilience necessary to succeed in whatever personal pursuit is being sought?

As I consider this, I also consider the tension of this first year on campus, the magnified social environment of college and of wanting/ needing to "fit," and a first-generation student's likely lack of "college knowledge." I do not think it rare for some females to find it easier to "fit" if they accommodate certain male-female stereotypical behavior: "In contradictory and restrictive messages--about being attractive but not too vain, about developing one's abilities but not being too achievement oriented, and so on--primarily affect girls..." (Bascow & Rubin, 1999, p. 37). And while my study subjects resisted stereotypical negative female behavior, I think of fit or congruence with the aggregate (Strange & Banning, 2001) and how more relational females (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Tinto, 1987) may attempt to draw

others in to certain culturally traditional or accepted behaviors to "belong" along with them: first-year research is often concerned with students' ability to integrate into the pre-existing academic and social life of the institution (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Students are supposed to fit in.

In this way some women volunteer to help maintain what our culture dictates is desirable for desirable women to emulate. Thus, they become willing accomplices to their own negative stereotyping. I say this with an understanding that a college campus is often a close, closed space of sorts where the spoken and unspoken objective is to fit in *somehow*.

All the women in my study felt like leaders. I think this gave them an edge. How do we help all first-generation women feel this way?

An Elucidating Glimpse

"An elucidating glimpse" was the second definition for "insight" in my *American Heritage Dictionary* (1979) after "the capacity to discern the true nature of a situation; penetration." After regarding all the narratives and the hours I spent transcribing the audiotapes of the narratives, after watching the faces of the four young women in this study as they often struggled to answer questions related to their feelings or why something made them "feel uncomfortable" yet unable to point a finger at a *logical* reason, after watching their faces both so full of hope and also often complacent as they told of sexism in classrooms and of having their mobility hobbled or their fear increased as they contemplated a walk across a campus at night, as they offered all these things in a

matter-of-fact way, aware that perhaps they wished it weren't this way, but as they were also resigned to the *truth* that this was just the way things were, my sadness at their seeming practical surrender to such truth had me thinking of practical strategies that could be employed *now*, that is, during this first college year, which may increase gender awareness.

Such strategies may include General Education, *core* classes exploring male-female issues and Guided Gender Communication workshops as a continuing part of First-Year Orientation Seminars. This may include female-to-male communication, female-to-female communication, and male-to-male communication. Various sexual orientation/ sexual identity communication issues should also be considered.

(Of course, early introduction of female-oriented achievements within all textbooks/ materials utilized from pre-school on is favored as well.)

Including, for example, a guided dialogue of gender issues in a First-year Seminar would, I believe, help both male and female students make more informed choices in their interactions with each other and provide a safe place for discussion. Kneller (quoted in Timpson et al., 2003) says, "... students cannot even begin to test their pre-formed biases and convictions if they do not feel it is safe for them to do so" (p. 218) and Kees (quoted in Timpson et al., 2003) states while "Creating a completely safe environment is impossible" we can make a climate "safe enough" for learning and change (pp. 55-56). Creating a small, safe environment within a larger ecology of campus is necessary since interpersonal issues and gender issues are likely to surface when young adults are living

and learning together in close proximity. Such communication is integral with how a student sees him or herself: “A growing body of evidence indicates that one of the most predictive factors of academic adjustment is self-esteem, a term often used interchangeably with self-concept, self-perception or self worth (Byrne, 1996). In the ideal, including a lesson segment addressing gender communication would advance character, maturity, beneficial dependence and independence, and students’ understanding of themselves and others. Exploring male-male and female-female communication issues/ styles would also foster greater awareness of how and why we communicate in certain ways, which, I think, may lead students to question their own and others’ reasoning and intent.

This could include both an anecdotal case study approach and a simplified introduction to the possibility of general differences between how males and females might communicate. I use the qualifiers *possibility* and *general* here since personal socialization and personal communication style always play into the equation of interpersonal communication and are not purely gender-based: we don’t want to promote stereotypes of how *all* females or how *all* males communicate, but we can help students unpack some of their own stereotypes. However, if one considers Tannen’s acclaimed work on socio-linguistics (2003), there are some gender specific common patterns that may emerge.

These are only a few broad strategies, which are meant to invite dialogue and awareness so the existence of gender issues within a campus culture are addressed in positive ways. We too often downplay gender differences in the name of politically

correct equality concerns and in so doing may miss the opportunity for informed discussion about gender distinctions to foster better interpersonal communications. In some studies, for instance, analysis of gender differences suggested that less well-adjusted males were less proactive in using support measures whereas less adjusted females showed high levels of separation anxiety and were just the opposite—overly dependent on social supports (Gerdes & Mallenckrodt, 1994; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Hence perhaps the stereotype of the overly involved, clingy teenage female “drama queen” who can’t seem to say no to her friends and establish boundaries, and the equal stereotype of the “strong, silent male” who suffers in silence and feels he has to “take care of business” on his own. Wouldn’t it be refreshing to share this research? Might it help them feel less alone in “surviving” college? Could information help dissolve some hurtful stereotypes? I believe so.

Such information can not only serve students well in college, but may even aid in stronger campus understanding, which may engender heightened student success and retention while also nourishing greater peace and reducing campus sexism and violence--goals to be embraced.

Conclusion: A Telling Story

In narrative research, inquirers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Bruner (1985) believed that narrative added to the search for Truths and served to sensitize practitioners that these truths happen. Dewey thought that an individual's experience was a central lens for understanding an individual (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003) believed that the search for truths utilizing firsthand experience helped to "to extend and enhance conceptualization and/or to sensitize practitioners to their occurrence" (pp. 259-260). And I am more than aware that my use of 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" (Louztenheizer, 2002, p. 444, emphasis in original). As Chase (2003) states, "... 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" (p. 80).

These are only four stories. Mine is another story. And yours is still another...

These study participants' experiences are opportunities for the education of others as well as myself as researcher, student of human nature, as a person, and as a woman. Students do not share all of the same experiences, abilities, or histories. I doubt if they can have the same or perhaps even similar personalities. And while they are all obviously women, they are not the same woman--though I would argue they all make up *Woman*.

I was inspired by the participants' belief in themselves, and their ability to take charge of their educational future. What surprised me was the telling role of expectation and its interplay with *fensing*, the resistance/ avoidance of perceived negative female behavior utilized to preserve a positive personal declaration of the female self. A limitation of the present study was its small sampling of female students; research using more participants may allow deeper exploration into possible impacts of such resistance/ avoidance maneuvering as regards female behavior choices and identity development.

I believe there is a culture of womanhood in want of restoring and *restorying*. Throughout this study, I encountered literature that questioned the efficacy of narrative

and also documentation that proclaimed its power. What I know from this study is that narratives control women's lives, especially those they carry on the *inside*. Our inner story is our *Home*. Where do we get our stories? For me the stories we are told become what we believe. What we believe becomes what we live, how we construct our lives. This is the small power of narrative.

Ultimately, the women in this study are responsible for ownership of their education and their lives, as are all women, all individuals. In a house you want to use all the corners, not live in one. A central thought from Susanka (1998) is that you should not feel insignificant in your own space. What remains my hope is that a university education bears the distinction of helping women to help themselves craft the architecture of those lives, that house, that home rather than leaving them to adventitiously cobble it together.

If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story.

~ Orson Welles ~

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Support from First-Generation Office

Center for Advising and Student Achievement

202 Aylesworth Hall NE
1032 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1032
(970) 491-3658 / FAX: (970) 491-1530

Advising appointments:
200 Aylesworth Hall NE
(970) 491-7095 / FAX: (970) 491-1133
<http://www.casa.colostate.edu>

lewhite

TO: Human Research Subjects Committee

FROM: Barb Musslewhite, Assistant Director, Center for Advising and Student Achievement
Barb Musslewhite

DATE: April 17, 2006

RE: Deborah Gengler-Dunn Ph.D candidate and research proposal

The Center for Advising and Student Achievement (CASA), and more specifically the First Generation Award program, is familiar with the scope of the proposed study project entitled, "Thereby hangs the tale: A narrative inquiry of first-year, first-generation female student perspectives of the university experience", submitted by Deborah Gengler-Dunn and approved by her doctoral committee.

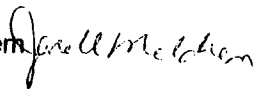
CASA is satisfied that the individuals to be involved-- first-generation female students who are completing or who have completed their first-year college studies-- will be adequately protected as human research subjects and that their participation will be completely voluntary.

The First Generation Award program's involvement will entail posting the recruitment flyer, distributing the information in the flyer via RamSelect to First Generation Scholars who meet the researcher's profile, and affording the researcher(s) other access to possible volunteer participants.

APPENDIX B

Study Approval

Notice of Approval for Human Research

Principal Investigator: Jim Banning, School of Education, 1588
Co-Principal Investigator: Deborah Gengler-Dunn, School of Education, 1588
Title: Thereby Hangs the Tale: A Narrative Inquiry of First-Year, First Generation Female Student Perspectives of the University Experience
Protocol #: 06-098H **Funding Source:** N/A
Number of Participants/Records: 15 interview participants, 15 focus group participants
Committee Action: **Approved on:** May 17, 2006 **Expires:** April 22, 2007
HRC Administrator: Janell Meldrum 

Consent Process:

The above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. *NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee.* Subjects under the age of 18 years old must obtain parental permission.

Investigator Responsibilities:

- It is the PI's responsibility to obtain this consent form from all subjects.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research.
- It is also the PI's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo describing the changes and submitting any altered documents.
- Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators must obtain PI approval for any changes prior to submitting the proposed changes to the HRC for review and approval.
- The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.
- A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of review. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a courtesy, a reminder will be sent approximately two months before the protocol expires. The PI will be asked to report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary continuation form (H-101) is available from the RCO web page www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/.
- Upon completion of the project, an H-101 should be submitted as a close-out report.
- If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.
- **Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.**

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's OHRP Federal Wide Assurance 00000647.

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee.

Attachment

Date of Correspondence: 5/26/06

APPENDIX C

Study Consent Form

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University**

TITLE OF STUDY: Thereby hangs the tale: A narrative inquiry of first-year, first-generation female student perspectives of the university experience

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: James Banning, Ph.D., Professor, School of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523, Tel: 970-491-7153, E-Mail: banning@CAHS.Colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DEBORAH A. GENGLER-DUNN, GRADUATE STUDENT, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY, FORT COLLINS, CO, 80523 TEL: 970-226-8772, E-Mail: dgengler@lamar.colostate.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? Participants (up to 15) were chosen on a first come basis. We are asking you to participate in this study since the goal of our research is to learn about the first-year college experiences of first-generation female students at Colorado State University. If you agree to participate in the study, we will ask you about your perspective in two private, confidential interviews that may last about one hour each. You will be asked a series of open-ended and focused questions about your experiences at this college. Questions may involve how you came to attend the college, how you negotiated your way through your first year, and how you liked or disliked your initial year on campus.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The Principal Investigator (James Banning) is the professor at Colorado State University who is overseeing this research project. His job is to evaluate the progress of the work, make suggestions for improvement, and evaluate the final work. The Co-Principal Investigator (Deborah A. Gengler-Dunn) is the student who will be doing the research project. She will be conducting the interviews, listening to and analyzing the interview tapes, and writing the results of the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of the proposed study is to explore the first-year experiences of first-generation female students at Colorado State University. First-generation women students will be interviewed in an effort to understand their "lived experiences" during their initial year at Colorado State University.

The study will address the following research questions:

- 1) What family dimensions influenced you in regards to your educational advancement?
- 2) What societal characteristics influenced you in regards to your educational advancement?
- 3) Are there first-year circumstances you identify as challenges during your first year at college?
- 4) What strategies do you think you used in order to overcome any perceived challenges or problematic expectations during this first year?
- 5) What existing campus organizational factors encouraged or discouraged your success during this first year?
- 6) What image of women did the campus culture project?
- 7) Consider the total ecology of the transitional first year at college. What do you regard as factors that would empower other first-generation women who may follow your lead into a first college year? What advice would you offer?

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523. The interviews will take place in a classroom or other room that will provide a quiet and uninterrupted environment. The exact dates of the study have not been determined. The study will start after May 15, 2006 and end before April 1, 2007.

Page 1 of 4 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? This study will collect data through an analysis of private, confidential interviews. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed twice in private at dates, times, and locations that we both agree upon. During your first interview, you will also be asked to keep a journal for a week and to self-select three entries you wish to share with the researcher(s) before the second interview. The second interview will be a follow-up interview to clear up questions from the first interview and journal entries. If needed, this second interview may be by e-mail or telephone. Your identity and the identity of your institution will remain confidential. After the interviews and prior to the end of the fall semester at a time and place convenient for those who want to participate, you may self-select to take part in an approximately hour-long group discussion (3-15 individuals) concerning your college experiences as a First-generation female. (Focus) group discussion is offered because the dynamics of thinking/speaking in a group format often exposes participants to new or alternative perspectives, which may further promote open communication and research possibilities. If you want to participate in a group discussion with other First-generation students to discuss your experiences and perspectives, please indicate below that you would like to participate. While the discussion will focus on the first year experience, how much you share in the group will be up to you. Group discussion will be guided by questions from the first two interviews. The researcher will contact you regarding the time and place. Your identity and the identity of your institution will remain confidential in any written reports of the group discussion.

___ Yes, I would like to participate in the focus group; please contact me and at that time, I will still have the choice to participate or not.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no known reasons why you should not take part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no known risks or discomforts to you if you participate in this study. 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 are no known benefits of the research to individual participants, although you may or may not find personal reward or satisfaction in being afforded an avenue to tell your story. The anticipated benefit of the research is that via presentation or publication of research results, colleges and their constituencies may learn about the experiences of first-year, first-generation female students at a particular university. Research results may stimulate awareness of these students and their needs, and may affect the design and delivery of student services like advising and development programs. This may also bring new teaching and learning perspectives to faculty who have these students in their classes and may also affect the development of female leadership strategies.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your data will not be used in the study but it will be secured and kept according to federal regulations. For data to be used within the study, both a first and second interview will be completed.

Page 2 of 4 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? The only cost to you for participating in the study will be the time needed to conduct your interview. We estimate this will take about two hours.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with that from other people in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

To maintain confidentiality we will use a randomized code using common last names to identify you and other participants. For example, one participant may be identified as Jones and another may be identified as Smith. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing 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, secured places. You should know, however, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to others. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court if our research records were subpoenaed in civil or criminal litigation. If you self-select to participate in a group discussion, others within that group will also be privy to whatever you choose to say in the context of that group. Participants in the focus group will be directed to respect the group process by agreeing to confidentiality regarding all comments made during the interview. Although no reference to individuals will be used in the final report, confidentiality can be guaranteed only to the degree participants respect this direction.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? We are unaware of any reason why your participation in the study would be ended once your interview begins.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No, you will not receive any compensation 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 principal investigator at 970-491-7153. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrum, Human Subjects Administrator at 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take *with you*.

Page 3 of 4 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? 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 four 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

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

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 _____ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Page 4 of 4 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Flyer

Recruitment Flyer

You are invited to participate in a research study of First-year, First-generation women students' experiences at this university

***15 participants will be selected on a first come, first selected basis**

What is the purpose of this study?

To gain a better understanding of First-year, First-generation women students' experiences at this university

Who can participate in this study?

- Participants must be female and must be First-generation students who have recently completed or are in the midst of completing their first year of their college studies at this university. Within the parameters of this study, "First-generation" means that neither parent graduated from college.
- Participants may reside on campus or may commute
- Students from any department may participate
- Students must be at least 18 years of age at the time they agree to participate or must obtain the written consent of a parent or guardian on a consent form that will be provided

If you are interested, I invite you to attend two interviews:

- A first individual interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes long
- A second interview will be approximately one hour in length.

**** If there is participant interest in a group (3-15 people) discussion after the initial and follow-up interviews, a convenient location and time will be made available**

- Participants will also be asked to keep a brief journal of their college experiences for one week and to self-select three entries to share with the researcher before the second interview

During our interviews, I will ask you questions about your personal background and your experiences at this university. Your participation is voluntary and will remain confidential. If you choose to participate in a group interview any information you decide to share within the group will be entirely up to you. If this research study is published your name will be disguised.

Please contact the following individual if you are interested and/or have any questions: dgengler@lamar.colostate.edu

Refreshments will be served

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PARTICIPANT:

DATE:

HIGHS/ LOWS:

LANDSCAPE OBSERVATIONS

KEYHOLE INSIGHTS

APPENDIX F

Journal Instructions

JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS:

Please keep a daily journal of your experiences for 7 days after your initial interview.

Select three journal entries you would like to share and either place these original pages in the envelope provided to you during the first interview or make copies of the original pages and place these in the envelope provided and bring them to the Education Building, Graduate School office, rm. _____ by _____ so these pages may be reviewed before your second interview. Seal the envelope and simply write "journal" and my name Deborah Gengler-Dunn on the outside of the envelope

APPENDIX G

Initial Interview Questions

Initial Interview Guide

- 1) What family dimensions influenced you in regards to your educational advancement?
- 2) What societal characteristics influenced you in regards to your educational advancement?
- 3) Are there first-year circumstances you identify as challenges during your first year at college?
- 4) What strategies do you think you used in order to overcome any perceived challenges or problematic expectations during this first year?
- 5) What existing campus organizational factors encouraged or discouraged your success during this first year?
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- 7) Consider the total ecology of the transitional first year at college. What do you regard as factors that would empower other first-generation women who may follow your lead into a first college year? What advice would you offer?