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IDENTITY/IN/FORMATION:
A VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION THROUGH THE VOICES
AND IMAGES OF SIX IMMIGRANT WOMEN GRADUATE STUDENTS

by

Tanya Demjanenko

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2011

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A VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION THROUGH THE VOICES
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the formation of the researcher's identity through narratives of immigrant women, collected through interviews, who are completing masters programs at the University of Windsor. The purpose of this study is to expand a body of knowledge, document and critique social practice/s, and reflect on epistemological or philosophical questions.

Using a case study approach and a convenience sample, the researcher interviewed six graduate student participants who self-identify both as a woman and as an immigrant. At the end of each semi-structured interview, each participant was invited to perform a 'song of identity' – a song she felt is significant to her personal history and/or cultural background.

Applying autoethography, narrative and arts-based research methods, the researcher assembled a visual representation of [her] identity through the answers and song performances of the participants. The fragmented nature of the supporting project parallels the fragmented glimpses into the researcher's own identity formation and exemplifies identity as a series of sub-identities unified through flux, separations and breaks. Additionally, this project explores the interplay between personal experiences or life positions (immigrant, woman, graduate student) and research interests.

DEDICATION

Za mama. Sekoj zbor zvuci tvoe ime.

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I wish to wholeheartedly extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who nurtured me through this learning experience; a few offered their shoulder to cry on, others reasoned me back to confidence, and some generously gave exactly what I needed in that moment to inspire me to move on.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

This study grew out of a project in the Qualitative Methods course I took in the first semester of the Masters of Education program at the University of Windsor. Having the freedom to explore research interests, I found myself looking for answers to questions such as: What do I want to study? What am I interested in? What am I passionate about? My greatest concern was the interplay between experiences and interests to an extent that it was impossible to divorce them from one another.

I identified three characteristics influencing my life experiences and professional choices: being an immigrant, being a woman, and being a graduate student. In contemplation and reflection, I settled on the above-mentioned three categories. They were broad enough that I fit myself into their academic or institutionalized definitions while at the same time I could explore the distinctive features of my own story. From the beginning of this research I felt that these three characteristics strongly influenced my personal and professional lives. I was as fascinated by their individual particularities as I was by the interplay between them. My identity and characteristics are intensely present in my research. I am interested in the idea that most research is a form of self-search and I have seized this as an opportunity to explore personal interests through a formal and structured academic route. I realized that the questions I asked the participants are also questions I asked myself. I was searching for my own identity as an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student when I was asking participants to speak to me of theirs.

During the course of this study, I created a film that discusses, through the stories of the participants, my own identity performance (Butler, 1990, 2000; Kosofsky-Sedwick,

2004) and formation. I used autoethnography as a written method through which I explore my identity within the context of three life positions, while the video allows me to represent my ideas in visual form.

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to explore the formation of my identity as an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student through the narratives and voices of participants who share these three positions. I explore similarities, “discontinuities and disjunctions” (Mishler, 1999, p. 13) between my experiences and identity with those of the study participants in order to examine the ways in which my subjective experiences may relate to and connect with the experiences of others. Through the use of the video recordings of the interviews, this qualitative research explores a visual autoethnography.

The central question addressed in the study is: How do these three positions (immigrant, woman, graduate student) contribute to personal identity formation, and how do they influence my research interests?

There are four guiding questions that shape this study and each is linked ethnographically to a construction of my identity:

1. How do participants describe the experience of immigration and adjustment to a new culture; and how are their stories reflected in the development of my identity?
2. How do participants describe their experiences as women between cultures; and how are these experiences reflected in the development of my identity?

3. How have the two positions of woman and immigrant shaped the experience of graduate studies for the participants; and how is this reflected in the development of my identity?
4. How do participants represent themselves through song; and how do these performances reflect the development of my identity?

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study extends to the identity formation of the researcher within the context of three positions: woman, immigrant, and graduate student. I chose these three characteristics over others that play a part in my self-definition because I sense they are connected and affect one another. Additionally, each category represents for me a pillar of my identity. I felt compelled to explore how they were interconnected in me. This study explores how these three positions affect and continue to affect me personally and professionally.

The study uses a combination of autoethnography and video to construct a visual representation of the identity formation of the researcher (myself) within the three positions identified above. In particular, the short video created for this thesis is limited to the expression of my own experiences. I use the voices, faces and expressions of each participant as images to reflect my own experiences. In this way, I work to communicate a message to the audience of the video that this is my experience but it is also a shared experience, pieced together from the experiences of other woman walking similar paths. In short, subjectivity and reflexivity rather than objectivity are the intent of this study.

At the same time, this study proposes a scope that extends beyond the particular and the local, to experiences that reflect the lives of others, and to observations and insights that may add to discourses of identity, higher education, and cultural difference.

Definition and Discussion of Terms

For the purposes of this study I have modified and expanded traditional definitions of the following two positions: immigrant and woman. At the forefront of my mind were the issues of inclusion and self-identification. I intended to have potential participants in this study self-identify rather than having a definition (or an identity) imposed on them by me. To do so would be regressing to a period in research when the power dynamic between participant and researcher were tipped in favour of the latter (Minh-ha, 1989; Spivak, 2006). Minh-ha (1989) describes the power and inequality between the namer and the named in a particularly poignant paragraph:

We set out here, she and I, to undo an *anonymous*, all-male, and predominantly white collective entity named *he*, and we wish to freeze him once in a while in his hegemonic variants. Knowledge requires a certain dialectic of information and control, and I think it may help to reverse our roles once in a while, more for the emergence of a certain awareness than for the gratification of aping. I have wondered time and again about my reading myself as I feel he reads me and my false encounter with the other in me whose non-being/being he claims to have captured, solidified, and pinned to a butterfly board. Like any common living thing, I fear and reprove classification and the death it entails, and I will not allow its clutches to lock down on me, although I realize I can never lure myself into simply escaping it. ... What I resent most, however, is not his inheritance of a power he so often disclaims, disengaging himself from a system he carries with him, but his ear, eye, and pen, which record in his language while pretending to speak through mine, on my behalf. (p. 48)

While I was comfortable identifying my position/s with participants, I hesitated and was unwilling to define their positions. I will use a broad-based definition of what constitutes an immigrant as well as a woman.

Immigrant

Traditionally, an immigrant is defined as an individual who comes to live permanently in a foreign country. Originally published in 1928, Wirth's (1960) study of Jewish quarters in American cities insinuates a definition of immigrant based on physical place or occupied space, in this instance the ghetto. Although several derivative word origins are considered, Wirth (1960) settles on the Italian word *gueto*, "the cannon foundry at Venice near which the first Jewish settlement was located" (p. 2) as the most likely origin for the word. As a physical place or occupied space, the ghetto is a cultural area intended for containment, segregation and isolation, particularly referring to an "area of first settlement...[or] those sections of the cities where the immigrant finds his home shortly after his arrival in America" (Wirth, 1960, p. 4). The ghetto is occupied by immigrants driven there by financial necessity (Wirth, 1960). While on one hand it fetters people of "an alien culture" (Wirth, 1960, p. 198), it also creates levels of separation from established citizens (Wirth, 1960) as well as a discourse of otherness.

Current literature refers to immigrants as "newcomers" (Azania, 2009, p. 2; Citizenship and Immigration, 2010a), creating a discourse that stresses both the passing and time-sensitive nature of this label of otherness. The federal government of Canada lists several categories of possible immigration to Canada. Individuals seeking to immigrate may choose among the following categories: skilled workers and professionals; Quebec-selected skilled workers; Canadian experience class; investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed people, provincial nominees, and sponsoring your family class (Azania, 2009; Citizenship and Immigration, 2010b). The Immigration and Refugee Protection (IRP) Act identifies immigrants as foreign nationals, meaning "a person who is not a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, and includes a stateless

person” (Department of Justice, 2001) within this category. These recruitment categories as well as the IRP Act both recognize the “social, cultural and economic benefits of immigration” (Department of Justice, 2001) of foreign nationals to Canada and speak to the government-sanctioned objectives of “integration” (Department of Justice, 2001) of this otherness within mainstream culture.

It was this experience of otherness, of belonging to and identifying with more than one culture, that inspired parts of this study. I worked with a more liberal definition of this term. For the purposes of this study, immigrants are individuals who self-identify as immigrants regardless of whether they have made the journey from a foreign country at some point in their life. This inclusive definition expanded the potential participant pool to immigrant women who may have been born in Canada or immigrated at a young age but were raised in a home and thus a culture other than the mainstream. The focus of this study is on the sense of otherness (Minh-ha 1989; Wirth, 1960) reflected in participants’ narratives and song performances. Most importantly, identification as an immigrant is determined by the participants, rather than imposed by the research/er.

Woman

In conventional terms, a woman is an adult human female. Both terms, woman and adult, have been defined in historically- and culturally-specific ways (Irigaray, 2002; Lorraine, 1999). Woman, in particular, has been described in terms of the *other*, as a non-male, sometimes without being given individual and definitive considerations (Irigaray, 2002; Lorraine, 1999). Irigaray (2002) notes that this “contra-diction show[s] man that his discourse and his language are the field and techniques of man” (p. 231) and goes on to

question the dichotomous opposition and their applicability to the definition of self or identity for women:

What if women were not constituted on the model of the *one* (solid, substantial, lasting, permanent...) and its base of contradictions, both effective and occulted with a proper hierarchy. What if women were always 'at least two,' without opposition between the two, without reduction of the other to the one, without any possible appropriation by the logic of the one, without autological closure of the circle of the same? Always at least two that can never be reduced to a binary alternative – that spoke as several at the same time, and if those several were not reducible to a multiple of the one? How would the truth resolve into its economy this enigmatic word, having no principle of identity to the self, nor any known principle of non-contradiction? (p. 231)

Irigaray (2002) questions the use of discourse as an “archi-technique” (p.232) used by man alone, and whether the use of language or discourse by women would “fulfill an unrealized potential for meaning” (p. 256) or whether women’s entry into the scientific discourse would require a “mutation of the horizon of language” (p. 256). It is a call for change, a provocation toward a science inclusive of women’s experiences and ways of knowing. Irigaray’s (2002) question permits and encourages both the exploration and expansion of research methods, questioning how the truth can be known when so much experience, knowledge and ways of knowing have been excluded, marginalized and devalued in the process.

For the purposes of this study, I have defined woman as an individual who self-identifies as such. Opening up the definition in this manner allowed the inclusion of women who identify with a gender other than their biological one. In this study, I wished to place importance on self-definition as a woman, regardless of biological and physical gender.

Graduate Student

For the purposes of this study, a graduate student was defined institutionally, as a person who has successfully completed or who is in the process of completing a graduate course of study or training at a post-secondary institution. I limited participation to those individuals currently enrolled in or who have completed post-graduate work in the last two years at the University of Windsor. The intent of this limitation was to capture a similar context and real-time experience between participants and the researcher.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a brief history and development of autoethnography, outline current issues, and discuss criticism of this methodology. Next, I will present a short discussion of the development of identity formation within Western intellectualism, elaborating in detail on Elliot Mishler's (1999) theory of the formation of craftartists' work identity as it developed with life experiences. Focusing on the work of filmmaker and academic Trinh Minh-ha (1989), I will discuss the connection between minority women and women as a minority, and the representation and expression of a female/minority identity within the context of mainstream Western culture. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how knowledge is constructed, and the connection between knowledge and the politics of identity.

The authors discussed in this chapter wrestle with the dominant research institutions of their time. This struggle is reflected in their work through the challenges each poses to the established model of research and/or academia within their individual fields. Their theories are reflections of their personal struggles with the formation of and search for identity (Erikson, 1970; Minh-ha, 1989; Mishler, 1999), which also reflect my academic and personal struggles as a researcher.

The work of these theorists is particularly important for the findings discussed in Chapter Five, where I present an autoethnographic analysis using a hybrid of qualitative and visual approaches to create a space where my subjectivity, experiences and opinions can be expressed as they relate to the creation of an autoethnographic video. This study works from the premise that research and creative expression are forms of self-search,

identity development and identity formation (Bateson, 1989; Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jones, 2008; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Minh-ha, 1989; Mills, 1959; Mishler, 1999; Moreira, 2008a; Moreira, 2008b; Scheurich and Young, 1997; St. Pierre, 1997; Ronai, 1995; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008; Watson, 2009; Wing, 1997).

Who is Autoethnography?

The difficulties of autoethnography begin with ambiguity in definition, stemming partly from the fact that the method continues to evolve. In the beginning, there was ethnography, a method of research rooted in anthropology and used to study, research and re/present in academic circles the culture of a subordinate and distant other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jones, 2008). In its most common definition ethnography is a qualitative research method used to gather empirical data on societies and/or cultures (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003).

Ignited by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, qualitative research began to flourish (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; Jones, 2008) and the re/presentation of the self as a valid method and voice of research began within empirical academia (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003). The qualitative approach was embraced as a “democratic method” (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003, p. 14) used to give voice to individuals and groups on the margins of society. In particular, feminist and minority researchers gravitated toward the qualitative tradition as a means by which to give validity to their unrepresented voices and experiences within the context of the established empirical academic system (Fitzgerald, 2006; Minh-ha, 1989; Moreira, 2008a; Moreira, 2008b; Spivak, 2006; Swanson, 2009; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1958; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008; Wirth, 1928; Xu,

Connely, He, & Phillion, 2007). Out of this, autoethnography was born. For example: Fitzgerald's (2006) three-year research study "for/with" (p. 201) indigenous women educators in New Zealand, Australia and Canada reports on how ethnocentric knowing, acting and leading in educational settings impacts the lives of indigenous women working as leaders within these institutions. Moreira (2008a) combines performance autoethnography, third world feminism and postcolonial/cultural studies to make an argument for a socially just and "decolonizing form of inquiry that includes not only the stories but also the bodies and visceral knowledge of the oppressed in the academic production of knowledge" (p. 590). Swanson's (2009) poetic narrative stories transform research issues and events into performances of lived experience.

Perhaps the best and most recent definition of autoethnography can be found in "Autoethnography: Making the personal political" by S. H. Jones (2008) who argues that autoethnography is a deeply reflexive art that creates connections to lived experiences through a narrative created to inspire reflection and associations in the reader, and a performance text that respects and values the difference between experience and the experience of witnessing in order to affect the world.

In this definition, autoethnography becomes a style or an art that may be practiced by anyone. It asks autoethnographers to give of themselves and to believe that this giving possesses academic worth, relevancy and value. In comparison to qualitative traditions that advocate strict rules, definitions and processes, autoethnography is conceptually ambiguous. In this research and others (Gallagher, 2008; Minh-ha, 1989; Mishler, 1999), ambiguity permits valuing of academic intuition and a questioning of the certainty of truth and knowledge claims. Conceptual ambiguity calls for destabilizing and confronting academic assumptions, as well as breaking the mould of established scientific processes.

In particular, this inquiry joins the wave of autoethnographic studies that integrate multiple methodologies. In this way, researchers can move toward a respect for the participants in research, the academic creativity and the growth possible in fluid and ambiguous research.

Jones (2008) argues that autoethnography represents a crisis in research mitigated by the willingness of researchers to reflect upon their own involvement, participation, and influence in the search for meaning:

The drama of representation, legitimation, and praxis is part of an ongoing dialogue between self and world about questions of ontology, epistemology, method, and praxis: What is the nature of knowing, what is the relationship between knower and known, how do we share what we know and with what effect? (p. 209)

The crisis described suggests a tireless reflexivity on part of researchers to examine their role in the production of knowledge.

Michel Foucault (2007) examines the discourses of knowledge and the origin and validity of knowledge. Specifically, Foucault examines the interplay between knowledge and science, “including sciences entirely penetrated with ideology” (2007, p. 196). Claiming that the interaction between knowledge and science provides a site for the development of ideology, which “is not exclusive of scientificity” (p. 205), Foucault (2007) exposes the subjectivity of the sciences, including the epistemology of the quantitative family of sciences. This is particularly interesting considering the history and traditional assumptions of empirical science as an objective process (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003).

Similarly to Jones (2008), Foucault (2007) expresses and expects a reflexivity on the part of the thinker/researcher:

To tackle the ideological functioning of a science in order to reveal and to modify it is... to question it as a discursive formation; it is to tackle not the formal contradictions of its propositions, but the system of formation of its objects, its types of enunciation, its concepts, its theoretical choices. It is to treat it as one practice among others. (p. 205)

Foucault (2007) questions the validity and conviction of legitimate science or those methodologies often characterized as quantitative methods.

The struggle with representation, legitimation and praxis expressed by Jones (2008) is characteristic of the work of many qualitative researchers including Bateson (1989), Mishler (1999), Jones (2008), Wagle & Cataffa (2008), and Watson (2009). Mary Bateson (1989) defines “life as an improvisatory art... [that] combine[s] familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic” (p. 3). Rather than “purposeful and monolithic,” Bateson views achievement as “something crafted from odds and ends” (Bateson, 1989, p. 4). This more liberal or inclusive definition of accomplishment recognizes the work of marginalized groups in society, such as women and minorities, as sources of knowledge to be acknowledged and celebrated (Bateson, 1989; Minh-ha, 1989).

Similarly, Cate Watson argues that “[t]ruth in research, as elsewhere, is about frames;” a frame which “discloses a truth” and “invites transgression” (2009, p. 532). In this way, autoethnography works to transgress the empirical frame of research. Wagle and Cantaffa (2008) labor the concept of working the hyphen, which describes “the moment in which the researcher (the Self) and the researched (the other) are joined (p. 136). For example, Wagle and Cantaffa (2008) consider how their hyphenated identities as a gay-male-researcher or Latina-female-researcher affect the research process explaining:

“it is likely that Tina would not have been able to collect, nor process, the same data as David because she does not identify as gay, just as David might not have been privy to the insider information made available to

Tina because he does not possess the same physical appearance or Spanish-speaking skills that provided Tina access to the particular culture that operated within certain arenas of the high school.” (p. 155-156)

Wagle and Cantaffa (2008) further explore how their research influences their professional and personal identities and vice versa:

We understand that our research processes are necessarily entangled with our identities, and this explicit, reflective exploration is an attempt to open our research to this entanglement through an examination of our identity positions along the axes of gender/sexuality and race/ethnicity...Rather than hide behind a false veil of neutrality and disembodiment, we name our identities in relation to our research participants as a means to challenge ourselves and others to define how research projects are necessarily embedded within researchers' identities. (p. 136)

The self-reflective or *reflexive* nature of autoethnography points to foundational questions of philosophy. Foucault (2007), for example, questioned how the world knows what it knows, how discourses are developed, and how these discourses play out in power relations between those who define and those who are defined.

In *Circling the text: Nomadic writing practices*, St. Pierre (1997) elaborates on her professional struggle as a researcher trying to think differently than before. To St. Pierre (1997) there is an “ethical imperative” (p. 405) to respect the validity of her research and participants. Driven by “obstinate curiosity” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 405), researchers pursue research that oftentimes has personal meaning for them. As a way to guide this ultimately personal re/search, St. Pierre (1997) refers to Foucault’s (1983) seven ethical principles. Written in reference to both external and internal Fascism, Foucault’s (1983) principles of ethics oppose knowledge claims based on authoritarian systems of government and map out an introspective revolution of thought and action. Furthermore, the principles ask for

a continued and persistent reflection of practice and ideology across disciplines and methodology.

Within this self-questioning context, autoethnography and qualitative methodology encounter difficulties. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) elaborate on some of these issues that continue to haunt the method, explaining that quantitative research “is a commodity that circulates and is exchanged in this political economy” (p. 377). It is often subjected by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) to qualifications and criteria *uncharacteristic* of its very definition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “IRBs have become methodological review boards, institutionalizing only one brand or version of science” (p. 377). An additional significance of autoethnography is to question established practices and validate the existence of various forms of research, loosening the rigors of control of the established system that decides who and what will be studied, as well as how it will be studied. Autoethnography assumes that “to study the particular is to study the general” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 378); while “[t]he researcher assumes that readers will be able...to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 378). In this way, autoethnography authenticates and recognizes the validity of personal experiences by creating a safe-space within academia and academic research. In turn, the reader gleans personal lessons from the subjective narratives, curtailing the power of traditionally defined achievement, success and academic accomplishments.

Foucault explains that in ancient times “[t]he elaboration of one’s own life as a personal work of art, even if it obeyed certain collective canons, was at the centre...of moral experience” (1984/1988 as quoted in St. Pierre, 1997, p. 410). St. Pierre (1997)

notes that “for the ancient Greeks, the focus of morality was on aesthetics of existence, and free men (not women) developed practices of the self that would allow them to become the ethical subjects of their actions” (p. 410). Within this struggle for recognition, the plight of autoethnography might be compared with the plight of women for equity; in retrospect, it is difficult to imagine, at least in Western-minded nations, that society and culture could exist and flourish without the full and active participation of women in daily life and work. It is reminiscent of the autoethnographic struggle to establish itself as a valid and contributing research method.

According to Jones (2008), the present moment of autoethnography confronts:

the impossibility of representing lived experience by troubling the link between life and text...we develop (and question the development of) criteria for understanding and evaluating the work we do to narrate the conditions of our lives...we resolve to do work that makes a difference by writing the social imaginary in insightful and revolutionary ways. (p. 210)

The challenge is to move beyond the rage of exclusion and silence to a place where that energy can be used as a political tool to affect greater change within society (Jones, 2008). Asking questions and challenging established practices are a requirement of the autoethnographic method (Jones, 2008; Watson 2009). This requirement “posits the challenge of *movement* – to talk and share in new and difficult ways, to think and rethink our positions and commitments, to push through resistance in search of hope” (Jones, 2008, p. 211). It does not devalue tradition but rather asks that established practices submit to a self-reflexive standard of ethical practice involving a continued method of self-criticism and reflection on part of the researcher with the understanding that no self is separate or unbiased in research and research interests. In this way, personal stories,

narrative and experiences “become a means for interpreting the past, translating and transforming contexts, and envisioning a future” (Jones, 2008, p. 211).

Jones (2008) argues that “[p]ersonal narrative performances deny any easy distinction between ‘art’ and ‘life.’ Such performances retain their performative, political power in and through the ways in which they foreground the constitutive and shifting nature of giving testimony and witnessing” (p. 230-231). For example, Tim Miller’s *Glory Box* (1999) is an example of a performance that draws on the artist’s life experiences for material and subject. Miller’s accomplishments include suing the federal government, which, under “political pressure from the Bush White House” (Miller, 1999, ¶3), overturned a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Solo Performer Fellowship awarded to Miller in 1990. Miller’s 2001 *Glory Box* performance is a deeply personal self-reflection on the challenges of living as a gay man or lesbian in the United States, which incorporates the political and legal struggles of his own life. In this way, the “personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970; Jones, 2008, p. 232; Wing, 1997) and many artists remain dedicated to the intent “to provoke, to raise questions, to implicate their audiences” (Hughes and Roman, in Jones, 2008, p. 232). This is the “fold” St. Pierre (1997) speaks of, in which art imitates life and life imitates art; they are indistinguishable from each other and autoethnography recognizes the benefits of ambiguity between these two terms. We are what we research. We are searching for ourselves. Our narratives and creative efforts validate these experiences by allowing a freedom of form within a developing and sympathetic discipline.

It is within this autoethnographic context and its traditions, or innovation, that I situate the examination of my own (art) work. This thesis merges some of the traditions of ethnographic research with autoethnographic methods. In this way it becomes a work of

dualities, reminiscent of Mishler's (1999) dualities of identity formation discussed in the following section.

Identity /In/Formation

For a long time in the Western history of identity studies, identity was conceived as a stable or “fixed point of thought and being” (Hall, 1989, p. 10). While we may be different than when we were a baby or a toddler, the idea was that we changed at such a slow rate that we retained our essential selfhood (Hall, 1989). In the last one hundred years of Western intellectualism, theorists and theories emerged that disrupted or destabilized traditional concepts of identity (Hall, 1989). Contributions that particularly “helped to destabilize the question of identity” (p. 10) are: Marx's introduction of the notion that one's sense of self is shaped by one's historical circumstance, effectively displacing one from the past; Freud's work and discovery of the unconscious questioned how one can know one's own identity when he/she is in constant and mysterious negotiation with the unconscious psyche; Saussure's work in linguistics reasoned that we are located within, but also against, language and in order to say something new we need to counter an entire history and preceding system of meaning; and Nietzsche, Foucault, and other philosophers helped bring about the “de-centering of identity that arises as a consequence of the end of the notion of truth as having something directly to do with Western discourses of rationality” (Hall, 1989, p. 12). A foundation had been laid for both the questioning of Western episteme as absolute truth as well as for identity fragmentation as a modern concept.

A professor of Social Psychology at Harvard Medical School, Elliot G. Mishler's *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (1986) is nested within a qualitative

research methodology concerned with the politics of research and the interview.

Gradually, Mishler's (1986) research methods shifted from a structured interview to a narrative analysis, re/conceptualizing the interview as a speech event and jointly constructed narratives.

Influenced by the romanticism of early figures of the arts and crafts movement, Mishler (1999) describes his love of the crafts as a pre-beginning to research of the life histories of craftartists. Through self-reflection, Mishler (1999) shifts research and theory approach from a quasi-experimental, quantitative model to a qualitative, sociolinguistic method of narrative analysis. At the same time, he identifies a poor fit between the erratic career trajectories and multiple and distinct sub-identities in the lives of craftartists and the sequential and singular definition of identity established by Erik Erikson. Instead, Mishler (1999) develops an inclusive and opposite-based framework of work identity analysis: universality vs. inter-individual variability, continuity vs. discontinuities, coherence vs. contradiction, and individual vs. relational conceptions of identity. Finally, Mishler (1999) defines narrative as praxis and identifies three characteristics navigating his theoretical perspective: narratives are socially situated actions; narratives are identity performances; and narratives are fusions of form and content.

Inter-individual variability in personal and career trajectories challenges an approach to the study of identity formation that assumes "universal, progressive stages of development...as invariant across different cultures and historical periods" (Mishler, 1999, p. 9). In recent times, some researchers have begun to question and dispute the all-encompassing, universal and singular explanation of identity formation guiding earlier generations of academics and have sought to document identity development along paths of social class or gender (Mishler, 1999). This shift has allowed for development of a

research paradigm that acknowledges “the remarkable diversity among individuals along all dimensions and throughout their life spans” (Mishler, 1999, p. 10).

Continuity versus discontinuities in the achievement of adult work identities arose out of Mishler’s (1999) discovery that “discontinuities and disjunctions in career paths were typical rather than unusual” (Mishler, 1999, p. 13), and an individual life might waver from the traditional course to a trajectory characteristic of a push-pull relationship mediated by negotiation and compromise. Understandably, the ideas of consistency, linear development and progression have served researchers well in their ability to order, organize, categorize and predict. However, this approach creates an illusion of control. The scientific approach to research is beginning to acknowledge the unreliability of a totalizing truth and the validity of personal experience.

Coherence versus contradiction and tension in life stories pays particular attention to the meaningfulness of coherence created between the communicator and audience (Mishler, 1999). The message is not limited to the discourse of the communicator but includes, among other things, the interpretation(s) of the audience/viewer as well as the social and cultural surroundings of both communicator and audience. This poses a challenge to or a paradox in understanding and communication, particularly in visual media.

While critics agree over the intensity and value of Marina Abramovic’s art, differences of interpretation exist between Eastern-minded and Western-minded critics. Originally performed at the 1997 Venice Biennale, *Balkan Baroque* comprises of four individual parts (Demaria, 2004; Furstenberg, 2006; Kosmidou, 2001; Turim, 2003). Particularly interesting is the life-size video installation of Abramovic dressed in a white lab coat narrating a story of how rats are killed in the Balkans and created into wolf-rats

(Madoff, 2006). Western critics attack the discourse of the narrative itself (Demaria, 2004; Madoff, 2006) and liken the rat catcher to a Balkan state that tortures and maltreats its citizens (Madoff, 2006). As an Eastern critic, Pejic (2006) leaves the possibility open for consideration of the circumstances of war in general and argues that the narrative of the creation of the wolf-rat in the Balkans depends on their placement “in unbearable conditions” (p. 28), conditions that are not necessarily specific to the Balkans. In this instance, the message communicated by the audience/viewer filters through a social and cultural context, referencing and understanding the visual media, and thus exposing the personal ideology of each communicator.

Individual versus relational conceptions of identity stress an importance of contexts to the understanding of personal identity. Mishler (1999) argues for avoiding “the usual dichotomy between individual and context that treats the former as the active agent influenced by external conditions and forces” (p. 16). In this way, it becomes necessary to consider and “study identity development as an inter- rather than intrapersonal process” (Mishler, 1999, p. 16). As an intrapersonal process, identity formation depends heavily on the personality and characteristics of the individual and the separation of identity and social context. On the other hand, an interpersonal identity formation process considers the context and surroundings within which an individual functions. It examines how individuals negotiate events and actions, navigating between personal desires and public and/or family pressures. For example, Adrien Katherine Wing (1997) describes her struggle with identity and belonging as an African-American woman:

By the end of high school, ...[I]... had become the militant Afro-American, wearing as much of an Afro as my long wavy hair would permit. I often ended up in discussions with darker-skinned blacks with

‘real afros’ who would claim that no ‘high yellow girl’ with ‘good hair’ going to some fancy white private school wearing a uniform was really black. (p. 29)

For Wing (1997), the struggle with identity reaches beyond an Afro-American context and into her experiences with the racism in White culture, which also denied and rejected her because of her physical appearance.

Mishler’s (1999) model stresses the idea of narrative as praxis, which must be analyzed as a socially situated action, as an identity performance, and as a fusion of form and content. As a socially situated action, communication must be broadened beyond analysis to include “placement within the sequential order of exchanges and ...utterances” (Mishler, 1999, p. 19) of those involved in the communication process “as they negotiate a mutual understanding” (Mishler, 1999, p. 19). The onus of meaning is equally shared. Identity performance “focuses attention on the question of how we speak our identities or on the rhetorical strategies we employ that achieve this effect” (Mishler, 1999, p. 19). Fusions of form and content identify the stylistic features, “the ways of telling” (Mishler, 1999, p. 20), or the personal signature of each individual’s uniqueness. Creative processes, those of film as well as the written form, demonstrate a stylized identity performance. In each, meaning is co-constructed by the communicator-artist and the spectator.

Feminism and Visual Culture

In *Women, Native, Other* (1989), filmmaker, writer, academic, composer, feminist, and post-colonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses issues of identity: hegemony vs. difference, male vs. female, power vs. disempowerment, multiplicity vs. singularity, and pure origin (authenticity) vs. true self. Furthermore, Minh-ha (1989)

develops the issues of postcolonial identification, the question of roots and authenticity, the infinite layers of identity, the geopolitical apparatus of disempowerment, the female identity enclosure, and the duality of ethnicity and womanhood. She questions the use of First-, Second-, Third-World terminology and the established order's need for the authentic otherness or an authentic Third-World woman representative (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 88). As a minority, immigrant woman, Minh-ha (1989) asks whether one is more native here or in the lands of his/her ancestors. In this way, Minh-ha (1989) engages the audience with the issue of cultural or national identity. The dominant theme in Minh-ha's (1989) writing is a strong focus on the politics of repression of women and of minority women and the effects on their identity.

Numerous researchers have discussed the concerns of women working within an established white-male society with rigid definitions of the appropriate outcomes of creativity (Barry, 2003; Bloom, 2003; Fusco, 2008; Hanisch, 1969; Hanisch, 2006; Kristeva, 2008; Mulvey, 2003; Ronai, 1995; Smith, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997). Specifically, Minh-ha (1989) argues that this established male order produces the effect of "immediate" solitude for many women who "resolutely work toward the unlearning of institutionalized language" (p. 80).

Furthermore, Minh-ha (1989) identifies the "policy of separate development" (p. 80) in which "[d]ifference is not difference to some ears, but awkwardness or incompleteness" (p. 80) that must be contained within the political, geographic and cultural borders of *your* country so that it does not interfere with *mine*. In other words, difference is only tolerated so long as it does not disturb the "established rules" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 87). Tolerance of dissimilarity, which Minh-ha (1989) describes as a both a "tool of self-defence and conquest" (p. 82), "is a step forward...[b]ut it is a very small step

indeed, since it serves as an excuse for their complacent ignorance and their reluctance to involve themselves in the issue” (p. 80). She goes on to say that:

[y]ou who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice—you know. And often you cannot *say* it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 80)

These are the politics of repression and silence. They impact the identity and experiences of immigrating women who work within a foreign framework of making themselves understood, who have a desire or a need to express the joy, frustration, struggle and accomplishments of who they are in a world that narrowly defines accomplishments and achievements and in this way excludes their identity and experiences from the privileged ways of knowing (Dei, 1996; Minh-ha, 1989).

Minh-ha’s (1989) use of herself in her films is a technique that blurs the lines between director/researcher and actor/participant. Who is being studied in these films? Whose story is being told? Implicating herself in a collective narrative of Third-World women’s voices visually, orally and in written form, Minh-ha (1989) clarifies that:

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring... my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. (p. 122)

Working the interplay between researcher/director and participant/actor, Minh-ha (1989) re/presents marginalized women in her films and identifies as a member of this group. Minh-ha’s (1989) narrative rejects binary formations of privileged knowledge (written/oral, true/false, male/female, and so on) while at the same time objecting to the language of duality (Irigaray, 2002; Ronai, 1995).

In addition to including the self in research, text and other forms of representation demonstrate resistance to domination and privileged ways of knowing (Minh-ha, 1989; Ronai, 1995). Minh-ha (1989) questions the need to box narratives of otherness into Western structural forms and argues that these types of re-storied or reconstructed narratives make their purposes obvious. The story is “a living thing, an organic process, a way of life” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 143) in which life and narrative combine, “the story being as complex as life and life being as simple as a story” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 144). Ronai (1995) points out that if “I am communicating self to self with readers via the written text; and if I consider the structure of the self or, if one likes, of mental life, not to be a linear experience but a fragmented, self-adjusting one...then why should texts be limited to a linear format?” (p. 399). A break with the traditional forms of Western writing involves a certain amount of “un-learning [of] the dominant language” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 148) and “learn[ing] how to un-write and write anew” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 148). Levelling the “traditionally hierarchical format in science texts....allow[s] equal but different ways of knowing to contribute to the text” (Ronai, 1995, p. 399) and it acknowledges the reader’s capacity to engage and interact with the text (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 2003; Minh-ha, 1989; Ronai, 1995). Both Minh-ha (1989) and Ronai (1995), in their own ways, point toward a way of *understanding* through knowledge that shuffles the experience of the particular toward the relational typical.

The notion of personal experiences as the voice of a political movement is commonly attributed to Carol Hanisch’s (1969) article titled, *The Personal is Political*. Hanisch (1969, 2006) describes the power of collective action based on common experiences to influence and affect political solutions. Collective sharing led to collective naming of experiences (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 2003; Smith, 2005), which allowed

these “shared experiences a political presence” (Smith, 2005, p. 7) and the representation and visualization of women in the discourse of the patriarchy (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 2003; Smith, 2005). Sociologist, Dorothy Smith (1990,1995) focuses on the expulsion of women as agents or subjects within these ruling relations, which Smith (1995) defines as:

that extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives—the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourses, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them. (Smith, 1995, p. 10)

Contrary to the unspoken law of the ruling relations, “the women’s movement refused the separation of body and mind” (Smith, 2005, p. 23) and thus inserted a subjective corporality in the scientific discourse of the ruling relations:

Body ... [is] the site of consciousness, mind, thought, subjectivity, and agency as particular people’s local doings. By pulling mind back into body, phenomena of mind and discourse... are recognized as themselves the doings of actual people situated in particular local sites at particular times... They become observable insofar as they are produced in language as talk and/or text. Discourse itself is among people’s doings. (Smith, 2005, p. 25)

Refusing a definition of the female-self as a lesser compliment to the binary male-self, the women’s movement made visible and present the female body within scientific and/or academic discourse (Smith, 2005) for purposes other than admiration or research.

Similar to textual representations of women, feminists working in visual art practices speak of the necessity “to understand representation as a political issue” (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 2003). Barry and Flitterman-Lewis (2003) identify four types of women’s art practices: “the glorification of an essential female power” (p. 54) located in the body, which is glorified to communicate a satisfaction of being a woman to the intended female audience, to set up an identification process for the female viewer of their own femaleness, and encourage solidarity between women; “women’s art as a form

of sub-cultural resistance” (p. 56) that speaks of the hidden history of women’s productivity and dismisses differences between high and low cultural products; as art that “views the dominant cultural order as a monolithic construction in which women’s cultural activity is either submerged or placed entirely outside its limits” (p. 57); and the fourth type of art practice locates “women at a crucial place in patriarchy which enables them to play on the contradictions within it” by recognizing art work as a textual practice, emphasizing the social construction of meaning and “demonstrat[ing] the importance and function of discourse in the shaping of social reality” (p. 58). Barry and Flitterman-Lewis (2003) criticize the first three art practices for lack of representational theory of women, and applaud the fourth as employing theory to affect change within the patriarchal representation system that constitutes and constrains women through social practices in culture; “once this is understood it would be possible to create an aesthetics designed to subvert the production of ‘woman’ as commodity” (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 2003, p. 54).

In a perpetually globalizing world, Bloom (2003) questions how relevant these questions of women’s visual representation within a patriarchal system are outside of the north Atlantic region. Alternatively, Bloom (2003) calls for the creation of an international alliance among feminist theorists in visual cultural studies to establish “a space to articulate transnational feminist visual cultural practices” (p. 18). Speaking within an Asian context, Bloom (2003) argues that while big metropolitan areas in Asia have seen a growing number of analytical, informed and well-spoken women in the visual art world, these women are not necessarily aligned with the Western notion of *feminism*. Meaning is deeply related to context and “defining features of Western feminism do not always neatly translate from one context to another” (p. 19).

Kristeva (2008) calls the twenty-first century the “century for women: for better or for worse?” (¶1). Using Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin’s electoral bid as Senator John McCain’s vice-presidential nominee as an example, Kristeva (2008) argues that meaningful change has eluded the feminist movement and that women are not just submitting to the will of the patriarchy but actively participating in its preservation. Certainly women of previous generations and other cultures, such as Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, Israel’s Golda Mier or Indira Gandhi in India, ruled as heads of state. For Kristeva (2008), Palin is a modern illustration of how women have become active agents in the decay of society. Palin is one of “the new actresses of history [who] are taking part in the dead-ends and failures, in the archaisms and stalemate situations that mark the current technico-political craze” (Kristeva, 2008, ¶1); Palin is a false insertion, distracting with her female body from real and meaningful inclusion of women into power and/or governing structures of society (Kristeva, 2008). Feminism has failed to shift Smith’s (2005) ruling relations “from a politics of management to a politics of civilization” (Kristeva, 2008, ¶1). Instead, the vision of women’s consensual bodies, such as the visual of Palin’s consensual body, are used as symbols of the phallic matron, “fantasized as a substitute prosthesis of weak, castrated males” (Kristeva, 2008, ¶10) that appeals to both sexes of viewers. As a symbol of and for some women, Palin’s stylized and groomed image appeared in real life/real time video and other visual documentation entering the consciousness and homes of North Americans and interested citizens of the world as another woman’s body commoditized by the patriarchal ruling relations for a stylized political agenda.

Berger (2003) speaks on the impact of gender on ways of seeing. Berger (2003) explains that a man’s presence centers around a “promised power” (p. 37) over an/other

and whose “object is always exterior to the man,” (p. 37) while a woman’s presence is “so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura” (p. 37). As a result of binding social restrictions and limitations that govern the daily lives of women, a woman is in constant survey of herself, “continually accompanied by her own image of herself” (Berger, 2003, p. 37). Split in two, she is both the one who watches and the one being watched, “survey[ing] everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life” (Berger, 2003, p. 37). Berger (2003) explains the role of gender in the way of seeing as while “[m]en look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves” (p. 38).

Cheng, (2003) gives a more conceptual/theoretical discussion of sight as it relates to gender or other modes of subjectivity. Sight involves the other, as “[w]e are capable of seeing only that which stands apart from our eyes” (p. 30). Yet the interplay and connection between sight and belief works “to defer the uncertainty of (a) being” (Cheng, 2003, p. 30). The object of sight stands indifferent to the viewer who projects beliefs, meanings and desires on the visual object in order “to stop its rippling into invisibility, a disappearance that would register our inability to access the field beyond visibility” (Cheng, 2003, p. 30). Similarly, Mulvey (2003) makes the connection between pre-conceived ideas and lived experiences and their influence of the sight of the viewer in cinema. As “an advanced representation system” (Mulvey, 2003, 45), mainstream cinema reveals the unconscious desires of the dominant patriarchal order and how these desires have developed both the structure of film and the image of women within films (Mulvey,

2003). The visual language of film pre-dates verbal language in normal child development and “constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of mis/recognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I of subjectivity. This is a moment when an older fascination with looking... collides with the initial inklings of self-awareness” (Mulvey, 2003, p. 47). Within the cinematic frame, the viewer experiences both a reinforcement of as well as temporary loss of ego which typically influences sight and perception (Mulvey, 2003). Contemporary cinema breeds voyeurism as the visual image of women has been used as an erotic object of desire for both the viewer as well as the characters within the film (Mulvey, 2003). While men control the action and story within a film, a woman’s presence signals its interruption and contemplation of erotic desire (Mulvey, 2003).

A forward-looking aspect of the intersection between feminism and visual culture focuses on how an image is interpreted by the viewer rather than on the intended message. In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger (1972) argues that “[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (p. 3). Our *seeing* depends on our life positions, which help to create and complete the images our eyes detect (Berger, 1972; Jones, 2003; Ronai, 1995). In this way, visual culture and feminism have developed alongside one another (Jones, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998), the latter initiating a positioned gaze on image and visual culture. This way of looking at visual culture assigns shared responsibility between the image makers and the image consumers, and places a shared burden on the visual image and the image consumer.

The Other and Post-Secondary Education:

If knowledge is relative to the context in which it is created (Foucault, 2007; Scheurich and Young, 1997), what then are the implications for both the host institution that may propagate a white, male, Western and Eurocentric ideology, methodology and epistemology, and the individual whose educational and learning experiences are developed outside of this context and potentially with a different understanding of knowledge? Will the institution begin to recognize different ways of knowing or will it seek to indoctrinate students into its racialized, genderized, Westernized ways of knowing and being?

Ideally, and in preparation for active participation in a globalizing and democratic society, educators should “help students to understand all types of knowledge” (Banks, 1993, p. 5) and nurture individual students’ critical thinking skills (Banks, 1993). Positionality, gendered, ethnic, or cultural experiences of individuals is “epistemologically significant because these factors also influence knowledge construction, use, and interpretation” (Banks, 1993, p. 6) and should be acknowledged by researchers and scholars in texts and other forms of traditional and unconventional research dissemination practices.

Particularly relevant in consideration of what is, is not, and should be part of the Western post-secondary curriculum is the notion that “all knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators” (Banks, 1993, p. 4). Banks (1993) identifies and describes five dynamic categories of knowledge necessary for a multicultural education encompassing various life perspectives: personal/cultural knowledge, popular knowledge, mainstream academic knowledge, transformative academic knowledge, and school knowledge. Banks (1993) defines transformative academic knowledge as the “concepts,

paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and that expand the historical and literary canon” (p. 9). For example, Banks (1993) credits transformational academic knowledge with the reconsideration and restatement of Western traditional ethos’ such as Columbus’ discovery of America. On the other hand, school knowledge, which remains largely stagnant and unchanging, “consists of the facts, concepts, and generalizations presented in textbooks, teacher’s guides, and other forms of media designed for school use...[as well as] teacher’s mediation and interpretation of that knowledge” (Banks, 1993, p. 11). The disconnect between transformative academic and school knowledge is that the latter uses and depends on text/books that “present a highly selective view of social reality” (Banks, 1933, p. 11). The primary focus of written educational content and materials such as books and journal articles as well as the tools used to instruct students is to produce a convincing and coherent argument, the definitions of which are subjective, contextual and debatable. For Banks (1993), encouraging students to be “critical consumers of knowledge” (p. 12) cements in reality democratic ideals of society.

Particularly poignant arguments centre around the issue of curriculum within an educational setting. Generally speaking, the consensus in the literature among scholars toting educational reform points toward a broadening or expansion of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies used to inform curriculum and other forms of knowledge construction in Western educational institutions (Allingham, 1992; McIntosh, 1989; Scheurich & Young, 1997). While curriculum has been traditionally defined as “the subjects comprising a course of study in school or in college, Allingham (1992) and Dei (2000) argue that a more inclusive definition of curriculum is required to effect change

within educational settings. Although referring specifically to public school, Allingham's (1992) holistic definitions captures this sentiment well:

“the curriculum *is* [original emphasis] the text books and the story books and the pictures – and the seating plan and the group work and the poster and the music, the announcements, the prayers and readings, the languages spoken in the school, the food in the cafeteria, the visitors to the classrooms, the reception of parents in the office, the races (or race) of the office staff, the custodial staff, the teachers, the administration, the displays of student work, the school teams and sports played, the clubs, the school logo or emblem, the field trips, the assignments and projects, the facial expressions and body language of everybody, the clothes everybody wears...it is the whole environment. (p. 20)

According to Dei (1996), the construction of knowledge is connected to both space and place, most notably the school or academy as a space and place of education and knowledge. Exclusivity and exclusionary practices of educational institutions range from “constructed hierarchies to the privileging of certain voices and practices that lead to student disengagement from school” (Dei, 1996, p. 76). As microcosms of the larger society, institutions and schools “reproduce inequality” (Dei, 1996, p. 85) and “function to establish hierarchies” (Dei, 1996, p. 85) of the gendered and cultured ideology.

Even in a multicultural society such as Canada, the word immigrant may imply a foreigner, an outsider, an other or someone not of a particular description (Dei, 1996). Henry and Tator (1994) argue that while Canada may be held up as an example of a cultural mosaic, it is an equally good example of a democratically racist society. Henry and Tator (1994) explain that:

[t]he large majority of the Canadian population... hold varying degrees of racist attitudes and beliefs. But as a society founded on the principles of democracy – that believes in the ideology of democracy – Canadians also recognize that these beliefs are inappropriate and socially unacceptable. In order to continue to maintain these racist beliefs and yet at the same time to champion and uphold democratic values, Canadians have developed an ideology of democratic racism comprising a whole set of justificatory arguments and mechanism that permit

continuing congruency with these seemingly contradictory ideologies.
(p. 4)

These racist attitudes may impact the composition and interpretation of educational policies, laws and rules, as well as the experiences of immigrants within post-secondary educational institutions in Canada.

Scheurich and Young (1997) propose that Western academic research epistemologies are racially biased in and of themselves, regardless of the beliefs and opinions of the individual researcher. These racist epistemologies create and perpetuate a single, dominant way of being, thinking and knowing in both an academic context and beyond (Scheurich & Young, 1997); they are recreated “until these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as ‘natural’ or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 7) of one particular group at the exclusion of others. Scheurich and Young (1997) define epistemological racism as the exclusion of *other* ways of knowing (Scheurich & Young, 1997). This exclusion of other races and cultures from the Western space and place of knowledge construction negatively impacts both people and scholars of colour in three ways: “epistemologies and research that arise out of other social histories...are not typically considered legitimate within the mainstream research community” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 9); dominant epistemologies and methodologies representing the beliefs of the dominant social group have a propensity to alter the reality and life of other social groups (Scheurich & Young, 1997); and, the dominant epistemologies “implicitly favor White people because they accord most easily with their social history” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 9). Scholars resistant to dominant epistemologies have tended to gravitate toward the critical tradition, which is problematic in and of itself as it is “almost

exclusively drawn from White social history” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 9). Padilla (1994) observed the journal peer-review process and the institution’s importance, emphasis and preference for publication in journals serve “the gatekeeping function of excluding research that does not conform to acceptable paradigms or methodologies” (p. 250), which are institutionally defined.

The importance of curriculum as a means of knowledge representation signifies an understanding of its connection to politics of identity (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2000; Pinar, 1993). As a text, curriculum represents cultural beliefs, norms and knowledge, and discussions over what is to be included, left out or marginalized from the curriculum speaks of how society perceives itself and wishes to represent its identity (Mao, 2008; Pinar, 1993). “Denying issues of race within the curriculum does not make it less of a racialized text” (Dei, 2000, p. 184) but rather removes the opportunity of the majority to consider themselves and their brand of knowledge as racialized texts of identity (Pinar, 1993). Questions then arise. Are minorities Western-minded if their epistemology, ontology and axiology are not reflected in the education curriculum? Can and will Western academic research and knowledge expand to include and reflect the national cultural mosaic? When will the academy expand inclusion beyond the recruitment of racialized or minoritized bodies on campus to racialized or minoritized epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies in the construction of knowledge?

Some scholars have argued that a denied past, a denied identity or a denied self within educational contexts or curriculum equates to “spirit injury” (Wing, 1997, p. 18) or “psychic repression” (Dei, 2000, p. 185; Pinar, 1993) and that the resistance and rebellion by students is “not a general rejection of education and learning, as it is often perceived[, but r]ather, it is often a rejection of the status quo in education that privileges certain

voices and discourses while silencing and marginalizing others” (Dei, 2000, p. 172).

Dei’s (1996) description illustrates this point well:

Today, as I enjoy the privilege of teaching in one of Canada’s foremost institutions of higher learning, I see the struggle for inclusivity being continually waged all around me. Increasingly, many of my graduate students, particularly minority students, are challenging educators to be more inclusive in their pedagogies and other educational practices. The message I keep hearing from the students is that something is not right with the academy.” (p. 76)

Also problematic is the issue of role models within a post-secondary educational context (Crichlow, 1999). While identities may be multiple and discontinuous (Mishler, 1999) “role model positions function as idealized identity boxes where ascribed characteristics become literally employable” (Crichlow, 1999, p. 239). The position of a role model within the context of a post-secondary institution is “politically constituted along racial, gender, and other socially and historically constructed lines of difference” (Crichlow, 1999, p. 239). That is, the role and the model share the politically delicate position as “illusionary vehicle of reform and equity” (Crichlow, 1999, p. 243) in post-secondary educational institutions.

As a self described “young black, female, wife, mother, international lawyer, professor, and activist” (Wing, 1997, p. 17), Wing (1997) describes the experience of a racial and gender minority in the academy as participating in two worlds, two segregated ways of knowing, living and being, as existing in “multiple levels of consciousness” and living with “a feeling of ambiguity and frustration” (p. 17).

Summary

Curriculum is constructed at the interplay point between epistemology, identity and power. As such, curriculum reflects the ideology of its author-creator in an effort to

relay identity messages to the viewer-learner. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist researchers worked to broaden the definition of valid and appropriate academic research, which propelled personal experiences into the political sphere. The focus on the personal created a path through which otherwise marginalized voices, stories and narratives may be heard and learned from. Some researchers questioned the representation of marginalized groups in academic research and recognized and acknowledged the influence of the research/er body/self in their studies. The image and representation of the other leads to debate about how to best represent knowledge of previously marginalized people such as women, racial or ethnic groups, and sexual minorities.

One possible solution to this problem has been the creation and development of creative and often hybrid methodologies that draw on personal experiences and work to question traditional assumptions about truth, validity, and knowledge claims. This study incorporates visual autoethnography, pieced together from the narratives of six women sharing personal experiences as women, immigrants and graduate students. Through a storied single narrative, I represent the marginalized voice of the other, always questioning and debating the influence of my research self/body on my research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

One of the greatest struggles in the design of this research process centered around classification of research design. Do I intend to do an ethnographic study? Or should I instead focus on narrative research design, and what type? How do these research designs align with my interests and intentions? According to Cresswell (2005) “ethnographic research does not always fit cleanly into categories” (p. 438) and is oftentimes a collaboration between various methods. In this respect, my study is a mixed-methods approach that attempts to fuse arts-based research, visual autoethnography and narrative performance. Denzin (1994) refers to the employment of multiple methodologies inherent in qualitative research as bricolage or “a pieced together, finely knit set of practices that provides solutions to a problem in a concrete situation” (p. 17).

While I was curious about the development of my own identity within the context of three life positions (woman, immigrant, graduate student), I also wished to know if others in similar identity positions shared my experiences and beliefs, and to what extent. I set out to collect participant stories and to use their voices to piece together a visual narrative of my own, which I analyzed as a single case study. In the end, this study combines research interests and personal identity, and examines their overlapping points.

Research Design

In this study I used the videotaped narratives of six interviewed participants to create a visual autoethnographic video that reflects my experiences and beliefs as an immigrant woman currently enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Windsor.

I chose to interview six participants for this research study because of the variety of experiences and narratives I expected to encounter during the interview process. Through editing, I present a video that is a visualization of shared culture and beliefs. I have attempted to capture a moment of my own identity through the reflection and voice of my participants who share similar but not identical life positions and narratives. As such, this study is part auto/ethnography, part narrative analysis, and part visual sociology.

As a form of narrative study, Cresswell (2005) distinguishes autoethnography as “a reflective self-examination by an individual set within his or her cultural context” (p. 438). In the case of autoethnography, the individual is both the subject and the author of the text. Autoethnography reaches beyond the scope of autobiography, which is traditionally classified as a narrative research form, by considering the cultural context of the individual while at the same time requiring a self-reflective examination of a life rather than a retelling of events whether chronologically ordered or otherwise arranged. Furthermore, autoethnography benefits from a purposeful and intended reflection, which is the aim of the method, whereas the goal of autobiography is a retelling of events.

My interest in undertaking this study was to explore the formation of my own identity as reflected by the participants in this study with whom I share similar life-positions (immigrant, woman, graduate student). Furthermore, my intention was to create a collaborative and visual narrative that demonstrates to the viewer a similarity and difference in narrative and experience. My autoethnographic video narrative encourages the viewer to glimpse aspects of the self through the screen of the other/researcher. In this way, this project attempts to reach beyond the personal and subjective narration of my experience and extends to public/shared experience. This study focuses on six participants

but represents the larger processes, events and activities of life as immigrant, women, graduate students.

The reflexivity of the author/self/researcher brings this study into the realm of autoethnography. By the same token, autoethnography was appropriate for this study because research is a form of self-search (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006; Jones, 2008; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Moreira, 2008b; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008; Watson, 2009) and this study is a reflection on my personal life-positions and how they shape my identity. Specifically, I wished to know the extent to which others in similar identity positions share my experiences and beliefs. I collected participants' stories and edited their voices to piece together my own narrative. The end result or the supporting video documents is my construction narrating *my* story and *my* experiences pieced together from the participants' fragmented stories.

Interviewing is a qualitative methodology in identity formation studies. The interviews were videotaped for the following reasons:

1. It allowed me to review a visual recording of our interview, and,
2. The videotaped interviews were edited to construct a narrative that reflects my experiences and beliefs, and that performs my identity.

Since the purpose of this study was to explore the formation of my identity as an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student through the narratives and voices of participants who share these three positions, the research naturally lent itself to a symbolic interactive approach. Symbolic interaction proposes that "human experience is mediated by interpretation" (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003, p. 25) and that people, places and things do not possess their own meaning but rather a meaning is assigned to them.

Meaning is "essential and constitutive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience

is” (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003, p. 25). Finally, symbolic interaction states that the definition of self people create within their own understanding and reality is a “social construction” (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003, p. 26) which is always changing and shifting in response and reaction to experiences and interactions in the world and reality which exists around them.

Site and Participant Selection

The participant interviews took place in a setting where a video camera could be set up and where the noise level was at a minimum. Each participant determined the final decision of site location based on her comfort and personal needs.

Now in her mid-twenties, Participant 1 immigrated with her family from Poland at an early age. In flawless English, she identified as both Polish and Canadian. We had met in September 2009 through a mutual friend and in casual conversation connected through the similarities and differences in our stories of immigration and experience with the education system in Canada. At the time of our interview, Participant 1 was in the final year of a Masters of Fine Arts at the University of Windsor. She has since moved back to Toronto, the city she affectionately calls home.

Participant 2 came to Canada from Iran because of her acceptance to the Masters of Fine Arts at the University of Windsor. She shared an apartment with her live-in partner, a law student at the same university. We were also introduced in September 2009 through a mutual friend but we seemed to connect on a different level. She was fun to be around and we would often go out as couples. Once she successfully defended her thesis, Participant 2 moved to Toronto with her partner, who is supporting and encouraging her immigration to Canada.

I know Participant 3 on a more intimate level than any of the other women who volunteered to take part in this study. We moved to Windsor together in July 2009, each in pursuit of her own graduate studies. As a first year student in the Masters of Fine Arts, Participant 3 introduced me to both Participant 1 and Participant 2. She had immigrated to London, Ontario in her early twenties from former Yugoslavia, now Serbia, and had completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montreal. With her, I had once shared a country, a culture and a language, and now we share a house and the experience of immigration and education as a graduate student.

In her mid-twenties, Participant 4 moved to Windsor from China in the summer of 2009. I first saw her in my first-year graduate classes, where I observed her to be solitary and quiet. We did not speak much to one another until she began to voice her opinions in the Qualitative Research Methods course we both attended in the second semester of our first year. She later explained that it took a while for her to have enough courage to speak English in our courses even though she had been an English teacher in China. Along with her partner, who is a graduate student in economics, she plans to apply for permanent residency to Canada once she completes her Masters of Education degree.

Participant 5 is a married mother of two adolescent boys. Born and raised in Windsor, she now works as a lawyer and a professor of law at the University of Windsor. We had met casually in one of our graduate courses at the University. From the beginning, she explained that her interest in taking graduate-level courses in Education was motivated by her personal interest in improving her methods of instruction as a professor. She approached me with her interest in participating in the study, making it clear from the beginning that she was born in Canada and therefore had not immigrated to this country. She explained that being raised in a traditional Lebanese family, she felt she

could identify with the immigrant experience. It was her interest in this study that allowed me to consider the possibility of participants *self-identifying* with the research categories immigrant, woman and graduate student. As the only participant who declined to sing on camera, her other contributions to this study were invaluable.

Participant 6 immigrated to Canada from Iran in her mid-twenties to marry her current partner who is also enrolled as a graduate student in the Faculty of Education. We met in our first semester at the University of Windsor in September 2009. She spoke frequently and articulately in our class discussions. By winter term, her pregnancy became more obvious and she took a term break to have her child and visit her family in Iran. Quite generously, her and her baby girl appear together in the film.

I used a non-probability, convenience sampling technique to recruit participants for this study used by other researchers, such as Fitzgerald (2006), Wey (2007), and Windle, Hamilton, Zeng, and Yang (2008). I approached graduate students I had met since my arrival at the University of Windsor in August 2009. Participants in this study volunteered their involvement and were ready and available to take part in this research process. In conversation, participants self-identified as immigrants, as women, and were institutionally defined as graduate students. I discussed my definition of these terms with each potential participant as part of the recruitment process.

Once I identified potential participants from a list of known individuals, I contacted them one by one via email and told them about my research project. The initial e-mail briefly described the project and asked them to reply if they are interested in taking part in or finding out more information about the research project. In this e-mail, I identified the three topics of interest and informed potential participants that I would ask them to sing a song of their choice on camera at the end of the interview.

When potential participants expressed interest, I e-mailed them a Letter of Information and consent forms. I continued to recruit participants until I had a total of six individuals who self-identified as women, as immigrants, and as graduate students at the University of Windsor.

Once participants had signed the consent forms, I e-mailed them the list of Interview Questions (Appendix A) with an explanation that these largely open-ended questions were intended to guide the topic of discussion but that I would likely ask probing questions to clarify points arising during the interview. Prior to and in preparation for the interview, I asked participants to read the interview questions and give some consideration to a song they would be asked to perform at the end of the interview. The element of surprise was neither necessary nor warranted for the questions in this study. Mishler (1999) regards research interviews, like interviews in general, as “speech events” (p. 19) or performances tailored to the situation at hand. Asking that participants prepare for the interview added yet another level of informed consent as participants considered what to reveal and what to conceal in their speech performances.

Data Collection and Recording

The collection of data occurred in several phases. Initially, I engaged in conversations with other students at the University of Windsor. With an insider’s perspective, I identified possible participants to enroll for participation in this study based on their self-identification as immigrants and women. Once I received clearance from the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Windsor, I began to enroll participants for this study.

The second stage of data collection occurred during the scheduled interview. I conducted all six interviews using a semi-structured approach. Before the start of the interview, I reminded participants that they were free to withdraw from participation in the study up and until the completion of a pre-final draft of the video narrative. I informed participants that I expected the interview to last approximately one hour, however, I anticipated that the duration of each interview would vary in length from participant to participant. Each interview was video recorded through the use of a video camera. Once the interview was completed, I transferred the videos to my password-enabled computer where I edited the footage using iMovie. I reviewed each interview as a form of analysis and reflection upon the speech event.

The final stage of data collection occurred in the post-interview phase. I informed participants that I may or may not contact them for a follow-up interview in the event that I may need them to elaborate on an answer or the stories they had shared. I did not ask for a follow-up interview with any of the participants in this study.

Data Analysis

As part of the data analysis, I reviewed each interview twice. Reviewing the interviews allowed me to comb through the data in search of beliefs, experiences and opinions expressed by participants that I could identify with. Also, I was able to reflect on each interview and give consideration to my participation in the process.

Reviewing the interviews helped during the video-editing process. I searched for data by constructively editing each video interview individually, selecting instances where participants expressed opinions, beliefs and experiences matching my own.

As I edited the videos, I constructed or re-storied a film narrative that speaks of my own identity and experiences through the use of the voices and images of the participants. Re-storying is “the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story... and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence” (Creswell, 2005, p. 480). Using Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000) literary elements of three-dimensional space structure, I composed a new video. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) identify three dimensions of space narrative structure: interaction, continuity and situation. According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000) these three elements of narrative structure are a “metaphorical” (p. 50) space that determines narrative inquiry.

Once I completed the video, I transcribed and analyzed this narrative as a single case. This is the point where ethnographic research design intersects and overlaps with narrative research design. The edited video was my field text – the narrative I focused on and analyzed. Finally, I reviewed the edited video and transcription and identified sub-themes within the five major categories: immigrant identity, woman identity, student identity, songs of identity, and performed research.

Feminist and cross-cultural researchers have used narrative analysis as a means by which the narrative of the traditionally marginalized individual or social group could be told (Bateson, 1989; Bogdan, 2003; Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2006; Loder & Spillane, 2005; Jacobs, 2002; Moreira 2008a; Moreira, 2008b; Solomon, 2000). As such, this research design fit well with my study, which set out to explore the experiences of immigrant women in a post-secondary educational setting.

Representation and Legitimacy

The intent of this study is to highlight the voice and experience of the researcher through the use of an edited video, which selectively chose participants' answers to represent the opinions of the researcher. Meaning is co-constructed by what participants share during the interview and how I edited the video recordings in the post-interview phase. The third narrative, created as an accompanying project to this study, represents the researcher's personal beliefs as well as those of the participants who lent their voices and images to the study. As the researcher, I am both literally and metaphorically "one voice among many" (Creswell, 2005, p. 437).

The reputation of qualitative research suffers from a constant questioning of "is it real" (Meiners, 2001, p. 110) knowledge and/or is it truthful research (Denzin, 2009)? It pits the single I against the counted I, favouring and validating the authority of the latter in the world of research knowledge. The justification of knowledge claims involves an acknowledgement that "researchers are involved in the making of the real" (Meiners, 2001, p. 122) and that all knowledge involves representation (Denzin, 2009). The meaning of a narrative or meaning created during a research interview is co-constructed and negotiated by the author/researcher and audience/participant through interaction (Meiners, 2001; Mishler, 1999; Mishler, 1986). The people involved in this process negotiate understanding through a filter of identifiable experiences (Meiners, 2001).

Arts-based education research (ABER), otherwise known as arts research, places importance on exploration or approaching a problem without clearly defined research intentions (Gallagher, 2008; Sullivan, 2006). ABER positions the researcher as a participator in the research involved in "building a context together with research participants" (Gallagher, 2008, p. 67; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). ABER rests on "the

idea that the arts might be used in some productive way to help us understand more imaginatively and more emotionally problems and practices that warrant attention in our schools” (Eisner, 2005, p. 10; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). Defined by methodological pluralism, ABER pushes “the boundaries of method and explore[s] alternative ways of knowing” (Eisner, 2005, p. 11).

In this study, I build on existing methodologies within educational research to create a work of art as much as a work of research. The film is a representation of my own ways of knowing in collaboration with the research participants who lend their voices and experiences to the study; it works on both an emotive as well as intellectual level resulting in both symbolic and aesthetic choices.

Ethical Considerations

At the onset of the study, I considered that the known and anticipated risks of the proposed research might affect participants in three stages: before the interview; during the interview; and after the interview. In the pre-interview phase of this research, I anticipated that participants might be worried about how to answer the questions, about the interview being videotaped and about how the interview recording would be used. During the interview, I expected that participants might be nervous about answering personal questions on camera, they might feel embarrassed about singing a song on camera, and they might relive painful past experiences during the course of the interview. In the post-interview phase, I anticipated that participants might worry about being visually identifiable to those who see the film.

Since the intent of the video recording was to use the footage as part of a reflexive visual autoethnography, I was unable to ensure participants of either confidentiality or

anonymity. Individuals who view the film may recognize participants by their appearance and/or voice. Participants might feel some psychological risks or harm such as humiliation, embarrassment, anxiety and agitation. Also, participants might experience potential social risks or harm such as loss of status, privacy or reputation as a result of their participation in this study. Furthermore, as I recruited participants from a pool of fellow graduate students attending the University of Windsor, the participants were known to me.

In an attempt to minimize the potential risks to participants in this study, I was up-front with participants throughout the research process about my intentions in the use of the data they would allow me to collect, and clearly stated the purpose and intent of the research study; I made the questions available to the participants before the interview in order to minimize psychological stress and to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their answers; I informed participants that the interview would focus on these questions but that I may ask probing questions for clarification purposes; I provided the participants with contact information to Student Counselling Services, where they may seek help if they experience an emotional or psychological response during the research process. If, during the interview, participants showed signs of experiencing a moment of distress as they recollected their life experiences, I asked them if they needed time to recompose and consider withdrawing their participation in the study or not answering some questions.

Before signing the consent form and at various stages of the research process, I informed participants that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time before the publication of the final draft. In this way, consent becomes an on-going process negotiated by the researcher and the participants in the study (Sefton, 2006). I offered

participants the option of viewing a penultimate video draft in an effort to continue collaboration and remain respectful of the on-going process of consent. This step also demonstrated to the participants that the video, although it involves their participation, their voice and their image, is a constructed narrative about me. While I was not able to ensure participants of anonymity and confidentiality of their data, I removed their names in the final project. I assigned pseudonyms, such as Participant 1 or Participant 2, to each interviewee.

A potential benefit to participants for taking part in this study may have been the opportunity to reflect on the formation of their identity by reflecting on life experiences, interpretation and understanding of life events. Talking about life experiences may have been therapeutic for the participants (Research and Ethics Board, 2009) and viewing the narratives of others with similar life stories may have provided a sense of shared experience, where the participants may have previously felt isolated (Connelley & Clandinin, 1990).

The Position of the Researcher

I am a woman. I am an immigrant. I am a graduate student. These three positions influence my life on a daily basis. This study was born out of a desire to know more about how these three positions shape me personally and professionally, and how these experiences are reflected in the lives of other women who share similar life positions. I believe that all research, whether it makes claims of objectivity or not, is a form of self-search and that researchers are deeply implicated in all aspects of their research. As such, I wished to involve myself explicitly in my research and knowledge claims.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the formation of my identity as an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student through the narrative voices of participants with whom I share these life positions. I collected and recorded data before, during and after the interviews with participants I recruited using a non-probability, convenience sampling. Once I analyzed the data collected by transcribing each interview, I re-storied a short video or third narrative that represents my identity performance. Also, this video explores a visual autoethnographic method and speaks to how the three self-identifying life positions contribute to the development of my personal identity, influence my research interests, and are shared by others in similar life positions. Drawing strength from conceptual ambiguity, autoethnography gives voice to marginalized individuals, embraces and acknowledges research and scientific subjectivity, and questions privileged ways of knowing.

I propose that a hierarchy of marginalization plays into who has the power to rank individuals on a hierarchical scale. In my view, this would further alienate and disassociate marginalized groups and individuals from established systems of power such as educational institutions. For this reason, I made an effort to avoid duplicating a hierarchy of marginalization because it signals a competition of who is more or less marginalized as this reinforces marginalization by ranking individuals. As an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student, I do not want to further empower a racial, social and patriarchal hierarchy by placing myself and others within such a structure. Instead, I propose a connection through our differences and marginalization. The point is not the level of exclusion or the reason/s for exclusion but rather simply exclusion.

I worked toward demonstrating that in this particular case, research interests and personal identity overlap, complimenting and provoking each other. Interviewing participants demonstrates both shared experiences and personal interests as they relate to research interests. The videotaped interviews are documentation of shared experience while at the same time demonstrate my personal re-storied narrative to the viewer/audience. The disjointed and discontinuous (Mishler, 1999) narrative speaks to the fragmented nature of my personal and professional identities, which I negotiate with daily experience(s). In this way, the video and narrative becomes a collaborative speech event documenting the creation of coherence and meaning between researcher/creator and participant/viewer (Mishler, 1999). Other researchers/creators have demonstrated similar connections. Minh-ha's (1989) work deals with the politics of exclusion and representation of women as minorities and as minority women and the effect of these on a cultural and national identity. The use of herself in her video links Minh-ha (1989) with both the narratives and experiences of her research participants as well as the ways in which they/she define/s their/her identity. Textually, Minh-ha's (1989) incorporation of video stills in her text and her style of writing further provoke the established representational forms of academic research/knowledge.

CHAPTER IV
SONGS OF IDENTITY

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of the data gathered in this research. I have structured this chapter in four sections, the first three corresponding with the life positions examined in this thesis research: immigrant, woman, graduate student. The voices of the participants are indistinguishable from my own voice and I use their shared experiences to weave my own narrative. The fourth section explores the performative nature of this research. The subheadings that follow are for the convenience of institutional analysis, however, each section folds and overlaps over the other/s resulting in a single, constructed meta-narrative. This meta-narrative is my construction and the field text analyzed in this section.

Immigrant Identity

The findings of this study indicate that the experience of immigration is characterized by immigrating at a young age, a sense of otherness in the new culture, and mixed feelings suggesting both excitement and difference regarding the immigration experience. Immigrating to Canada at the age of ten *happens to* a person. I identified with one of the participants who described the experience of “immigrat[ing] with [her] parents” as being “brought here” and having “no choice in the matter.” The choice to immigrate to a new country and a new culture in this case is solely a parental decision at the exclusion of a self-described “very young,” “ten-year-old” child. My first experience of schooling and elementary education in Canada is best described by one of the participants as feeling “different.” One sign of this difference is “the language.” “I, I, I

would come home and say to my mom, *I don't understand what the teacher is saying. I don't know what she wants me to do.*" A participant light-heartedly proposed that "[a] lot of my psychosis's these days [laughter] probably started there." I have often considered that a result or an aspect of my experience of cultural and geographic relocation lead to a permanent change within myself. In particular I thought of this thesis and my intrinsic motivation and drive to examine, probe and reflect deeply on these early years and their affect on my present and continued development. As an adult, I know that the "fortunate" experience of immigrating while still a young child meant "that I could assimilate very quickly and easily" in comparison with my parents' acculturation experiences I observed as a youth. At the same time, the experience and process of immigrating was "tough" because you "go through lots of issues like identity crisis, like nostalgia, [and] idealizing your country in a naïve way." Adjusting to new ways for me involved an element of "surprise," an acceptance of things that in my eyes were not "quite normal for me" or perhaps even "weird." For me, as well as the participant who lends her voice, immigration is an experience of "learn[ing] to fit in." After more than 20 years in Canada and feeling Canadian more now than ever, "I'm still not sure what elements are very important for [me] to just function perfectly" in Canadian society and culture. To this day, I am "learning" and "observing" this culture as an outsider within.

My experiences with a new society and culture lead to feelings of otherness and continual comparison of two often different worlds. For example, in comparison with the culture, environment and social customs back home, Canada is "quiet" in the sense that it is generally less crowded, ordinarily one family unit lives in one dwelling, and this country culturally places more value on privacy and individualism, which affect many

aspects of the tasks of daily living. In general, people “here” are more “relaxed” and “laid back” than people back home [Macedonia/former Yugoslavia].

This contraposition leads to a sense of otherness and ultimately, in this case, an underlined sense of inferior minority. “I’ve always felt like a foreigner” or “an outsider” in perpetual disconnect from my surroundings:

With that [outsider feeling] came some insecurities; my own lack of self-confidence made me feel like I was less than these people. You know, I did feel inferior to them for a very long time. Felt like every time they were around I had to cater to them cuz I wasn’t equal. I wasn’t as good as them.

The sense of otherness continued once I returned to my original culture. Four of the six interview participants said they have returned to their country since their immigration to Canada, which can feel “like a parallel universe” in which both “customs” and “food” now appear “a little bit different.” The return is also a reality check in the sense that it allows one to see that “there is still the same problems, the same difficulties, if not more.” Idealized notions of the once-left-behind world, culture and society shatters in the reality of what you see upon returning home. As immigrants and visiting returnees, home makes clear the “chang[e] in me” “as a person.” Perhaps the most difficult thought is that “I don’t belong anywhere” or to any one place; feeling “like I ha[ve] no home” no single culture to identify as my own. I imagine comfort, security, stability and clarity in belonging to a single place, a single way, which others may describe as limiting and disadvantageous. Returning is an experience of reversed otherness, in between feelings and worlds, unhappy and happy in either and none.

In this context, interview participants and I shared a difficulty in identifying exclusively with one culture. Instead, I identify as “a mix” of Macedonian and Canadian. Each of these identifications, however, is more pronounced or slight depending on the

geographic space-place I happen to occupy in the moment. As one participant explained, “[i]n Poland I’m probably Canadian, here I’m Polish” while another reaffirmed that “[s]ometimes I’m more Serbian and when I go to Serbia I’m Canadian for some reason.” In my case, the reciprocal nature of self identification depends to a degree on the level of acceptance or rejection by either culture. The above statements illuminate an implicit and hidden tendency to reject the impure, spoiled, tainted or that which is outside of your definition and image of a typical cultural self.

Immigrating, among other things, is a process which begins with hope to “build a new thing, to build a perfect thing” in a new cultural context. In the voice of one of the participants, there is a desire, a “want to be Canadian” which may not materialize in the new cultural context. The process of integrating into a new culture is delayed by questions about “*Where are you from?*” implying an outward appearance and perception of otherness or foreignness which forces you to question your claim of identifying as a Canadian. Perhaps without malice, the question creates an awkward space of self-doubt and a subtle but sharp implication that I am identified as an outsider and an other by people whom I have accepted as my new cultural group. The experience expressed in the voice of one of the participants reiterates this point well in the paragraph below:

Sometimes I want to be Canadian. Most of the time I want to be Canadian but it hits me when somebody asks me, *Where are you from?* And I have to say, *It’s Iran*. I have to say Iran and I wonder sometimes: *Am I Iranian? Why? How? How is it so?* Even though I was raised there and I still have some Iranian characteristics with me but I feel more Canadian but whenever somebody asks me, *Where are you from?* I have to say Iran.

To solve the issue, some of us hyphenate our identity. The inclusive compromise considers both cultural selves and while “I [may] definitely consider myself [Macedonian]....anytime anyone’s ever asked me I say [Macedonian]-Canadian.

Always.” I build, define, and occupy a third place to which I now belong more than anywhere in the material world.

The struggle with self-identification imbues considerations and knowledge of which city, town or country to call and make home. In the physical world we all must live some place; the question is where. In this case study, sometimes “[h]ome is in Canada” and sometimes the possibility opens itself up to consideration that it may also be Macedonia as I find myself thinking of and searching for reasons to “go back just to try it out.” A part of me feels that “there is a really strong connection between [Macedonia] and myself” even though I cannot “specifically tell what I miss.” To say that it is the “food” or “your home,” “your room, your house” would simplify too much the loneliness my immigration experience involved. A different part of me also knows that “even if I move now back it would not be the same as if I would stay there and never move[d] to Canada.” Flirting with the possibilities of *here* and *there* may seduce my imagination, but realistically I know that I am literally, physically and spiritually “somewhere in between now:”

You go to another point. You go and you come back and it’s always going on. You want to find your home somewhere in between. But I was like, do I really want to go to Canada? Windsor? Is that home? And the answer was no. That really scares me. I’m belonging to somewhere, but where is it? I tried too much just to settle in, to experience their beliefs, their culture, their everything, and now I want to go back home. And something there is calling me still. [gestures] And where is home? I don’t know.

The traditional sense of home, which may be tied to a physical space/place, expands to include abstractions. “Home” becomes what you feel or remember feeling once before immigrating, when your senses perceived yourself to be safe, loved, accepted and belonging to something. “Home is maybe Canada; maybe Iran. I don’t know.

Wherever my beloved ones are is my home.” In spite of the forced otherness and the fluid abstract nature of *home*, my body must occupy a space/place and when pressed to give an answer to a traditional definition of home, I say with conviction and determination that “[h]ome is Canada. Home is Canada. Home is Canada.” It is an answer fuelled by my idea that I am here and here is me inside this place that is inside of me.

Woman Identity

The findings of this study indicate the experience of the women participants and the researcher in this case are characterized by early and continued socialization as a woman in society, perceived injustices within a patriarchal society, and a sense of connection or sisterhood with other women suggesting a bond rooted in similar personal experiences.

My experiences as a woman detailed in the short film identify a rootedness and a history of sexism. Growing up *girl*, I subconsciously absorbed the social message that female dis/advantage went back “for centuries... in history.” At the same time as I understood and internalized the ideas, behaviours and comments that with every syllable spoke of how femininity is less than it’s gender opposite, I heard and knew mostly from other women that we, “[w]omen have a holy, spiritual position as mothers” in this world. As I got older, I began to drop the dis- and saw only the advantage of the female experience, which in my case meant that “[b]eing in the minority gives you so [many] feelings, passions, statements, pains and everything;” *it* is a privileged perspective of the world.

Personally, I have seen my own ideology evolve from equality between the genders to gender equity. These days, I tend to think of transgressing gender boundaries

as a periodic interplay between correct and incorrect thought, belief and action. For example, while in my twenties “I thought there is no difference between men and women.” I now see, welcome and relish the uniqueness of gender and I make an effort to avoid essentializing either sex. Instead I think, “*Okay. I am a woman*” in body and mind, “[b]ut it does not mean that I am not human.” Rather than a focus on gender differences and intricacies, my attention is on the quality of a person’s character and the aesthetics of his or her lived experiences and actions.

Immigrating to “Canada I realized, yeah... there are still things needed to be done, even here in Canada.” As a political democracy, Canadian society is built on an old patriarchal system that pervasively privileges men and excludes women. For example, Canadian women won the right to vote in 1919 when the Act to confer the Electoral Franchise upon women took effect on January 1, 1919 (Parliament of Canada [PoC], 2007a); in 1984, the Right Honorable Jeanne Sauvé served as the first woman governor general of Canada, while in 1999 the Right Honorable Adrienne Clarkson was the first member of a visible minority and the first immigrant to serve as the governor general of Canada (PoC, 2010a); and in 2010, women held just under 22 per cent or 67 of the 306 occupied seats in the House of Commons (PoC, 2010b). Gender inequity is deeply rooted and perhaps invisible at first glance or upon brief examination of the surface culture of Canadian society but look closer or dream, hope, plan, do and experience life in this county and you realize that the “[c]riteria for being a good leader is just for men.” It is not that I cannot achieve or succeed professionally as a woman; rather, it is the choice of and negotiation between career and family women face. As a woman, I choose, I negotiate between personal and professional options.

In the microcosm of my household, my lower/middle-class immigrant parents modeled the mixed messages in society. On the one hand they taught me that “girls or women can be as good as boys and men, that gender doesn’t really matter. My parents encouraged me to think outside of traditional roles and to redefine the implied connection between *weak* and *female*. They gave me both “[c]ourage and all this power...that I can do anything I want with my life.” Sometimes I wonder if it is their own dream of success they dreamt for me in the face of the reality of their immigrant experience, which was marked by a high-standard of qualifications for entry into Canada and unrecognized knowledge and experience upon arrival. On the other hand, my immigrant parents enjoyed traditions and customs from the old country and at times when I proposed by action, word or thought to transgress beyond their comfort-zone, I heard how a good “girl does this” and not that. This guilt often accompanied messages of *you can’t*, *you shouldn’t* and *you won’t* when my younger “brothe[r] had a lot more freedom than I did” at the same age.

Growing up to be a woman “was hard[, e]specially for me because I was so driven.” This life-force in/outside my self pushed me forward in life. This drive was influenced by socially acceptable expectations or “common opinions that are held in our society [of] what women should do and how women should behave.” “Being a woman influenced my career” choice to become an elementary school teacher as people around me applauded and affirmed my decision as setting the stage to raise a family once I got married and settled down with a husband (Howell, 1997; Smulyan, 2004).

Outwardly, my body announced me to the world as a woman; psychologically I have been gender-bending my way toward a self-definition and self-understanding throughout my life. “I’ve always said [laughter] that I’m a man trapped in a woman’s

body.” As a young girl I would say “I was a tomboy.” My scabbed knees and bruised legs were the honorary scars authenticating my days of boorish play and unladylike discovery and exploration. But it was more than this that made me feel “trapped in a woman’s body:” I was “driven; I had “courage;” I was “proud.” Psychologically, I was ill-fitted to the narrow and concrete definitions of gendered behaviour and mannerisms of a typical girl.

In the commotion of all this, I feel a deep connection to other women. “I feel like we underst[and one another, like] I understand women...all women” regardless of “socio-economic background...[and]...culture.” Without undoing the good work of feminists everywhere, it is my experience and observation that a good portion of women of this world continue to experience domination, rule, and order by men; this is the strength of the fabric of sisterhood, excluding Kristeva’s (2008) phallic matrons who are the weakest of women for they model an *other* in the shape of a *self*.

As a physical image to myself “I’m a girl” in all its complicated and indefinite ways and I happen to be “really proud of that fact.” At this stage, however, “I am still in the process of knowing myself as a woman, I guess.” This knowledge is without concrete conclusions, without permanency, as the story is still in the process of writing itself. In this case, *I am a woman* is a *fluid*, conceptual definition. Saying fluid is really the most care I can show within a language of ideology that forces a description of fluidity in the negative: unsure, unclear, inconstant, unsettled, sketchy. The derogatory meaning and nature of these words demonstrates to me the privileging of stability and solidness, over flexibility and fluidity, in the English language.

The image of women, in my case, is influenced by models from two continents. A desirable woman back home “didn’t assert herself, didn’t have a job that was better than

her husband's, didn't make more money than her husband, didn't run the household." The tasks of a desirable woman back home were "to, you know, cook, clean, take care of the household and the male patriarch of the family really had all the freedoms" and control over her life. "In Canada I feel women... are more brave to claim that, *I am equal with you so you have to treat me equally.*" However, the treatment of women in Macedonia and Canada "is pretty similar" in that they both function on a "deficit model" view of women that informs and imparts the action of men and society. For example, in either country a man may say that "because you are girls we need to treat you well and ladies first" but "sometimes they still have the idea: *I have to treat you well but it's just because I'm better than you.*" To be psychologically free of these deeply ingrained ideas, I must scour my subconscious for the damaging and crippling patriarchal ideology that influences me to self-define in the negative and informs my self-image within a deficit model. This is messy work (Denzin, 1997).

I am a generational gender/fold. My mother modeled the image of a woman back home, although I am not sure if this is a version of her life she would tell or agree with. "She was my role model...the most influential person in my life" who taught me to "give" to people "what I would expect in return." I saw that "[m]y mother struggled. Suffered. And still gave us the greatest love." She was "a hard worker" who "tried to do everything very well" and was "very successful with her own job and work." My mother's layered and multiple responsibilities didn't detract from "the way she loved us unconditionally." My mother tried to instruct me and influence me to be "obedient" but "I wasn't. To her I wasn't but I still think I'm obedient more like her." Her efforts to "rais[e] me like a good [Macedonian] girl" were perhaps efforts to create an image of herself in me and to show me her understanding of my role in society in order to help ease my

experiences in this world. My rebellion and my disobedience to her instruction sprung from the instinctive belief that the rules of life had changed we once immigrated as a family.

It is a lonely, separating experience to know the moment when my knowledge has evolved beyond what my parents know. This experience comes too quickly for children of immigrants, in my case “[a]t twelve or thirteen.” Specifically,

I remember when I was, I think in high school. I was a very independent kid. I remember I was picking my courses for high school. I realized, I went to my mom, or she came to me around the house and said, *What are you doing?* I said, *I’m trying to decide what courses to take.* She just couldn’t help me because she didn’t know the system. She expressed her wishes for me. What she wanted me to do and what she thought that I would be good at but she couldn’t help me with that choice.

I am a generational culture/fold. I retain aspects of my parents and their cultural past, but at the same time I grow into individual characteristics, which more often than not are shaped and influenced more strongly by the society that surrounds me. I am of my parents but I wonder if we are of the same world. Are we of the same mind? The same values? How do we connect across time, space and experience? How do I connect with my parents and with my past? “Now when I talk to my [dad] sometimes” I feel the distance between us and “I think, you know, poor things.” They immigrated to Canada because they sensed and judged that the political situation of former Yugoslavia in 1987 was heading toward national collapse. Accomplished in their homeland, my parents sought to replicate and perhaps double their achievements in a new cultural context where they heard life was better. Once here, they worked manual labour and entry-level positions; as the better English speaker, my mother adjusted from her governmental secretarial career back home to her job as a cashier standing on her feet all day in a

convenience store in the Eaton's Centre in Toronto; and my dad, who had owned and operated his own car repair business in Macedonia could only get an entry-level mechanic position in Canada. He would later tell me with some sadness and pride that in the beginning years he would easily repair a vehicle but struggled to fill out a required repair order form. I mourn their struggles, their lost fights and irrevocable decisions. They had given up so much to come to Canada that in their calculations they never figured how to return to their homeland and save face at the same time. While alive, "my mother had the wisdom of ten wise people" and my dad continues to this day to surprise me with his sense, passion and persistence in life. It is not education, nor status, nor money that are responsible for their wisdom, rather their knowledge draws on experience and the self-reflective nature of their individual characters.

Student Identity

The findings of this study indicate the experience of the researcher and participants in this case are marred by acculturation to the academy as well as real or perceived insecurities, worries and issues with the use of the English language for academic purposes.

For negative educational experiences as a graduate student, I distribute fault equally between my own thinking and self-imposed pressure "*to do well...to get good marks*" and external institutional pressures. "[B]eing a successful student is very important to me" as this is one measure of accomplishment and self-worth I voluntarily submit to. It is my experience that to some in the academy knowledge is a privileged monopoly of the quantitative way of knowing. Directly or indirectly, I have been encouraged as a student to be formulaic and "computerized" in written and oral language.

The nature of my individuality resists this “computerized system that doesn’t talk about my feelings and my expressions” and works to distance me from them in thought, word and action. “[R]ather than fitting us into some form or system” I invite a liberated, more artistic and different approach to post-secondary education: ask each student to explore “[w]here can [my] imagination and brain” lead me on this educational journey. With an understanding of the various dynamics and interests at play, I gently and generally critique the academy and its participants for its adherence to and privileging of “automatic styles” of esoterica “we [must] satisfy [so] that we can graduate.”

My experience as a graduate student “has been an interesting experience” enlivened by the aching rips and tears vital to development and growth. It has been a “[g]ood experience, but at the same time really, really hard for me.” Adapting to the culture of the academy has been part of the learning experience as “any graduate school [will] have their certain academic culture.” In my case, the curriculum includes “the actual knowledge you should learn as part of your program but also how to be a graduate student in a Canadian university,” which as an institution encourages and privileges White patriarchal values such as aggressiveness, competition and dominance. For example:

If you are in a seminar or something, everyone just takes the opportunity to say something and I feel that the people who speak the most, they feel the most confidence about themselves and make them look [like] the most intelligent person in the group.

In my case, as “the only educated person in my family” I shoulder equal parts burden and pride in the pursuit of this Masters of Education degree. I work “hard” to be “a successful student” and realize my parents’ dreams to educate their children.

Linguistically, I struggle to accurately and adequately express myself in academic papers

and presentations. I would say most of the problem “is the language [because I] don’t have the privilege of being a native English speaker” although “I’ve been here almost 20 years.” “I studied hard and I know that my English is very good” but “[i]n my academic life I struggled all the way though” and I suspect this is in part a “result of English being my second language.”

Somehow I know that the disconnection between the education system and myself goes beyond language and mirrors the disconnection I have felt with Canadian culture. Although I desperately wanted to, “I just felt like I couldn’t understand things the way everyone else did.” I felt of different mind, of different heart, of different knowledge or of a mentality that linked me and permanently marked me as other. I just “could never think the way everyone else was thinking” and “it affected me greatly.” “I still got through my education” and, in fact, “I performed well” because “I learned coping strategies.”

Songs of Identity

While I have focused the analysis on the constructed video narrative, the songs are a touching yet brief part of the findings of this research. Each woman, except for one, sings in her mother tongue, encrypting her message in her native language. Although they are singing in place of me, they are incomprehensible to me as the researcher at the level of linguistic understanding but not at the level of emotions. This works to distance the English-speaking viewer from understanding the words. Instead, the viewer and I must feel our way through the notes of each song in an attempt to connect with each performance.

Although I tend to think of this chapter of the film as a singularity, individually, each performance is uniquely and beautifully executed and renders various aspects of this

researcher's characteristics. At times, the performance is quick, shy and reminiscent of the innocence of youth that partially recalls rhymes learned in childhood. There are moments expressing sadness and melancholy in voice and swaying back and forth that searches for comfort and other moments that portray a playful nature I connect with. I identify as strongly with the trembling voice choked by feelings as with the performance that diligently works to control the voice and convey a subtle despair the audience may relate to. In the absence of my voice, these women sing my song of identity.

Performed Research

The original intent of this study focused on songs as identity performance and formation of three participants, not six. However, going through the process, I realized that the genuine appeal of this project lay in my ability to see my own identity reflected in the words and song performances of my participants. I realized I was searching for my own identity by asking others to speak to me of theirs. The questions I asked my participants were questions I was asking of myself. The six women I interviewed for this research shared different experiences with me, yet in their differences is my story, and in their voices is my voice. They have enabled me to express unique and contradictory aspects of myself. Through the voices of these women with whom I share as many commonalities as differences, my own identity performance and formation emerged.

As a socially situated action or speech event, my video follows a sequential order, piecing together my personal narrative through the voices of the participants in my study. It is a narrative I constructed with conscious awareness of an audience. I along with the women who lend their voices reveal and conceal ourselves in this research in various ways. Both the participants' individual responses and my own editing of their narratives

equally restrain my constructed narrative. In this way, my film demonstrates Mishler's (1999) deliberate and socially constructed speech event, which is performed in many layers with various audiences in mind.

The deliberate and sequential ordering of questions speaks to my understanding of purposeful communication. I negotiate understanding by revealing my past. The audience, I believe, can better understand how I know and what I know if they are able to understand where I come from. My past shapes my present, and revealing my origins reveals my identity and the events that have formed it. In addition, I negotiate meaning and understanding between myself as the researcher or interviewer and the six women as the participants in this project. Their voices are my voices, or Mishler's (1999) multiple and distinct sub-identities of my person. The women literally and symbolically speak and perform in my place. Together we create a layered narrative; I guide the questions and edit the narrative and they lend their voices and unscripted speech events during the interview process. The video is a visual representation of how the six women participants and I construct, understand and know the world around us during the interview process.

In the use of multiple layers, the video reveals another aspect of narrative as identity performance. By framing the video images of myself and the participants against a particular background, I focus the viewer's attention on the women, their faces and their voices while I control what happens from behind the camera. In this way, it is easy to claim that they speak for themselves and not for me. The layers reveal my self-search, my passions, my past, but also a lack of trust, a fear of rejection and an anxiety of both the cool and prying eye of the camera and the gaze of the viewer. The women participants mirrored my feelings during the taping of the interviews. All six voiced concerns and inquired about the public nature and accessibility of the video.

In addition, this video represents a narrative as fusion of form and content (Mishler, 1999). My ways of telling my story using a multi-layered approach of video and the symbolic use of the voice of others to represent my voice, demonstrate my need to conceal myself through the creation of visually symbolic distance and separation. In my interpretation and representation, I have changed the voices of the participants and manipulated them into my own. These language games represent the “disjunctions, [and] discontinuities” (Mishler, 1999, p. 9) of my identity and its evolving nature. I am hiding behind these women as the camera portrays their image and narrative. At the same time, I attempt to include myself in my video through the use of short clips with subtitled questions set against the same background. This is how I draw parallels and visually suggest sameness between the narrative of my participants and my own narrative.

One question of this study examines the idea of representation, namely how do I make myself “present and absent in the work that [I] do” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 72)? The film and film narrative are *performed* (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 2004) research, rooted in performativity. As a researcher, I am deeply embedded in this research. I respect the validity and value the contribution of the subjective and personal nature of this research. I avoid and dismiss claims of objectivity or what other researchers have defined as “a form of male bias that pervades theory and research” (Acker et al, 1991 as cited in Gallagher, 2008, p. 68). There remains, however, that which may be learned from this effort.

I make use of the video and transcribed text to capture a shared reality of immigrant women graduate students. Each of these life positions represents a state of otherness and marginalization for me and the participants in this research. The video and field text also support, construct and validate each other in that they work to explain the relevance and meaning of the other. Institutionally and academically this video was

created to capture the experiences of a shared cultural reality of otherness of immigrant, women, graduate students. It is a construction of a single narrative from the narratives of other women who share similar life positions. Academically, it demonstrates a way in which subjectivity may be utilized to extend the personal into a general and public knowledge; the audience of this research can connect with it through the filter of its own experience and draw its own conclusions and meanings.

Additionally, this video is an acknowledgement of how subjectivity within research, teaching and learning shows and allows the audience to make connections to a subjective text derived from subjective findings and performed research. The video empowers and respects the viewer to draw personal connections to and lessons from the narrative and experiences expressed. An attempt to be more academic in this re/presentation parallels the attempt to fit a sphere within the structure of a cube. Rather than privileging one way of knowing over another, this research, these findings, this visual autoethnography redefine and reinterpret academic knowledge in that they cause, inspire and affect learning.

In this video, I liberate traditions in research methodology and construct a more emotive, feminine space of academic and creative video making. I read, heard, listened and saw how my *I* was being “said” (Minh-ha, p. 80) in academia and thought and felt it lacking. The outcome of this research counters established definitions of appropriate or valid outcomes and presents findings with a creativity, subjectivity and an aesthetic that reaches out to the audience through its uniqueness, individualism and multiplicity. The women participants and I are united in a single narrative, dislodging the effect of “immediate” solitude attributed to women working to “unlearn” institutionalized discourse of “difference, [...] awkwardness or incompleteness” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 80).

I present a single identity told through the multiplicity of voices and layering of other narratives. The film is a representation of the female other by a female other. The choice to include myself in the film is obvious to me; I am as much a participant in the creation of this film as I am involved in the behind-the-scenes work. I am a member of this group of participants who self identify as women, immigrants and graduate students. My findings, my narrative, my video counter the binary systems of privileged knowledge and embrace a fragmented narrative that empowers the viewer to draw understanding and knowledge from the experience of the particular toward the relational typical. The women in the film are not my research commodity. They are not my findings or the results of this research. They are an infusion of subjective corporality in the scientific discourse of “the ruling relations” (Smith, 2005, p. 25).

Traditionally the camera has been used as a surveillance object in research (Gallagher & Kim, 2008; Minh-ha, 1989). The appeal of the camera to record and capture data lay in the belief that it represented a “‘realist,’ and therefore more ‘objective/scientific’” record of events (Gallagher & Kim, 2008, p. 104). Some post-colonial theorists and scholars redirected the camera and used it to represent and insert the voice and gaze of the other in research and film (Fusco, 2008; Gallagher & Kim, 2008; Minh-ha, 1989). The problem is that whoever is directing, employing and positioning this mechanical eye is doing so in the image of their own gaze (Gallagher & Kim, 2008). The use of video in research is not a neutral act; it affects “that which it films, including...our relationship with the research participants and their relationships to each other and their space” (Gallagher & Kim, 2008, p. 107).

Some researchers have moved beyond thinking of the politics of representation and toward innovative approaches to the use of video and film as a research tool (Fusco,

2008; Gallagher, 2008; Gallagher and Kim, 2008; Goldstein, 2008; Mihn-ha, 1989). For example, Gallagher and Kim (2008) propose a shift in thinking of video as merely “a technical tool [to] an artistic research medium” (p. 112) that can be used for collaborative data collection and analysis. Rather than individual- or researcher-based research, Gallagher and Kim (2008) propose “group-based research and editing practices” (p. 112) that make use of multiple points of view as another layer to inform study findings (Gallagher, 2008). Similarly, Goldstein’s (2008) work in performed ethnography “turn[s] educational ethnographic data and texts into scripts and dramas that are either read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences” (p. 85). In addition to informing and consenting representation, the involvement of the researched community in the construction of the ethnographic text, as well as arts-based research, “can help create more ethical relationships between researcher, their research participants, and the communities...by providing an opportunity for mutual analysis” (Goldstein, 2008, p. 85).

One of the pillars of this study is the question of representation; how do I make myself “present and absent in the work that [I] do” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 72)?

While I construct a single and personal narrative, I use the voices and images of the research participants in both the text and video portions of this study to introduce a subjective corporality into otherwise sterile research. The autoethnographic text and video are a “claim to presence” (Fusco, 2008, p. 161) for both myself and the participants in the study; however, they also represent embodied knowledge (Fusco, 2008) that uses the visual and verbal presence of women in research to draw connections in and through experience.

In the context of this study, it would be more appropriate to ask *What does it do?* rather than *What does it mean?* The methodological “shift from *meaning* to *doing*”

(Fusco, 2008, p. 173) lends itself naturally to “messy texts” (Denzin, 1997, p. 224). In contrast to the orderly nature of reader texts that begin, build and conclude in a formalized structure, messy texts “move back and forth between description, interpretation and voice” and “make the writer a part of the writing project” (Denzin, 1997, p. 225). I work to distance myself from a search for true origin or authenticity, searching instead for a revelation of a true self in the narratives of similarity and difference of other women in similar life positions.

Summary

The video and narratives presented in this thesis are performed research (Kosovsky-Sedgwick, 2004; Mishler, 1999), embedded in performativity (Butler, 1990; 2000). The participants lend their voices to describe my own struggle to identify the place and space I belong to in the present rather than the place and space which first shaped me as an immigrant, woman, graduate student. This research speaks to the value of knowledge, whether it is known by one person or shared by many. It demonstrates the possibility that research and findings can be messy in that two contradictory concepts are found to be true at the same time in the same individual. The various sections of this chapter construct a single meta-narrative out of the voices of six women participants.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the study objectives and questions guiding this research. Specifically, I reflect on the methodological choices made during the course of the research as well as my own role as the researcher/collaborator in the research project. I also examine what I have learned in the process of this re/search. In the discussion section of this chapter, I question how my discoveries are aligned or misaligned with the literature review discussion I presented in Chapter II; and I attempt to locate my study within the context of other research in this field. This Chapter concludes with some implications of this study and next steps for future research.

Review of Study Findings

This study grew out of a desire to explore and understand the connection and interplay between academic research and personal experiences. Particularly, I was interested in how personal experience and life positions influence and impact the course, direction and interest of academic research. As I began to focus and define the research questions I intended to explore, I realized my particular, but shared, life positions as an immigrant, a woman and a graduate student shape my research interests. The purpose of this study became an exploration of the formation of my own identity within the context of these three positions and through the voice and image of participants who self-identify as women, immigrants and graduate students.

The four research questions posed in Chapter 1 are: 1) How do participants describe the experience of immigration and adjustment to a new culture; and how are their stories reflected in the development of my identity? 2) How do participants describe

their experiences as women between cultures; and how are these experiences reflected in the development of my identity? 3) How have the two positions of woman and immigrant shaped the experience of graduate studies for the participants; and how is this reflected in the development of my identity? and 4) How do participants represent themselves through song; and how do these performances reflect the development of my identity?

First, I wanted to explore similarities between how I describe, think of and remember my own immigration experiences with how the participants in this study reflect on their own experiences of immigration. The experiences of immigration as narrated by the participants, are distinguished by a sense of otherness in the new culture, immigrating at a young age, and mixed feelings of both excitement and difference regarding the experience of immigrating. From the safe distance of adulthood cushioned by time and memory, the participants helped me express objection to having been brought to another country. In an adult voice, I considered the often silent and shared struggles of immigrating as a child. Among the participants and myself was a shared sense that immigration begins with a dream, a fairytale journey to a better place. We connected through an understanding that as people physically grow and intellectually develop in the new world, they confront confusion or a sense of otherness that makes them wonder how and why they are a part of that which surrounds them. In this study, I am an anthropologist of my original, new and personally constructed culture; I draw distinction between having been born into a culture, placed in a culture, and growing and developing a culture of my choosing that borrows from others based on necessity and like. Immigrating at a young age, I witnessed the fluctuating nature of cultural beliefs and traditions commonly assumed to be unchanging or tradition based in both cultures. This is how I explained to myself alternative ways of celebrating the same religious holiday. As

an ethnographer of my own experiences, feelings and emotions are my field notes. In research and in the academy, truth is an illusive concept I continue to strive for and keep an open mind about with each action, thought and belief.

The women in this study shared experiences of: gendered socialization which began early in life, and continues to the present; a sense of sisterhood or bond with other women shared through personal experiences; and perceived injustices within a patriarchal society. The voices of the participants help me express the struggle to exist as a woman between cultures; a part of both and whole of none. In this multiplicity I acknowledge a second layer of inequality, this time being gender based. I struggle with what it means to be a woman and the opposing and conflicting demands to be a good wife and mother on the one hand while also working toward professional excellence as a career educator. I could not relate to either one or the other of these self-concepts fully. Milevska (2007) argues that Balkan identity in general is defined by “*neither* completely Eastern *nor* completely Western” (p. 182) ideology. Alternatively,

[*n*] *either* pushes forward and backwards the already existing concepts and thus creates new ‘folds’ in the regimes of representation... [*it*] is not about going through an ultimate process of acquiring some kind of desired identity opposed to the pre-destined one but is marked by a restless chain of negotiations. (Milevska, 2007, p. 181)

Honouring my traditions, my self, and my hope, I negotiate a spot between these three. I permit myself a fluid definition of self that negotiates two cultures’ conflicting demands for a constant and concrete definition of self.

Third, I wanted to explore how my experiences as an immigrant and woman interact with my professional interests as a graduate student. The women participants talked about real or perceived insecurities; worries and issues with the use of English for

academic purposes; as well as mixed experiences of acculturation to the academy. Cultural and academic language acquisition begins the process of acculturation. High academic achievement satisfies old and new cultural norms of acceptable accomplishment for girls and women. However, modeling my life experiences on the margins of society as both an immigrant and a woman, I gravitated toward an arguably marginal research method and methodology. Coupling video with autoethnography allowed me to share the beauty of my perspective of the world, and to show the artistry behind the way I negotiate my life-stance or world view. Already having personal knowledge of living in difference as a woman and an immigrant, I understood and accepted acculturation to the academy as another negotiation in/between cultures. In this work I have borrowed from various places, as I have done throughout my life, to compile a mosaic that reflects personal beauty and truth.

Finally, I wanted to explore if and how the participants' song performance demonstrated the development of my identity. The participants themselves were all at varying levels of acculturation to both university life and life in Canada. To sing is an artistic expression; singing approaches the realm of feeling understanding and knowledge. I value these performances for their emotive nature and the value of arts-based research. Once linguistic understanding vanishes as it does when each participant performs in her mother tongue, the audience is left with abstract emotions and song to facilitate understanding. I should also acknowledge I did not have the courage to sing on camera, and I applaud and marvel at the participants' gallantry –with all the gender bending this word implies.

Implications

This thesis adds to and supports the research of other scholars working on the premise that research and creative expression are forms of self-search, forms of identity development and identity formation (Bateson, 1989; Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jones, 2008; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Minh-ha, 1989; Mills, 1959; Mishler, 1999; Moreira, 2008a; Moreira, 2008b; Scheurich and Young, 1997; St. Pierre, 1997; Ronai, 1995; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008; Watson, 2009; Wing, 1997). Other researchers, academics and philosophers discuss the performative nature of research (Haseman, 2006; Pratt, 2000; Usher, 2006) and the need for reflection on the methodology and the methods employed in the representation of research findings (Jones, 2008; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008).

As a visual and textual autoethnography, this project describes the identity formation of the researcher at a specific moment in time and within the context of three life positions: immigrant, woman, graduate student. However, as within any work detailing a socially constructed reality, “a surplus of difference always remains” (Watson, 2009, p. 527).

Constructed with the collaboration of my participants, who lend their voices, images and experiences to produce an auto/ethnographic performance, this work attempts to break down some of the traditional power structures of representation and validity in research. It acknowledges the participants’ voice as full of knowledge and invites the audience to learn what it can from this research, text and video. Autoethnography as a research method gives voice to people on the margins of society (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2006; Swanson, 2009) while at the same time politicizing the narratives of “researchers at the margins” within academia (Fine, 1994, p. 24). The inclusion of

my/self in this research, otherwise known as reflexivity, speaks to the ethical imperative I feel as a researcher to acknowledge my position and the effect it has on my work. The self-reflective character of autoethnography is one model of how I approach understanding and sense-making in research, text and film with a gaze from my own life positions and through the lens of my experiences.

This research models a form of identity fragmentation discussed in Chapter 2. The fragmented nature of the video rejects a singular totalizing identity and rather speaks to the fragmentation of my own identity (Mishler, 1999). The struggle I describe in identifying solely with one nationality over another naturally lends itself to fragmentation; in one context, at one time I am to myself and others Macedonian, and in the next I am Canadian. Milevska (2007) describes this cultural between-ness using the term “neither.” As a concept, “*neither* pushes forward and backwards the already existing concepts, and thus creates new ‘folds’ in the regimes of representation” (p. 181). Furthermore, *neither* “is marked by a restless chain of negotiations” (Milevska, 2008, p. 181) and alternating commitments. Communication, and research for that matter, is a social phenomenon in which the other outside of the self is required for collaborative meaning making. The context and surroundings, whether pertaining to the participant/s, the researcher herself, or the research as a whole, impact identity and its formation in repetitious negotiations between personal desires and public and/or family pressures.

Politics of representation played a central role in the development and execution of this thesis research. I disagreed both with the manner in which I, an immigrant, woman, graduate student, saw or read myself re/presented in academic literature and the ways in which I saw myself being indoctrinated to re/present in my own research. I responded with a creative effort that began with the idea that I am deeply embedded in

my research. I negotiated understanding and meaning in the fluidity between researcher and participant and how these two are in this case integrated and complimentary rather than binary opposites. The awareness of constructed and collaborative meaning making at various points of this research allowed me to consider the audience capacity and ability to engage with this research and glean its own findings apart from my positional gaze. Placing self in research represented, for me, resistance to domination and privileged ways of knowing within academia, a position that aligns with the work of other researchers, such as Minh-ha (1989), Moreira (2008a/b) and Wagle & Cantaffa (2008). Involving personal experience, women's body and the other as representations within the clean, categorized and rationalized dissemination of research practices effectively politicizes the subjective and transgresses the boundary of what is and is not valid knowledge and credible methods of representation. For me and for other researchers who question representation, this has involved a process of "unlearning of institutionalized language" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 80).

This thesis works within a context that knowledge and what students learn goes beyond the examined texts characteristic of formal Western educational settings. Curriculum is the positional statement of a culture (Banks, 1993; Dei, 2000), signifying what that culture places importance on as a social group. Equally important is what is left out, denied or marginalized in the curriculum. Exclusion pertaining to a specific and unique perspective of the world equates to the denial of the identity of those aligned with that particular position and perhaps a rejection and disillusionment of the student in respect to the education system itself (Dei, 1996), when the student does not see his/her identity, image and experiences reflected and valued in the institutions of education.

This thesis represents a two-year chapter of my life that is now closed. What I have discovered will continue to inform my future studies. Particularly important to my own learning has been the examination of the place and space I occupy in my own research. I feel a heightened awareness of how my experiences and life positions influence and affect my standpoint, and my ability to observe and make knowledge claims.

It has been my honour to apprentice the work of and under the leadership of respected and established researchers whose work has informed and stimulated parts of this study. It was the trailblazing work of Minh-ha (1989) and Mishler (1999) that originally allowed, through example, the arts-based approach of this study. In the most modest way, this study humbly joins the ranks of past and current researchers working on the margins (Fine, 1994). Optimistically, I envision this study will act as an example that informs and inspires future scholars and graduate students in pursuit of alternative ways of knowing and questioning traditional knowledge claims.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

IMMIGRATION

Please describe your experience of immigrating to Canada.

What were your first impressions of Canadian culture and life? How did they compare to your expectations before your arrival?

What were the most memorable similarities/differences about these two cultures?

Have you been back to your country since? What do you remember most about the experience of returning?

Do you consider yourself to be Canadian or (national identity of participant)?

Can you imagine and describe what your life would be like if you had not immigrated to Canada?

Where is home now?

WOMAN

Tell me about your life experiences as a woman. In Canada and in (nation of origin)?

Can you compare the different ways women are thought of and/or treated in Canada and (nation of origin)?

What do you think one culture would say about the women of the other culture?

How did/does being a woman influence your life and your experiences?

How did your mother influence your life?

Do you feel that you have surpassed your parents in knowledge (ability to guide you through life)?

GRADUATE STUDENT

Tell me about your most intense experiences as a graduate student at the University of Windsor.

How does being an immigrant affect your graduate studies?

How does being an immigrant affect your career choice?

How does the fact that you are a woman affect your studies?

How does being a woman affect your career choice?

SONG

Have you thought about what song you are going to sing?

Can you sing the song?

Why did you choose that song in particular?

What's the significance of the song you have chosen?

CONCLUSION

Do you have anything that you'd like to add?

Thank you for your participation.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Tanya Demjanenko was born in 1979 in Dracevo, Skopje, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. She completed her Combined Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in history and comparative literature at the University of Western Ontario in 2001, followed by a Bachelor of Education in 2003. Prior to enrolling in the Masters of Education program at the University of Windsor, Tanya worked as a special education teacher in the Toronto District School Board between 2005 and 2009. As an immigrant from Former Yugoslavia, Tanya's arrival and acculturation to Canada inspired this thesis.