Can we ~~Tawk?~~ Talk: Fashioning/Re-fashioning and Mapping MySelf as a Border Crosser

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Abstract

Drawing upon anthropology, sociology, linguistics, cartography, and feminist theory, I use a layered account to map my experiences as a working class, first generation college graduate and professsor within higher education to better understand my struggles as a border crosser."[1] Through word + image, I explore the intersection of gender, class and education and the construction of my overlapping and conflicting identities that have been subject to fashioning/re-fashioning throughout my life. I discuss the requirements, challenges and costs of border crossing. Suggestions for addressing class as an academic, feminist, and social justice issue are further explored.

Keywords: graphic narratives, gender and identity, women academics, border crosser, working class academics

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1. *Border crosser* is a term used to describe an individual from a working class background who achieves a college education and professional status. See: Law, 1995, p. 6. Border living is a term to describe the space that working class students occupy in middle class university cultures. (See Rendon, 1992).
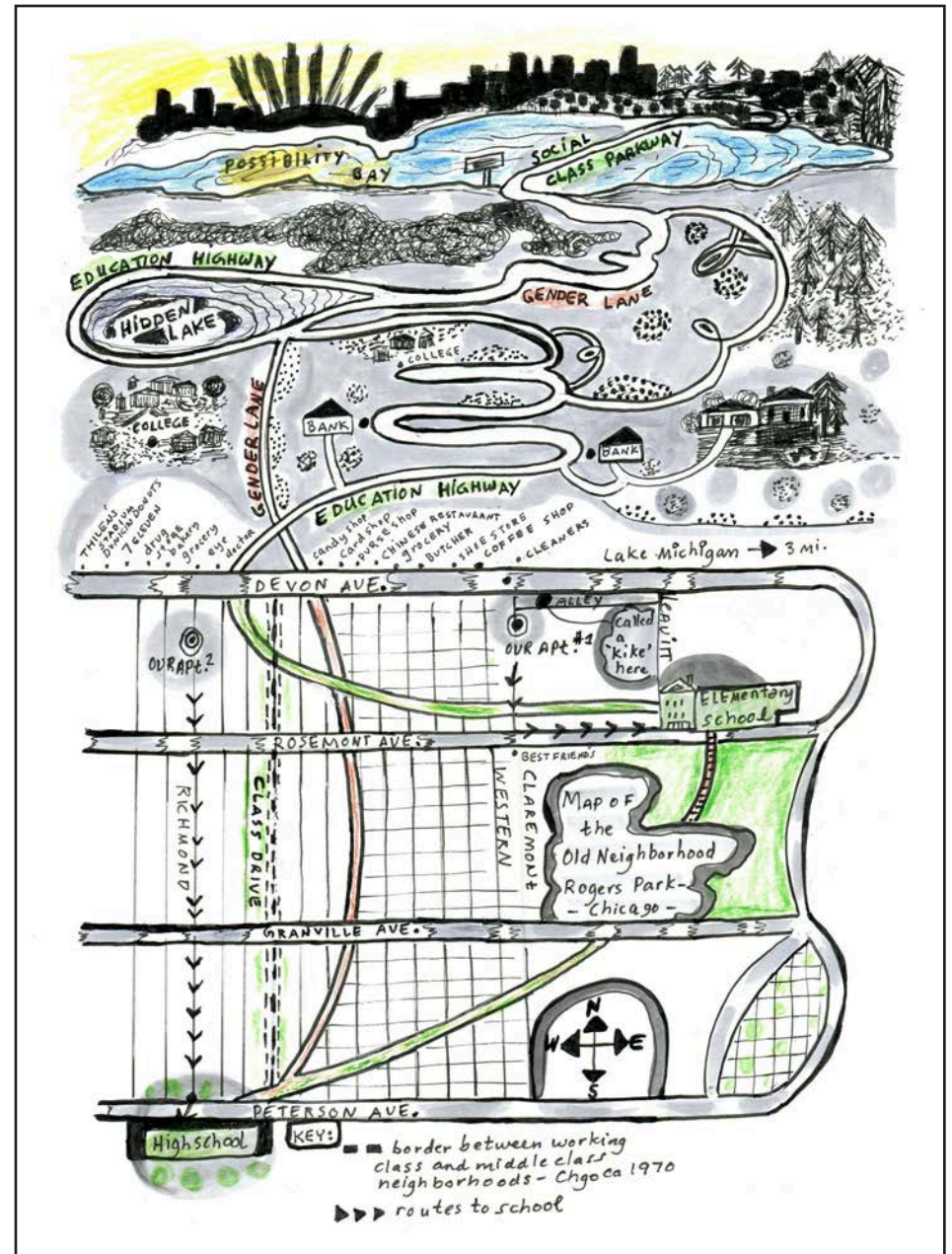
Mapping Theory

As a daughter, artist, and academic from a working class background, I am particularly interested in how class shapes "values, attitudes, social relations," behaviors, appearance, and voice, enhances and/or impedes the access of individuals to various realms of experience and opportunities, and influences "the way knowledge is given and received (hooks, 1994, p. 178). This knowledge includes social knowledge, or what is communicated through spoken language and social interactions.

To better understand the complexities of my professional life as social practice and as lived experience, I looked to the scholarship on class and narrative research to understand the experiences of academics, in particular, female academics, who have experienced marginalization in the academy (Bock, 2009; Barney Dews & Law, 1995; Charlip, 1995; Check; 2006; Dykins-Callahan, 2008; hooks, 1994; Humphreys, 2005; Jago, 2002; Johnston-Hurst, 2010; Knight, 2007; O'Dair, 1995; Leeb, 2004; Roode, 2007; Tokaczyk & Fay, 1993; Zandy, 1990).

To better understand my experiences in visual terms, I looked to mapping. Mapping is a process associated with the fields of cartography and the sciences, but is also a method used by social science researchers to collate and visualize complex sets of data (McCandless, 2009; Tufte, 1983). Many contemporary artists, including feminist and activist artists, have taken to using mapping in their art (Harmon, 2009/2004). Artists such as Joyce Kozloff, Maira Kalman, Julie Mehretu, Paula Sher, Nina Katchadourian and others use maps to explore personal and cultural geographical issues (Berry, 2011). Relative to the concept of mapping, border theory is critical to understanding "the process through which borders are demarcated and managed …[and] demarcation as "the process through which borders are constructed and the categories of difference or separation" (Newman, 2007, p. 35).

As a work-in-progress, my visual maps include data from my life and other sources to explore issues related to gender, social class, education and my lived experience. Visual data methods such as drawing, diagrams and maps allow me to visualize my struggles, to explore connections between experience, facts, and my locations, and to address

the "intense silence about the reality of class differences" (hooks, 1994 p. 177). The interrogation of my own class identity using a mixed method approach (Creswell, 2008) allows me to see more clearly how my voices (artistic, speaking, pedagogical, theoretical, family, work) have been shaped by class values, beliefs, socialization, and social knowledge as a border crosser.

To understand the development of identity is to know that it is "constructed through everyday practices at many levels" (Escobar, 2008, p. 203) and is influenced by the 'psychological tendencies' of individuals relative to their social class: responsiveness, ability to make decisions, perceiving their own sense of agency, and orienting themselves to the future (Fiske & Markus, 2011, p. 3). In turn, social class influences knowing "how to talk … if to talk … whom to trust ... how to belong" (p. 8) and knowing how to interpret visual, gestural and linguistic cues. Therefore, class may be understood as a dynamic interaction between individuals and the spoken word.

Yet, how do I do research mySelf and avoid a critique of being either too subjective or feeling that the process is a "highly impersonal activity'? (Etherington, 2004, p. 25). Using the Self as research (Etherington, 2004) can allow for self-reflexivity[2] and the bending back on oneself through writing, visualizing experience, and the linking of word + image back to theory and other research. Diaz' (2002) use of collage as a research tool is an example of the blending of word + image "where pictures can function as illustrations of text … text as illustrations of the pictures … [in a] living dialogue" (Sava & Nuutinen, 2003 in Leavy, 2009, p. 233). I've approached the research process both as merging of word + image as well as a *bricolage*---where the overlap of research methods results in a multiperspectival inquiry (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). As a researcher/bricoleur, I use techniques of juxtaposition, and the appropriation of multiple sources of data to create new understandings about mySelf.

Using mixed methods (Creswell, 2008), I draw upon the traditions

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2. Self-reflexivity is defined as "a space between subjectivity and objectivity (Etherington, 2004, p. 37) and is a both a stance and a methodology used in narrative forms of inquiry that includes auto-ethnography.

of autoethnography (Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holman-Jones, 2005; Richardson, 1997), narrative and qualitative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) arts-based research (Leavy, 2009; Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008), reflexive research (Etherington, 2004; Lyle, 2009) and researchers who use personal history as educational research (Krall, 1998). All of these methodologies support and honor the exploration of the 'multiplicity of ironic and conflicting and interdependent voices' (Slattery, 2001, p. 374) within identity work.

Critical questions for undertaking identity work include: What do we write about? How do we write it? And for whom do we write it? (Richardson, 1997, p. 12). Additionally, a critical question for preparing identity work for publication is: How much do I disclose? In looking for models and ways to present one's struggles, I have found Miller's (2008) autoethnography of his interrogation of race relative to personal and professional contexts compelling. The autobiographical graphic narratives of Lynda Barry, Aline Kominsky-Crumb and *Ladydrawers* offer other equally powerful models for exploring identity and sites of pain through storytelling in the union of word + image. My graphic narratives included this text were completed both prior to and during the creation of this manuscript. They have afforded me an opportunity to "bend back on [my] self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740 as cited in Lyle, 2009, p. 297). In this sense these visuals, as data, allow for retrospection, introspection, and further theorizing (Ronai, 1995) in a process of moving backwards and forwards. In this kind of movement, I acknowledge "there are always gaps in the telling," but that "the truth is still here" (Jago, 2002, p. 737).

A heuristic inquiry process aimed at "self-examination, personal learning and change" (Moustakas, 1990 as cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 110) motivates my identity work vis a vis the "revisiting of life experiences that are considered influential" (Lyle, 2009, p. 295). A determination about what events or stories I considered influential is based on the level of emotional intensity that I associated with a particular set of experiences.

The following questions surfaced at the beginning of this study, evolved throughout this study and guided my inquiry, writing, image making, gathering, analysis – and a bending back on mySelf.

- How have I *fashioned/re-fashioned* my identity through clothes and appearance?
- How and where have I been positioned/re-positioned/*fashioned/re-fashioned* within the familial, artistic, and educational landscapes and borders that I have occupied?
- What have I experienced at the intersection of class, gender and education?
- In mapping my experience, what is revealed?
- How can class be further interrogated as a teaching and research subject?

Mapping[3] the Journey

Travelling on Education Highway, beginning in the Old Neighborhood, was not a straight and direct route as it intersected with Gender Lane and Class Drive. This interwoven path continued as I headed north[4] Gender Lane wrapped around Hidden Lake merging with Education Highway and headed toward Possibility Bay where it finally merged with Social Class Parkway. Along the way, there were many colleges, banks, nicely appointed houses and green spaces for rest and shade. From the bridge, I could see a vista that on one hand offered me feelings of hope, renewal and possibility; and yet, on the other hand, seemed daunting. Could it be the signs that provoked my sense of confusion and uncertainty? One said: "Road Construction Ahead--Expect Delays" Another

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3. In the summary of my journey as a border crosser, I use metaphors, such as Gender Lane, Class Drive, Hidden Lake Social Class Parkway to help explain and visualize my path from a working class background to the land of higher education and the middle class. The spaces of my childhood (in the lower half of the map) appear more geometric, whereas, the upper half of the map associated with my early adulthood and college years and work life appear more circular and winding. Yet, these spaces contain long stretches of "educational highways" leading toward an ominous landscape, the unknown, and a world beyond the Old Neighborhood) on the other side of Possibility Bay, on the other end of Social Class Parkway, and where social class became a very significant factor in border crossing.

4. North is a direction I associate with wisdom and intellectual discovery.

said: "Passport required." I continued onward and crossed the Parkway. The following is a summary of my journey, based on memory, feelings, facts, and theory, how I fashioned and re-fashioned myself along the way as a student and professor from a working class background[5].

Drawing upon anthropology, sociology, linguistics, cartography, and feminist theory, and through narrative and image, I use a layered account to map my experiences as a working class, a first generation college graduate and professsor within higher education to better understand my struggles as a border crosser"[6] and the beginnings of a classed, divided and bricolaged self.

Beginnings of a Classed and Divided Self

From our third floor apartment living room windows, I had the perspective of a bird although I rarely ever saw, or heard one. In front of the windows, I'd sit alone at the prow of my ship on the metal radiator cover. It was here that I would imagine far away places beyond the passages of the trees and brick buildings. I'd see mySelf on an adventure on the Amazon, dream about becoming an artist, a fashion designer or an art teacher, and think about beautiful people that I saw on the television–like Peggy Fleming, the 1968 Olympic skater. With my eyes closed I could see her skating and how effortlessly beautiful she looked as she glided across the ice in her billowing chiffon outfit with not a hair out of place. She had a perfect smile. I wanted to look and skate like Peggy.

Such visions of ease and gracefulness were juxtaposed with stories that were told to me about the economic struggle and religious persecution that my ancestors faced in Eastern Europe and Russia. My belief that such struggles were of the past was disrupted when, around the age

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5. Working class is a term to describe a social group who work for wages, typically do not have college educations, own property, are employed in industrial and non-professional jobs, and have limited access to educational, financial, and cultural resources; also known as *blue collar workers*.

6. *Border crosser* is a term used to describe an individual from a working class background who achieves a college education and professional status. See: Law, 1995, Border *living* is a term to describe the space that working class students occupy in middle class university cultures. (See Rendon, 1992).

of seven, I was called a kike[7] in front of my house. I did not know the rough-looking teenage boy who yelled this out at me as he passed by in the alley, but I felt the jolting pain as this word entered into my body.

I stood frozen
as the word
jettisoned
around and around
like a crazed bullet
between my head
and all around
my body parts
plopping down
in my belly
while
he, the stranger
and his tongue
and his disgust
walked on
and left me
by the alley
to feel
like a stranger
in front of my house.

Figure 1. *Birthday dress*, drawn in 2011 from a black and while photograph, Ink on paper

Around this time, I began an obsession with my exterior appearance. Fashion and garments were part of my family history. My family is working class and both of my grandfathers were tailors (one was in the Amalgamated Workers union). Likewise, both of my parents worked in the garment district in downtown Chicago in large dress factories. My father had an appreciation for nice clothes and I'd take walks with him on Devon Avenue stopping to look at the latest display of men's cloth-

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7. *Kike* is a derogatory term that began about the beginning of the 19th century on Ellis Island and was used to refer to Jews from primarily eastern Europe; the origin of the term is not certain.

ing in the local haberdashery. He'd talk about what he liked and why he liked it and I could sense his longing to wear beautifully tailored clothes. I listened to many stories about my mother's father who sewed suits by hand and who could sew a seam 'so you could hardly see a 'stitch.'

Starting in about third grade, I started to draw hundreds of fashion designs using ballpoint pen on lined notebook paper and I colored these designs with crayons, colored pencils and glitter. I looked forward to watching the *Carol Burnett Show* and the *Sonny and Cher Show* each week on television and seeing the latest gowns that Bob Mackie[8] designed. Each fall, I looked forward to selecting one new outfit and a pair of shoes usually purchased from Marshall Field, the largest and most famous department store in the city. My sixth birthday dress was one of these outfits (Figure 1).

It was a small black and white checked sleeveless dress with a matching bolero style jacket with a white collar with pearl buttons. With my sparkling paper tiara, I felt *rich* in this dress. I loved how clothes could make me *feel*. It was the beginning of my awareness of clothes to transform my sense of Self, to disrupt and "erase markers of class difference" (hooks, 1994, p. 187), and any other difference, and *re-classify* myself[9].

Figure 2. *Sheri*, about age 10

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8. Bob Mackie is a designer who costumed Hollywood stars and was known for his bold use of sequins and rhinestones.

9. *Clothing*: a collective set of garments
Dress: an outer garment; a particular form of appearance
Address: a manner of speaking; a direction intended to the recipient
Re-dress: to remedy or relieve; to correct or reform
Fashion: a prevailing custom or style of dress, etiquette, socializing; a manner or way; to accommodate or adjust.
In *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Crane, 2007) reminds us that clothing signifies class and social position, and reflects larger social, economic and cultural changes and agendas. We can look to the suffragette and the women's movement to clearly see how political and social agendas paralled changes to women's clothing (alternative dressing, loose clothing, pants, denim, etc.) in ways

Around sixth grade, most of my girl friends began to iron their curly and wavy hair, wear makeup and attend Saturday modeling classes at a local Sears Roebuck department store. They became preoccupied in learning and perfecting their feminine voices embodied with any combination of a "gentle stammer," "softened edges," "wavering tones," "swoops," "glissandos," "sudden upsets and crises," and "hesitant speech," (oh, really?...) which signaled 'politeness, surprise … [and] good cheer' (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 116).

Brownmiller asks, "at what age does a girl begin to review her assets and count her deficit spots?" (1984, p. 25). It was at this time that I began to count my deficits: *teeth, voice, feet, chest, and wearing glasses (in order of self-consciousness)*. I became acutely aware of a "standard of desirable beauty, of individual parts" (p. 25), and an image of prescribed femininity that was projected in the fashion magazines (Seventeen) that I'd flip through at the drug store. In photographs, I chose not to reveal my crooked teeth (Figure 2) and in doing so I rejected yet another quality of feminine behavior – appearing open and friendly. My portrait of a young woman (Figure 3), drawn around this time reflects my pre-occupation with beauty. Realizing that I did not have a lot of control over fixing my perceived deficits, (teeth, evolving body, shape of toes), I focused on clothes and I began to collage and bricolage[10]

Figure 3. *My drawing of a woman, 1971,* Pencil on paper.

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that were seen as so remarkable, but now that we take so for granted. While the history of fashion is replete with examples as to how clothing enhances status, through fine fabrics, impeccable tailoring, and one of kind designs, fashion has also served as a "means of making subversive social statements" (Crane, p. 237).

10. *Bricolage* is a term suggesting a process where something is created (an art work, a

with my clothes as a way to re-fashion mySelf.

Beginnings of a Bricolaged Self

As an exercise in *doing middle class*, high school social life comprised of attending to the where, what's, and how's and perfecting the *feminine*. Appearances were very important and now girls began to surgically alter their appearance (e.g. nose jobs). The public high school that I attended was more of a middle class environment than was my elementary school; there were more matching outfits from *Carol Corr* (the neighborhood boutique for teen girls) and girls who sported winter break tans. Class distinctions were more evident, and less concealed; it was clearer at least among the girl groups who did, and did not have *stuff* (clothes, cars, vacations, and boyfriends). Social status in girl groups could be attained by concerning oneself with the following in a way that conformed to feminine ideals about appearance and demeanor:

1. How you look
2. How you want to look for others
3. What you wear
4. Where you go
5. What you talk about
6. How you talk about it

My choices of clothing in high school reflected my working class family background and my growing artistic and intellectual interests in eastern philosophy and art. The first wave of feminism was well under way and the *hippie* look was still in vogue. Yet, I did crave status and achieved it through the only athletic sport available to women at that time—cheerleading. In high school, I gravitated toward these two seemingly contradictory looks—one that moved toward status, and one that fulfilled my need to wear "practical, functional and durable" clothes (Crane, 2000, p. 27) and be arty. My status look was a blue and white Varsity cheerleading uniform that I wore on game days with my silver

megaphone charm necklace. My other look consisted of a hippie, collaged, bricolaged look: embroidered jeans, t-shirts, OshB'gosh overalls, and mixed and matched thrift store finds.

The bricolaged look deviated from the norm of female attire in all social categories of the 1970s, Chicago public schools (i.e. jock, greaser, sorority, etc.) and signified a coalescence of my emerging independent spirit, a rejection of a hegemonic feminine appearance, a nod to the current counter-culture and its values, and a love for beautiful fabrics and patterns. After a while, my two looks began to blend as I started wearing a blue bandana (a worker's handkerchief) with my cheerleading outfit. I began to identify with the role of artist as worker and my artistic pursuits and interests in underground comics, embroidery, oil painting, drawing, and fashion.

While I walked among the middle class, it became clear that I did not possess many important signifiers for *doing middle class*: lots of new stylish clothes and accessories, a straightened nose, parents with a split-level ranch house, and college educations, and the kind of social ease that comes with possessing many, or all, of these signifiers.

Figure 4. *Excerpt from Doin' Art in Chi-town,* 2007, Ink on paper

My paralleling but divergent interests in art and cheerleading aroused the first of many tensions and experiences at the intersection of gender, class, and education; and the juggling of multiple identities and sets of friends. More importantly, the artist identity allowed me to identify with a style of "*bohemianism,*"[11] a connection to the 1970s countercul-

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piece of music, or a life) out of the everyday things readily available to the *bricoleur*, or maker.

11. Bohemianism is a term describing artists and writers in Europe and the United States in the 19th and 20th century who were associated with unconventional lifestyles,

ture, the Beat poets, which was mirrored in my bricolaged and androgy-nous (hats and vests aka *Annie Hall*[12]) fashion style.

Art school as a Border Crossing

I carried my interest in thrifting and appropriating fashion into my self-representation as an undergraduate and graduate art school student. As I continued to explore the bohemian look and artist identity, my mother expressed confusion and dismay about my lack of ability to dress in a way that conformed to standards of dress adopted by the working class (in Chicago this meant wearing beige raincoats and sweatshirts), and what "they're all wearing" (Figure 4). Little did I know this "nomad urban drifter" look would be high fashion thirty years later (Marie Claire, 2010) and that conformity was a tried and true working class value.

A commuter art student status also afforded me a certain level of privacy so I could conceal my "private life of poverty" (Dykins-Callahan, 2008, p. 364). I assimilated well into the art school environment through bricolaging my appearance. To also visually pass[13] for an art student, I adopted a worker uniform for the work of art making: mixing plaster, making charcoal drawings, and painting. But, as I listened to the voices of my peers around me, subtle and not so subtle differences between us began to emerge. My perception of *sameness*, that we were all equal as art students, gave way to interruptions, and *slippages* evident in voice and passages of *speech* that signified, made visible, what seemed to be immeasurable differences that existed between us.

Other voices seemed self-assured, carefully modulated —like *newscaster* voices. Other voices had prep school sounding accents likely

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art, literature, theatre, and travel.

12. Annie Hall (1977) is an American movie written and directed by Woody Allen and starring Diane Keaton. Her eclectic vintage-style men's wardrobe consisting of "loose-fitting jackets, vests, fedoras, and neckties" into "seemingly disparate separates into disheveled, effortless chic" influenced US fashion trends in women's wear. See: http://thestylenotebook.com/2010/07/31/the-moment-annie-hall

13. Dykins-Callahan (2008) explores the concept of 'passing' in her essay about being a working class university student.

attained through speaking with a clenched jaw (i.e. like Mr. Drysdale's secretary, "Jane Hathaway" in the *Beverly Hillbillies* 1960s sitcom). It's not so much what we talked about, but rather *how* we talked that spoke to and about class, privilege, power, authority and entitlement. Self-conscious, I aimed to control my own slippages that would give way to my own position, and I used my own speaking voice sparingly due to its "hegemonically threatening characteristic[s]" (Dykins-Callahan, 2008, p. 364), i.e. my "Chicago" accent with the long 'a' and long 'o'.

It was in art school social settings that I observed how spoken language was more than utilitarian. I realized that voice could have, nuance, beauty, and intrigue and it could connect, or not connect a person to place, status, and culture (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Excerpt from *Doin' Art in Chi-town*, 2007, Ink on paper

In the Old Neighborhood, the spoken language was very utilitarian, direct, and related to the Inland Northern American English accent prevalent in Eastern Wisconsin and Illinois and characterized by long "a's," hot is hat (a=ah), and the exaggerated "o." As a child, I was adept with what Basil Bernstein describes as "restricted," that is, language that is direct and precise, and to the point (Roode, 2007, p. 1). Like many working-class kids, I struggled with "elaborated language,' or the discourse of the middle class, characterized by indirect speech and generalities" (Kutz & Roskelly in Roode, 2007, p. 1).

While proud to be the first person of my immediate family to attend college and earn advanced degrees, the more that I attended college, the less I found in common to talk about with my family. At some point, I consciously made an effort to limit my talk about art, and school, and not to sound 'too smart.' Dykins-Callahan (2008) speaks about juggling so as to "skillfully manage multiple identities" (p. 366). I juggled my emerging and conflicting identities as a daughter, student, and artist. Many of my collaged art works at the

Figure 6. *Mixed media construction* ca. 1981

time dealt with the theme of inside/outside as I struggled with feelings of dissonance and dislocation (Figure 6).

Art school was a place to learn how to do upper class: to learn art speak, and use social ease for social positioning. Art School was also a place to see my own positioning as an insider, but I was positioned at the borders and margins of this new culture. As an insider, I did learn the language of art, however, I spoke in a manner "that did not conform to privileged class ideals or mannerisms" (hooks, 1994, p. 182). My self-consciousness resulted in a level of self-monitoring and editing that I did not find in the discourse of economically privileged art students.

Continued Border Crossings

My feelings of displacement continued after graduation from art school (Figure 7). While these feelings are not uncommon for most graduates with fine art degrees, my own sense of displacement was magnified by the nature and circumstances of being a working-class college graduate in a family who did not understand the 'art thing' and my aspirations to be an artist (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Excerpt from *Doin' Art in Chi-Town*, 2007, Ink on paper.

Figure 8. Excerpt from *Doin' Art in Chi-Town*, 2007, Ink on paper.

Upon deciding to formalize, and continue in my study of art + education, I entered into other university cultural settings and crossed other borders. Along the way, I continued to agonize over about my perceived deficits: body, hair, clothing, and voice. Differences between peers and myself seemed magnified. At one university in the southern United States, I was called a 'Yankee.' After some time, my speech patterns morphed. I spoke slower. I did not directly approach a subject. I softened my conversational tone. While I was expected to think critically, write well, and be able to express and support my strong opinions in class, in social interactions I was expected to be demure, indirect, uncritical, and charmingly unsure of myself.

It was at a graduate school in the northern United States, and pursuing a PhD, that I discovered examples of empowered females who expressed themselves without apologizing, who valued and demonstrated high levels of critical thinking, whose well-developed voices permeated their writing and pedagogy, and who wore ethnic looking clothes. With these affirming models, I was able to reflect back on my own voice and ultimately decided that I wanted/needed to develop more of a presence through my speaking and writing voice. I could begin to see connections between gaining confidence, having a confident speaking voice and being perceived as competent. The presence of strong women's voices within the graduate school culture reassured me that speaking up, while being articulate and persuasive was, and is, necessary and vital for professional growth, and survival.

My multiple voices (speaking, theoretical, writing, and artistic) re-formed in the context of my formal art education studies and paralled the purchase of my first professional looking suit to mark the occasion of my Bat-Mitzvah[14]. The suit had a deep violet skirt and jacket, was well-tailored; I wore it with a high neck, black chiffon blouse and I accessorized with a gold plated dolphin pin that I purchased at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop (Figure 9) fo*r* an *arty* look.

Studying for my Bat-Mitzvah involved several months of studying Hebrew and the Torah. It was more than an academic exercise. It was

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14. *Bat-Mitzvah* is a Hebrew term for girl-commandment and is a rite of passage for Jewish girls who around the age of 13 study and recite a portion of the Torah and who are then viewed as being responsible for their actions.

another border crossing, as I became the first female in my immediate and extended family to have some formal religious education. In this process, I felt a new identity emerge as a *professional*, and I became more aware of my social and ethical responsibilities.

During my doctoral studies, I moved away from thrift store mixing and matching, opting for a more conservative 'educator' look. I was now a teaching assistant at a major Midwestern university in the United States and with that role came a desire to wear sensible clothing and shoes that would be comfortable while attending classes, teaching, and running back and forth across campus. In dressing for academia (teacher education), I avoided clothes that could be considered frivolous, expensive, sexy, or vulnerable and opted for a look that would associate me with being serious, competent, and visual without looking corporate.

Figure 9. Purple suit, ca. 1992, 2011, Gouache and ink on paper

Professorial Border Crossings and the Body

Heading north, I crossed the social class parkway and landed in the upper Midwest to teach art education at a small regional campus. After a short while, I realized that I did not possess the look of upper Midwest women (either very thin, or very overweight was the norm). I also realized that I did not possess demeanors, behaviors, and role adoption expected of women in this culture: apologetic, self-effacing, cheerful, timid, deferring to male authority, and having children. The more socially ambitious women adopted these behaviors and demeanors in addition to their alignment with males in positions of power/authority, or their alignment with females who had access to powerful males. These women also

conformed to conservative, but very feminine ways of dressing: dress length at the knees, wearing nylons, polyester suits, low-heeled shoes in brown, black, or navy), little make-up, (maybe eye shadow and little mascara), simple silver jewelry (tiny gold or silver hoops), thin wedding bands, small diamond engagement rings, watches with small faces, no perfume, and nothing gaudy or garish.

Fitting in was about having a certain kind of appearance and demeanor that can only be described as being 'nice,' and not too ethnic, or urban. I felt insecure about the way that I looked, and I expressed these self-doubts in my journal (Figure 10). I also felt distanced from artist friends who wanted to know if I was a scholar or an artist and I felt distanced from educators who did not really understand the art part of *art education*.

In attempts to assimilate into my new role as a professor, I gradually began to consume the things of the middle class: "branded clothing, semi-fine wine, scholarly books and big words" (Dykins-Callahan 2008, p. 354). I avoided a look of poverty, or distress although ironically, a look of poverty (wrinkly expensive linen clothing, 'distressed' leather jackets and jeans with holes in the knees) was very fashionable at this time among middle class consumers. These high priced looking '*schmattas*'[15] noted in my parody *U Who*, (Figure 11), and based on the *J. Crew*[16] fashion catalog, captured the look of these fashionably 'flawed' garments in their use of rumpled fabric, torn materials, and other rejections of extravagance (Crane, 2000, p. 154). As hooks writes, "the person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body" (1994, p. 137) and not caring about being judged. As a new professor from a working class background, I became acutely aware as to how my body, and appearance was judged by others through incidents such as the following in wearing a vest.

Figure 10. *Journal entry*, 2007, Ink on paper
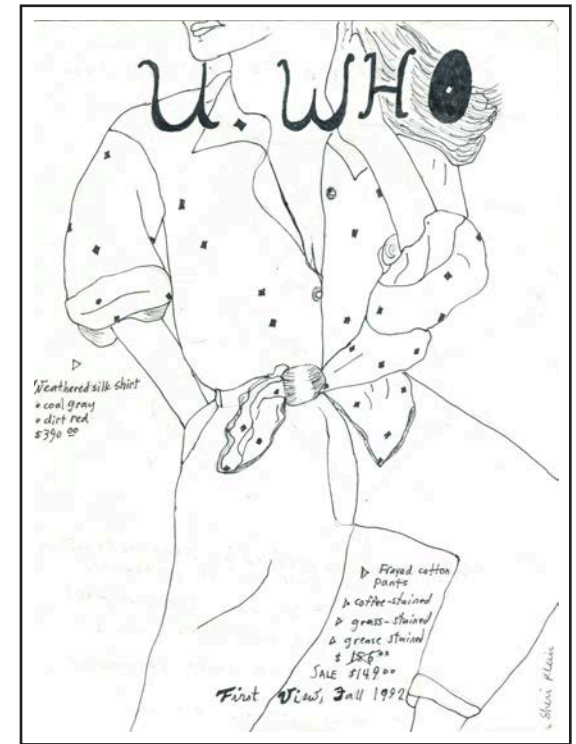
Figure 11. *U Who, (parody on J Crew)* ca. 1992

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15. *Schmatta*: Yiddish word for "rag."

16. *J. Crew* is a US based retail/outlet chain known for classic, but casual styles, denim wear, quality fabrics and more recently expensive one-of-a-kind items.

Clothes never shut up…[and] gabble on endlessly, making their intentional and unintentional points" known (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 81). Occasionally, I adopted an androgynous style by wearing vests because they were practical (had pockets), and were warm and comfortable to wear on the chilly upper Midwest days. One day, and as an untenured professor, while wearing one of my vests with a t-shirt, a male senior professor jammed a pencil up and down my cleavage, under my vest, in a shared work space, as he asked me: "Do you pass the pencil test?" I realized that none of my classes in feminism prepared me for this burning sting. Could it be that it didn't matter if I was smart or competent? Could it be that what only mattered is whether or not I was sexually attractive? Desireable? Available?

I was first in total shock as I got up and hurried out of the room. On my way out, I looked over at his wife who was at her desk, looking down and grading papers. I can't say if I was more outraged that a "colleague" (word used liberally) would do this, or that his wife didn't even acknowledge, or react to what he did in any way. I ran down the stairs trying to find my department Chair, and when I did and recounted to him the event, he responded with a "we'll just monitor it." I feel that his 'poking around' in my vest was his way of asking me whether or not I had breasts underneath what may have been perceived as a masculine style vest and/or were they firm enough to hold a pencil. The 'pencil test' epitomized female objectification and consolidated in my mind that I was not really a person, but an object under study through looking, examining, and 'monitoring.'

Around the same time, another male faculty member told me that I should wear fake long nails. My femininity was being examined, and challenged. I was being judged for not hyper-sexualizing my appearance. Male faculty members also asked me numerous times around this time when I was planning to have children – another act that would cause others to view me 'feminine.' The only times I was ever complimented on my appearance by males and females in the work environment was when I lost weight, or wore dresses and heels. My deep-seated fears about being different surfaced in a dream during my early tenure track years:

I sense that my chair is trying to
Capture me.
He's called a guy
From the psychiatric hospital
And I leave so
They don't find me
And I change my clothes
So they don't recognize me
But two young guys
Watch and hover over me

Preoccupations and Border Crossing

Figure 12. Untitled cartoon, 2007, Ink on paper

The more borders that I crossed, the more preoccupied I became with my body, appearance, nose, and voice. While I did not permanently alter my appearance in any way my body responded to the stresses of border crossing in academia first through weight gain, and then through weight loss. Subsequently, traces of my working class background

remained (Figure 12). Leeb (2004) acknowledges that working-class women entering academia have to assimilate. What does this exactly mean? Leeb suggests that, "disciplinary forces aim at her body and force her to leave her working-class body behind and, with it, her working-class behaviors, speech, and acts" (p. 20). This constitutes pretty much an extreme makeover! She goes on to say also that without a makeover, the status quo academic/middle-class community will "*denigrate* [my emphasis] the working-class as inferior, or deficient" (p. 21).

While a popular practice in English society in the 18th century was to punish women for not being 'quiet' by putting them on 'dunking stools' and plunging them into bodies of water (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 112), members of an academic community often use indirect means to punish women who do not socially fit in or conform to expected social norms and feminine behaviors. Using social knowledge about who's in and who's out, members of a community will use various indirect techniques to attack and drive out the undesirables. Cues are taken from those in authority or who have group social standing and in doing so, members can improve their own social standing within the dominant culture by being seen as one who is helping to drive out the interloper. It is not uncommon to see members of an academic community at various ranks participating in metaphorical dunking rituals.

My impassioned, direct, and confident way of speaking has often been criticized in academia for being 'loud,' and "Ben Stein-ish."[17] Hearing these criticisms often left me feeling very confused, angered, and dismayed. In particular, it is distressing to see the glaring discrepancies between university policy that advocates and celebrates diversity, pluralism, and inclusivity, while privately, its members practice values of rightness, sameness, and condemnation of others who are different by personality, appearance, culture, etc. The critique of being "Ben Stein-ish" clearly has overtones of Anti-Semitism. It is utterly disconcerting to know that some of the very students I helped to prepare to be future art teachers, harbored such thoughts, and who clearly were not being challenged to examine their racist ideologies within the context of their undergraduate education coursework[18].

Through these experiences, I became interested in cultural perceptions of voice. I discovered that loudness is often a criticism often waged against dark haired women[19] (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 71) (like me and other women that I knew) and rudeness is a criticism often waged at professors from working class backgrounds (like me and other women that I knew who also spoke more directly) by middle class students who are observed to have a low tolerance for tension, disagreement, and impassioned speech (hooks, 1994, p. 187). Historically, lower class accents have always been admonished by the elite class and have been the subject of parody and satire. Differences in the speech between middle class and working class women are noted in its function, discourse, and lexicon-syntactic properties. (Hoff-Ginsberg, 2008). As such, the negative associations toward working class voices may help to explain how and why female professors from working class backgrounds, or those who have non-regional accents are held to a much higher level of scrutiny in the academy and how the language of the middle class in the academy is solidified, and reproduced as the norm.

Recently, a very middle class female colleague offered an unsolicited speech lesson to help correct what she considered my defective pronunciations of words like "coffee." She said, "It's not 'cawfee,' it's 'coffee,' say it like that … it's the way you talk that gives you away." Dykins-Callahan agrees that "appearances not only matter, they dictate who is popular and who is persecuted—who wins and who loses" (2008, p. 363), and winning is being accepted as part of the group.

In her observation of Gombe chimpanzees, Jane Goodall (1986) observed that outsiders, in particular, females who are designated 'immigrants' and who travel into neighboring territories to 'transfer,' are met with hostility and exclusion. Young females must assimilate – to get protection by alpha males as well as try to get into the court of high-ranking females, they persist, or else return to their home community. Strangers are ruthlessly excluded to protect group integrity and resources.

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17. Ben Stein is a Jewish lawyer, actor and comedian.
18. After the "Ben Stein" criticism, I developed an assignment that was focused on the role of ethics in writing.
19. Dark-haired women in fairy tales and cartoons often symbolize evil and while blonds often symbolize all 'good,' i.e., Wizard of Oz and Disney cartoons and films. See www.classmatters.org for postings by women about class struggle.

She writes,

In human society, of course, we most often think of ostracism, or cold shouldering, as an informal group response to socially undesirable behavior in one or more of its members…attempts made by resident females to exclude young immigrants from their society perhaps come closest-since almost all the senior females will join such an endeavor at one time or another. The newcomer must persist over quite long periods of time before she can begin to relax among the adult females of her new group (pp. 86-87).

To assimilate, and to persist over time, particularly in the face of hostility requires a high level of tenacity, awareness, strategizing, and resources. Pursuing cosmetic modifications (surgery, aesthetic dental work, or huge wardrobe makeovers) that can help one to assimilate into a middle class 'acceptable' look may not be a reasonable option. Familial, cultural and social conditioning may prohibit long term and strategic thinking. Yet, group pressures persist. Just like Jane Goodall's chimps, to be accepted as a 'resident,' one cannot be perceived as a threat to the group integrity and resources, or vary in looks, speech behaviors to the extent that they become a noticeable target.

In *Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (2002), Naomi Wolf argues that while women have broken through glass ceilings, and have taken control of their bodies, there is another tremendous pressure – to adhere to notions of beauty as defined by patriarchal standards and that are reinforced through the media. In other words, despite the advances, the majority of women who are surveyed today indicate great dissatisfaction with their bodies, and their looks. *What Women Think and Feel about Their Bodies* (Figure 13) incorporates research about women, what they say and think about their body, what I say and think about my body, and the kinds of self-deprecating messages that women tell themselves.

Figure 13. *What Women Think and Feel About Their Bodies, 2012*, Ink and colored pencil on paper.

In spite of strides that the feminist movement has made, studies indicate that women are evaluated in the workplace with respect to their competence and authority based in part on their dress and appearance (Bartlett, 1994, p. 2553) and that looks matter in the workplace (Bennett, 2010). Studies within education also support that physical beauty has a substantial influence on students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness

and that correlate with higher instructional ratings (Hameresh & Parker, 2005) at almost every level (Goebel & Cashen, 1979 as cited in Buck & Tiene, 1989). Online postings of student opinions suggest that 'good' professors have nice speaking voices and that women who are 'different' in looks, class, and voice, are at high-risk for being harshly judged about their appearance, and performance. Confusing messages for working class women are evidenced in this online posting by "Julie," a white woman from a working class background who writes,

> I've been told by two feminist women professors as well as middle class women students that I should lose weight to gain greater social acceptance. This seems like a class dynamic to me, because at the same time my identity is confronted I am reading great books by feminists about body acceptance. (www.classmatters.org)

The Costs of Border Crossing

Inner conflict. Outside pressures. Confusing messages. Self-loathing. Shame. A divided self. Healing a divided self.

My journey as a first generation college graduate, artist, with two earned terminal degrees (MFA and PhD), and the attainment of a full professor tenured position allowed for the creation and dissonance of a "polyphony of [intersecting and conflicting] identities" (p. 210) all of which have been shaped in the process of border crossing and subsequently, a "significant Othering" (Dykins-Callahan, 2008, p. 355). While my degrees, income, and values locate me among the middle class, my appearance and speech often identify me with the working class. In spite of these contradictions, there are many overlapping identities (daughter, artist, educator, and professor) that have been subject to fashioning/refashioning as a participant in my profession. Several areas of dissonance also exist as I present myself in the following ways:

- An artist
- An artist from a working class family
- A college graduate from a working class family
- An artist within a university school of education
- An educator within an art department
- A working class student and professor within middle class university settings
- An urban person in a rural community
- A child-less woman in child-focused work cultures and profession
- A Jew in a Christian community

As a result of occupying these various locations, I have often been seen as an interloper (a threat to the dominant culture at varying degrees, and at varying times) and at risk for assimilation and complete residency. These positions leave me in an unresolved state of inner conflict and with questions about belonging that are not yet fully resolved.

The price for occupying these locations as border crosser is the pain of "difference," "being [seen as] different in some fundamental way" and even "seen [by some] as a lesser or inferior being" (Melani, n.d). In her essay "Root Hog, or Die: Surviving as Working Class in Academia," Bock (2009) talks about how one can be 'in' but still not feel like they are in because they will not act or behave in a certain way that conforms to group standard – whatever that standard may be. Subsequently, those who are perceived different are targeted and designated to positions of stranger, alien, outsider, and "other."[20] Referring to Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Slattery (2001) contends that Foucault's "analysis can be applied to any institution that seeks to control those who are judged abnormal" (p. 390). In academia, it is often the working class "border crossers" (Law, 1995, p. 6), or interlopers, who are often those deemed abnormal for any numbers of 'reasons' that signify difference, i.e. appearance, speech demeanor, personalities, class, or any one of these combinations. One's inability to effectively conform to privileged class ideals and mannerisms places one always in a position of interloper (hooks, 1994, p. 182), and stranger.

While I experienced that "working class was something to sur-

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20. The terms *other, border crosser and outsider* are used interchangeably within a number of essays about working class academics. See Barney Dews & Law (1995).

education as a path to do so, I ultimately found myself in an "ambiguous middle ground" (Sowinska, 1993, p. 160) of being in and out, neither here nor there, 'othered,' dislocated, disconnected, and at times, very disillusioned. Within the ivory covered walls, I discovered "politics of difference and sameness" and a climate of "universality and superiority" (Escobar, 2008, p. 3) both of which suppress well-being, hope, and possibility. The United States public educational system is based on a myth "where the desire to study [work] and learn all make us equal" (hooks, 1994, p. 177), but clearly where middle class values, behaviors, and codes remain dominant and continue to be reproduced in the social relations and practices among 'professionals.'

Mapping MySelf

My body is a site of class and gender struggles. The process of placing my "self" in my own research has allowed me to map the sites of my struggles. To map mySelf is to attempt to untangle these "entangled social realities" (Knight, 2007, p. 25) and voices to see how "identities are formed [and re-formed] in struggles" (Escobar, 2008, p. 219). To map mySelf is to liberate myself from the words of my oppressors and to liberate myself from my 'wounds, scars, [and] hard won understandings (Ely et. al, 1997 in Etherington, 2004, p 83). "Inside/Outside (Figure 14), is a map of head and representative of inner thoughts on my journey as a border crosser. After writing down some of the things I've heard people

Figure 14. *Outside/Inside Voices* , 2012, Collaged drawing.

say to me over the years, as well as some of the things I've said to myself along the way, I created a drawing using my head as the central image. I then began to cut up the drawing, using a technique called '*cut up method*' (made famous by the Dadaists) making lines of words to create new meanings. I eventually reassembled many of them in a collage form. (Figure 14). In rearranging text, I am now able to clearly see mind divided by layers of contested thoughts. Through mapping mySelf, I can see how my own border crossings have resulted in an internally contested thoughts. Through mapping mySelf, I can see how my own border crossings have resulted in an internally contested zone – a space that is now in a process of integration.

Kakali Bhattacharya creates poetry about her experiences as a transnational academic and asks, "How can insider/outsider researchers negotiate voices and silences when working in academia?" (2008, p. 88). This important question provides an opening for all border crossers for exploring their voices, locations, complications, and openings for healing, and transformation.

Complications and Opening in Border Crossing

It's a personal choice to decide how one is going to adapt and assimilate as a border crosser but crossing never comes with any guarantees. As did my immigrant grandmother before me, I landed at the shore of higher education to undertake a voluntary migration. Border crossing became a complex social, political and economic journey leading to cross-class encounters that aroused a myriad of conflicting emotions, feelings and experiences. As it is not uncommon for a border crosser's position to be relentlessly questioned and challenged by members of the dominant culture, to occupy such a location is an experience in suffering, and doubting.

In addition, border crossing requires leaving something behind (family, old neighborhoods, speech, looks, values, etc.). With this come feelings of loss and guilt. Through acknowledging loss and pain, there lies a wonderful opportunity for healing, understanding, and reconciliation within oneself.

Writing (as in this paper) and visualizing my experiences has allowed for a level of reconciliation and healing within mySelf as I was able to see the beginning and continuity of threads and patterns in the fabric of my experience. Healing can also take place through the creation of listening communities.

Yet there are many factors that make raising the subject of class difficult. It arouses shame in those who have, and do not have class privilege. The topic of class challenges deeply ingrained beliefs that hard work is *the* path to success. Terms such as middle class and working class are also open to multiple interpretations. Complications can also arise due the entanglements of race and gender; there is not a single experience that can ever or fully captures the experience of a *working* class person.

Opening spaces for these kind of conversations is important in order to move toward understanding self, examining one's biases, prejudices, and identifying self-limiting behaviors and beliefs. Cross-class conversations also require active and compassionate listening and the creation of spaces within and outside of the contested zones of higher education such as educational laboratories, classrooms, and community centers. Keifer-Boyd (2012) writes,

> Since context or particular conditions may limit capacities or the ability to be situated in positions of power for the agency needed to change oppressive systems, advocacy ethics requires listening and working with others to question what is socially just. (p. 209)

We need spaces that offer such a "model of possibility" (hooks, 1994, p. 131) where voices can be heard without judgment, where one can see how "private troubles are intricately linked to larger social forces" (Gardner, 1993, p. 49) (classism, gender discrimination, racism, etc.), and where questions, such as, Who speaks? Who listens? And why? (hooks, 1994, p. 40) can be vocalized.

Questions directed at exploring the concept of *home* can also be articulated and explored. Some pertinent questions might be: What does it look and *feel* like to cross borders and to *feel* like a tourist, to assimilate and move toward and attain permanent residency? Where is home and what does it mean to be *at home* with oneself in the world?

Class inequality is a "social problem in which all are implicated—university students and professors included" (Fusco, 2008, p. 14). Challenging the taboo of class as an academic and research subject, and that moves class as a subject toward dialogue about where and how race, class, privilege, power, gender education intersect, and how class shapes lives can raise awareness about class-stratified educational experiences.[21]

It is timely to address the intersection of gender, social class, and the current state of higher education within academic research and discourse. A recent article, "Has Higher Education Become an Engine of Inequality?"(Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012) reports,

> Inequality is growing in the United States, and social mobility is slowing. A study by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 62 percent of Americans raised in the top one-fifth of the income scale stay in the top two-fifths; 65 percent born in the bottom fifth stay in the bottom two-fifths. Education, long praised as the great equalizer, no longer seems to be performing as advertised …. the disparity in college-completion rates between rich and poor students has grown by about 50 percent since the 1980s.

Findings from a five-year study that tracked women on a university campus in the Midwest revealed that few women from less privileged backgrounds were able to realize dreams of upward mobility while those from privileged backgrounds were able to move upward. Some of the factors contributing to these gaps include lack of mentors and support, and a lack of inability to participate in socially oriented and recreational experiences. The authors conclude by saying that "by catering to the affluent minority, public universities are ceasing to serve as vehicles for economic mobility and instead reproducing social inequalities" (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2012).

As higher education has traditionally been understood as a path toward upward mobility for the working class, and in particular for women, these disturbing trends call for further dialogue and research as to how women experience crossing borders into higher education and

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21. See Campbell, 2008.

other middle class learning/work environments, how higher education reproduces inequality among women through social and educational experiences and work practices, and how it ultimately is contributing toward greater social class stratification.

       The second wave of feminism acknowledged that class is one of the oppressive forces contributing to the social and economic inequality of women and that impedes the full assimilation of diverse women into the dominant culture. As we are now in a time where feminist values and identities are shaped by technology, global capitalism, changing global demographics and social justice issues and where third wave feminists (our daughters, sisters, students, colleagues, and friends, etc. born between 1963-1990) are looking toward models of teaching and leadership that fuse with policy work, writing, publishing and leading through social media, "a commitment to multiplicity" and "working to re-dress [author emphasis] inequalities of all kinds," (Dicker, 2008, p. 126), and at all levels, is both timely, and necessary.

Re-Dress: The creation of a New Self and a New Dress

       It's almost fifty years later. I am sitting again at the prow of my ship. This time it's my drawing table next to the window where I can hear the birds and where I can find my favorite rocks, drawing pens, and inks. Using my drawing of contested thoughts (Figure 14), I take my pencil and I carefully trace the shapes of words that I can no longer recognize. I move the paper around and around until interlocking loops emerge in a pattern of interconnectedness and free flowing shapes (Figure 15). In re-dressing, I am reshaping old thoughts, making new connections, and seeing beyond limitations. It is here that I *de-classify* my experiences, and let go of my story.

Figure 15. *Re-dress, 2012,* Ink on vellum.

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About the Author

Sheri R. Klein, PhD, MFA, is an artist, educator, and researcher. For the past three decades, she has taught courses in art and design, art education, and teacher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. She is an exhibiting artist, conference presenter, and author of numerous publications on the subjects of art, education, and leadership. Her current research interests are to explore autobiographical, gender, social and cultural issues through writing and the creation of graphic narratives, drawings, paintings and garments. She is currently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in the Department of Art Education and can be reached at: kleinsheri353@gmail.com or or sklein1umassd.edu

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