Exploring the constitution of Canadian-born working-class women's subjectivities in higher education through Collective Biography

by

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Abstract

This thesis takes up a gender and class focus to explore the following research questions: What does it mean to be a working-class woman in higher education in Canada? How are working-class women's sense of self shaped in the higher education milieu? I explore these questions through feminist poststructural theory and the feminist methodology of collective biography (Gannon & Davies, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014). Through an analysis of memory stories written by six working-class women, including myself, about our experiences in university, I show how dominant discourses around smartness, contemporary femininity, neoliberalism, race, geographical differences, value, and respectability, and the affective responses produced by these discourses intersect with gender and working-class identity to produce particular subjectivities. I also explore how these discourses play out in the psychic and relational realms, informing the subject positions assumed by working-class women in higher education. My analysis reveals that Canadian-born working-class women take up a range of subject positions in university, including ones that reflect and resist the dominant middle-class discourses found within the discursive field of the university.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to working-class women who have attended or will attend university.

You don't need to save her
Or teach her to behave
Just let her arms unwind
Ever-changing and undefined
She's a river
-Patty Griffin, River, 2019

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Chapter One - Introduction

The Collective

I am waiting for the women to arrive on the evening of our first writing workshop. This is my first attempt at conducting my own research with participants I recruited myself, and I am concerned they have forgotten about our scheduled meeting or have been consumed with more important aspects of life and can no longer attend. I have no reason to believe they will not show up; however, the worries of a novice researcher are not easily quelled. I have arrived at the Meadows, the stately old home behind the main buildings on the Mount Saint Vincent University campus in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the selected location of our workshops, an hour early. This allows me time to transform the space into a personalized meeting spot. I want the Meadows, which was originally built as a residence for the University President, but only ever used for campus engagements, to feel like home for my participants. We will be spending a lot of time here.

It is March 23, 2018 and although winter has not been harsh this year, the Meadows is cold and creaky. I adjust the thermostat and move from the kitchen to the dining room to the living room, ensuring the coffee and tea is on, strategically placing vegetable and fruit platters and bowls of candy on every table I can see. The notebooks I purchased for our writing sit on the dining room table, waiting to be picked up and scribbled in. I decorate the living room with texts from which I selected the readings that will inform the writing we will do together over the next three months.

We are gathering, me included, to write about our memories of being Canadian working-class women in higher education using a methodology called Collective Biography (CB). To jog

our memories and begin discussions, we will read stories written by women from working-class backgrounds who have attended university. I want the books to be available for participants so they can see the wide array of writing done by women who share similar backgrounds with us: works by Renny Christopher (2009), bell hooks (1989; 2000), Michelle Tea (2003), and Janet Zandy (1990; 1994). These books appear inviting on the coffee and end tables, like they wish to be picked up and cracked open, setting free perspectives on an arguably overlooked topic in Canadian higher education: social class. I finish preparing for the workshop and hope the participants will soon arrive. While waiting, I reflect on how unexpected and important it is that I am writing my thesis on working-class women in higher education and how I fit within my research[1].

~

The first time I heard the term "working class" was probably as an undergraduate student nearly two decades ago. When I became aware of it, I was so steeped in prevalent discourses of equality, meritocracy and middle-class existence, that it was not a term that sparked even a flicker of recognition in me and least of all, interest. Coming from a white, rural Nova Scotian settler family, my understanding of social class in Canada was from an economic standpoint and the fact that my father's annual income was too much for his children to qualify for student loans, while a significant source of anxiety, cemented a long-held belief that we were a part of the middle class that politicians droned on about.

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[1] Reflexivity is an important aspect of Feminist research. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) define reflexivity in general terms as "attempting to make explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process" (p. 118). Acknowledging the social location of the researcher is an element of reflexive research.

By the time my oldest sister was in high school in the early 1990's, human capital theory[2] had pervaded the land, more women were attending college and university, and it seemed like in order to get a job and have a "good middle-class life" in a changing society, higher education was a necessity. I was still in elementary school when I sat with the rest of my family in the stuffy gymnasium at our local high school to watch my sister graduate. I remember very little about the occasion, except for the Reba McEntire song (written by Longacre, S. & Giles, R., 1992) that played as my sister and her classmates paraded out of the room in their white and blue caps and gowns:

> *Is there a life out there*
> *So much she hasn't done*
> *Is there a life beyond her family and her home*
> *She's done what she should*
> *Should she do what she dares*
> *She doesn't want to leave*
> *She's just wonderin*
> *Is there a life out there*

I am certain my parents were wondering what awaited my sister – she was off to university that fall, thanks in part to a higher education award from Imperial Oil, my father's employer. University was a landscape with which neither of my parents were familiar. After completing high school, my mom worked for the phone company, Maritime Tel &Tel, where she was a receptionist and then issued phone numbers to business customers, until my oldest sister was born. Her work life thereafter was mostly situated in the field of mothering and unpaid domestic labour. My dad got a job at the oil refinery, farmed beef cattle, and cut logs for local lumber

[2] Gomme & Micucci (1999) note that Human Capital theory, the idea that investing in human resources was just as important as investing in technological development, was a contributing factor in the development of mass postsecondary education in Canada. Western countries, who had fallen behind the Soviet Union in technological developments in the late1950's, used education as a strategy to try and catch up to their rival.

mills. Money was never overflowing, but we always had what we needed, and we could afford a little more, like family vacations to Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and the New England states.

In the summer between grade 7 and 8, my parents took me and my brother to see the Boston Red Sox play at Fenway Park. We visited the Hardrock Café and Cheers, famous from the television show we all knew and loved. There was something about that theme song... "*Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came*" (Portnoy & Angelo, 1982) that stuck in our heads and caused us to sing along every time we heard it and long after that too. Probably because it reminded us of where we came from, a place where everybody knew us, and we knew them.

On that trip, we took the subway to the ballpark, ate Fenway Franks from the nosebleed section, and did the wave with all the other fans and I loved every second of it. I can still smell the onions from those hotdogs and the spilt beer from the guys next to us. At school in September, I told my friends about Boston. They seemed impressed by my "worldly" adventure. One remarked that she had *never even* been to Halifax, our capital city, which was only an hour away from where we lived.

Some people in my hometown thought my family was rich and that made me angry. I knew we were far from rich, but in many ways, I tried to live up to this depiction of us. I toiled in strawberry fields in the summers, earning a quarter for every box I picked, to buy brand name back-to-school clothes that, according to some students in my school, looked more like what someone from the city would wear. No one at my school was surprised when I applied to

university. I am sure they were equally unaffected when it was announced that I won a Presidential entrance scholarship. This was just one more thing that signified my richness.

It was in this context of not talking directly about social class and one of being told by others that my family was rich, and by politicians that our annual family income made us middle class that I came to know myself as anything but working class even though my working-class roots were all around me, in plain sight.

My nanny was the “yard sale lady.” Widowed in her early twenties, she raised my mom and my aunts and uncle on a widow’s allowance. Later, she worked at the Sears Department Store and at the airport. She drove a little old car and she loved bingo and scratch tickets. She smoked a pack of cigarettes a day until the night before her aortic aneurism surgery in her 60’s; after that, she never touched them again. Nanny was a great poet and her writing was mostly about nature and the little animals that would stop by her house unannounced, but clearly more than welcome. She could make a gourmet meal that would feed many mouths out of macaroni, canned tomatoes, and fried hamburger. Her ginger cookies were blissful, always splattered with bright sprinkles, as if Jackson Pollock may have splashed them there himself. Nanny was tough and knew how to survive. In her older age, she held yard sales every day, weather permitting, selling things that people gave her to sell, like old clothes, furniture, books, and electronics. She wore a big straw hat and was good at wheeling and dealing. I used to think Nan loved talking to people and that is why she had an eternal yard sale. I see now that it gave her some money to make ends meet.

When I feel more inadequate than usual in the professional and academic worlds I currently inhabit, I think about a different time. I am nine years old. It is summer and I am

wearing tattered jean shorts that I have made myself and a t-shirt with my sleeves rolled up. My hair is cut short and everyone who does not know me during this time in my life mistakes me for a boy. This infuriates me, but I know everyone in this memory, and they know me. We are family. My mom is driving the truck – old Country and Western songs hum from the speakers – my dad is standing in the back, and my siblings and I are throwing bales of hay up to him to stack in the cargo bed. A few neighbours have joined in to help. It is evening and the sun is setting over the sprawling field. Hay bales are stretched for what seems like miles and they look like giant Lego pieces. If we are quick, we can get it all in. We work diligently together, talking, laughing, and slinging bales so the cows will have something to eat that winter. Mom froze water in 2-litre pop bottles, and we drink from those when we are thirsty. It is best to get to the bottle first so you are not the one who tips it up to your lips, only to feel the sharp end of the ice block inside, but no droplets of water. I see my dad chewing on a strand of hay, so I do it too. It tastes sweet. I am proud to be helping. I feel comfortable in this memory. I wish to be there again.

I know my story of not recognizing my working-class background is not unique in Canada, where perhaps the most dominant discussions connected to class are focused on economic inequalities between regions, rather than people. I came to understand my working-class subjectivity through my experience in the university where I studied and now work. I realized early that I did not feel entirely at home in academia, but I did not let on to anyone that this was my experience. When I felt excluded from class discussions, was mocked for not looking professional enough for my academic program, thought I was stupid for not having read all of the novels we talked about in my English courses and for not knowing the difference between right and left wing politics, I chalked that up to personal stupidity and began a quest to "get smarter", to attempt the impossible and exhausting task of knowing everything. I thought

everyone at the university knew everything except me. It did not occur to me that my rural, working-class background was not valued or acknowledged in the university and that was the culprit for my feelings of inadequacy.

A few years after graduation, I fell into a job as an academic advisor at my alma matter, where I am also completing this Master's degree. Most students who attend this university are women, many who are first-generation students[3]. Their stories of misfitting sparked a recognition in me and a curiosity about how their feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and imposter syndrome in higher education are linked to social class and gender. However, it wasn't until my professor suggested that I read the work of scholars such as Carolyn Steedman (1989), Valerie Walkerdine (2014), and Wendy Luttrell (1989), to name a few, that I was able to say that I come from a working-class background. These scholars write about their own and other's experiences being working-class women in education and reading their work helped me to identify with this aspect of myself.

~

The front door opens abruptly and closes with a thud, snapping me out of my reflective thoughts. I am so happy and relieved to see Anne[4], standing in the foyer and we embrace at first sight. Anne grew up in Alberta and moved to Nova Scotia to attend university, which is where we met. Over 10 years earlier, we saw each other every Tuesday night in our undergraduate Shakespeare class. Our professor assigned us to a group that worked together all semester. Both

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[3] This concept refers to students whose parents did not obtain postsecondary education. Many first-generation students are also from working-class backgrounds.

[4] Pseudonyms are used to ensure participant confidentiality.

in our early twenties at the time, we connected immediately and extended our friendship beyond the course. With her dry, quick wit, Anne rivalled Shakespeare's use of humour devices, and helped make the course an even more pleasant experience for me. Now, as I hang up her jacket, she tells me she is working on her second Master's degree.

Barb is next to arrive at the Meadows. I welcome her into the living room, and she takes a seat across from Anne. They met once before and are vaguely familiar with each other. *Only in Halifax*, I muse to myself. It is a tiny city. They chat about the event that brought them together for an evening a few years ago. Barb is my former colleague. She is younger than me; however, our rural Nova Scotia connection made us fast friends. I could tell Barb about going to stack wood at my parents' place on the weekends and we could carry on a grand conversation about how to tier wood so it won't fall over. Barb is proud of her practical take on the world. She transferred to university from a community college, a more affordable option for obtaining a baccalaureate degree. She does not think twice about declaring that she completed an undergraduate and graduate degree in three years, saving her time and money.

While Barb and Anne make their way to the kitchen for some tea, I greet Julia at the door. She is stylish, but without pretence. I admire the turquoise sweater she is wearing and wonder if that colour would suit me. *"This place looks lovely,"* Julia remarks, taking a moment to admire the Meadows. *"What a great space for writing! So many little nooks and cozy spaces."* I have been exchanging emails with Julia leading up to today. I know she is looking forward to the chance to talk and write about being working class in university. She was the first person to respond to my call for participants. Recently, Julia graduated from the same Master's program I am completing. We took a course together and I learned during that time that Julia grew up in Ontario and her higher education journey started in her late thirties and has continued into her

sixties. I loved hearing Julia talk in class – she is intelligent, has an extensive vocabulary, and speaks her mind. I look forward to her contributions to our discussions.

Julia, Anne, and Barb waste no time getting to know each other. Though I expected some awkward silences between participants at the start, I am relieved that there seems to be an excitement amongst the group to meet new people. Even when Claudia joins us, and the group expands, the Meadows is alive with chatter and laughter. Claudia is a fellow Maritimer[5] and graduate student. She is an avid writer and the most politically oriented of our collective when it comes to social class. She is knowledgeable about Marxist theory and often reads books about class. *"Have you read Hillbilly Elegy, yet?"* she asks me when she arrives. *"I have it on my bookshelf,"* I assure her. The first time I heard about Antonio Gramsci and the concept of hegemony, was from Claudia in one of our classes. I could have easily been intimidated by her, but she was never intimidating; rather, thought-provoking.

I am expecting one more participant to arrive; however, it is 6:30 pm and time to start. We gather in comfortable chairs in the living room with plates of vegetables and fruit and I am about to begin the session when the door opens, and the final participant arrives. Ashanti can hear us talking in the living room and tip toes in to join us. "*Welcome to our Collective Biography workshop!"* I exclaim. "*You're just in time for introductions.*" Ashanti is the only participant I have not met before. She does not know anyone else in the group either. She is quiet and stays that way throughout the evening. She is attempting to figure out the group and decide if she wants to be a part of it and share her memories about being working class in university. Ashanti is a woman of African descent and a member of the Blackfoot Nation and knows that

[5] Maritimer is a term used to describe a person who is from the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Nova, Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

many of her experiences will differ from the rest of us, who are white. I later learn that Ashanti sat in her car for several minutes before deciding to come into the workshop. She explained to me that she wondered if she should come in or not because she knows she is often going to be the only black person in the room at these types of events and that can be daunting. She shared that she was glad she came in and felt welcome in the group (Ashanti, Personal Communication, March 24, 2018).

As the other participants greet Ashanti, I look around the room at our collective. I am honoured that they saw value in my thesis topic and want to participate in this unique and interesting methodology of CB. Their presence tells me that an exploration of being a Canadian working-class woman in higher education is a worthy topic. I feel energized by their company and excited for the reading, writing, and discussion that is yet to come. I take a deep breath and we begin the process that will generate the memory stories I will analyze in this thesis.

Working-Class Women in Higher Education: Subjectivity Worth Exploring

Today, women's participation in higher education in Canada overall has surpassed that of men (Ferguson, 2016). This increase is significant; however, it must not be construed as indication that women no longer face educational barriers or that research on women's experiences in higher education is unimportant. To say we have made it, and have it made in education would be shortsighted and to cave to an ethos of "postfeminism"[6]. Analyses of women's participation in higher education allows us to avoid taking for granted the difficult and important work of first and second wave feminists who fought for women to be able to attend

[6] Pomerantz and Raby (2011) note that postfeminism suggests that "gendered oppressions that once plagued the school, the workplace, the home, and the wider social world have evaporated, and we are now living in an age of equality, making feminism irrelevant" (p. 549).

university. It allows us to expose inequities that impact women who have not only gained access to the university, but whose bodies and minds have become intertwined with it and changed by it forever. What I want to accomplish with my thesis, is to open a particular conversation about women's participation in higher education - one that explores what it means to be a working-class woman in university in Canada. This is significant because there is currently a gap in the Canadian higher education literature on the experiences of working-class women in university. While limited research has been conducted on working-class students overall, it appears as though none has taken up gender as a focus.

Also, just as more women overall are attending university than ever before in Canada, so too are more students from working-class backgrounds, although at a lesser rate than their middle-class peers (Lambert et al., 2001). Interestingly, as I write this thesis, Saint Francis Xavier University (St. FX.), a distinguished university in Nova Scotia, recently responded to criticism over a quote that was prominently displayed in its newly opened Mulroney Hall building, named after former Prime Minister of Canada and St. FX. alumnus, Brian Mulroney. The quote reads: *"The only way out of a paper mill town is through a university door."* These words were uttered to Mulroney in the 1950's by his father who worked in a paper mill. The alumna[7] who was the first to publicly criticize the University for its choice of quote indicated that although these words may have been spoken by a father who wanted a "better life" for his son, not all who view the quote will have this context through which to interpret it, including the students who may themselves, or have family members, who work at one of the two nearby

[7] The term alumna refers to a female graduate of an educational institution, while alumnus refers to a male graduate.

paper mills in the province[8]. Furthermore, she adds that the quote “devalues tradespeople, leaves an impression that paper mill towns are impoverished and embarrassing, and encourages people to leave their home communities” (Patil, 2019).

In response to the criticism, St. FX. President, Kevin Wamsley (2019), apologized, promised a formal review of the issue[9], and offered a personal account of his own rural, working-class roots, on the University’s Facebook page. He notes that his father wanted him to have the chance to attend university, something he did not have an opportunity to do. Wamsley states: “It didn't mean I was going to be better than him or that I was encouraged to 'escape' the town; rather, it was a pathway of opportunity that he supported for me.” Wamsley’s response is written with good intentions; however, his personalized attempt to protect the perspective presented in the Mulroney quote ignores the painful cultural and intellectual separation from family members and friends that working-class students can experience when they leave home for university. It also ignores the counternarrative that working-class students may face when they decide to pursue university education – that they have somehow become too big for their britches and are traitors to their working-class families, communities, and culture. The issue is neither one of encouraging working-class people to obtain higher education or validating the lives lived by working-class people who do not access higher education for a multitude of

[8] In January 2020, one of the neighbouring pulp mills, Northern Pulp, closed. The closure was a result of longstanding environmental issues, including environmental racism impacting the Pictou Landing First Nation, and the refusal of the Nova Scotia government to grant an extension to Northern Pulp regarding plans to stop polluting the nearby harbour (Gorman, 2019). Northern Pulp’s closure leaves one operational pulp mill in the province.

[9] “As an institution, we are accountable to all of our constituents and I thank you for raising these concerns. I will be reviewing this issue with our Executive Council shortly” (Wamsley, 2019).

reasons, it is one of suggesting that pursuing one of these pathways over the other makes one a more valuable human being.

When spoken in the mid-Twentieth Century, Mulroney's father's quote said something about the lack of value attributed to the working class and the worth assigned to the university educated in Canadian society. When posted on a placard in a university building in 2019, it does the same. The ideas that compelled Mulroney's father to say those words are still in circulation and led to the decision to mount them on the wall of a building at St. FX. University. We do not often acknowledge the existence of social class in Canada or explore its nuanced meaning and impacts; however, it is times like this - times that provoke public reactions of fierce protection of working-class backgrounds (though not often articulated as such) and staunch defenses of the opportunities for "expanding one's mind", "bettering one's life", and "saving oneself from a life of hardship" that university affords - that highlight just how subtle and embedded class issues are in the lives of Canadians and how complex this interaction becomes in the context of higher education.

My thesis explores the following research questions: What does it mean to be a working-class woman in higher education in Canada? How are working-class women's subjectivities constituted in the higher education milieu? To answer these questions, I employ the methodology of Collective Biography (CB), which aims to identify the discursive and affective processes by which subjects are made social. This approach acknowledges that subjectivities are not fixed and are produced through discourses. Through an analysis of memory stories written during CB workshops, I examine how dominant discourses of smartness, contemporary femininity, race, neoliberalism, geographical differences, value, and respectability, and the affective responses produced by these discourses intersect with working-class identity to shape the subjectivities of

working-class women in higher education and inform the subject positions they take up in university. My analysis includes an exploration of the psychic and relational processes experienced by working-class women in university and how these processes are influenced by dominant discourses and contribute to the shaping of subjectivities and the construction of class categories.

Unlike some of the Canadian research that exists on working-class students in higher education, I do not investigate working-class women's persistence, or lack thereof, to graduation, nor will I elaborate on how to support working-class women in their pursuit to obtain postsecondary credentials, although my analysis could be insightful in this area. The intent of my research, however, is to explore the shaping of female working-class identity in an environment that has been a highly contested space for marginalized students. My study positions working-class women as knowing and active subjects who recognize that they have been constituted by social constructions of class and its intersections with gender and race, exposing some of the naturalized ideologies that have positioned them in certain ways.

Clarifying Concepts

I want to clarify that the term higher education broadly encompasses formal learning beyond the secondary level such as university, college, and technical programs. In my thesis, however, I use the term interchangeably with university level education as my research is specifically about working-class women's participation in university. Also, I will elaborate on my treatment of the concept of social class. Dominant understandings of class are derived from the theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber (Brym, 2001). Marx identified that class inequality is determined by relationship to the means of production. Those who own the means of production exploit those who exchange their work for wages. Weber extended this perspective to consider a

broader definition of social class that includes consideration of economic, social, and political inequalities. Maintaining the economic foundation established by Marx, the Weberian view of class also accounts for how an individual's life-chances are impacted by their position in the economic hierarchy (Brym, 2001). Also, Sørensen (1994) identifies a "stratum" approach to class analysis and this is reflective of what we understand as socioeconomic status. This approach to social class does not have a theory attached to it explaining how inequality happens and is maintained (as cited in Jensen, 2018, pp. 231-232). My thesis seeks to explore class beyond economic terms and is concerned with psychosocial[10] aspects of class and Bourdieu's (1973;1986) theories of cultural capital and cultural reproduction. In taking this perspective, I hope to show how the material and cultural experiences of working-class women in higher education become a part of our subjectivities.

When I discuss working-class women, I want to acknowledge that we are not a homogenous group. Various socially constructed categories produce different types of working-class identities and this plays out in my thesis. Theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005) encourage a robust examination of the "interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2005, p. 68). Smith (2013) notes:

[10] (a) Frosh (2003) explains that in psychosocial studies the social and the individual are theorized together. This approach draws from disciplines such as "social theory, philosophy of science, linguistics, cultural studies, critical theory, psychoanalysis, and discourse studies". Importantly, a psychosocial approach is informed by poststructural understandings of human subjectivity, which takes up the notion that the subject is not "a pre-given entity, or something to be found through searching; it is rather a site, in which there are criss-crossing lines of force, and out of which that precious feature of human existence, subjectivity, emerges" (p. 1549).

(b) See Walkerdine et al., 2001; Reay, 2005 for examples of how this approach has been employed in studies of working-class women in the United Kingdom.

> While all women are oppressed as women, no movement can claim to speak for *all* women unless it speaks for women who also face the consequences of racism—which place women of color disproportionately in the ranks of the working class and the poor" (para. 21).

Scholarly work has been conducted on the intersection of social class and race and ethnicity. In her study of Mexican-American and white working-class high school girls in California, Bettie (2003) indicates that "being brown or black tends to signify working-class in the United States, given the high correlation between race and class" (p. 162). White working-class girls could "pass" more effortlessly for middle class because "for whites, class does not easily appear encoded on the body (although it certainly can be and often is)" (p. 162). Since class is frequently conflated with race and ethnicity in the US, the Mexican-American girls were tracked into a vocational curriculum by guidance counsellors more often than the white girls because they were assumed to be from low-income families while their white peers were not (p. 162). Bettie (2003) also notes that people from racial/ethnic groups are "more consciously aware of themselves as a community of people because of a common history of colonization and oppression that results from being historically defined as a racial group" (p.161). This is an idea also expressed in bell hooks's (2000) autobiographical work, *Coming to Class Consciousness*. Conversely, white working-class people often experience themselves as "individuals" rather than belonging to a racial/ethnic group. Thus, upward mobility for people from racial and ethnic groups not only means a distancing from individual families, but from their racial/ethnic communities (Bettie, 161).

Additionally, geographical and regional differences are an important consideration in the shaping of working-class identities. Connotations exist around rurality which label those who

live in rural areas as hicks, rednecks, hillbillies, primitive, and anti-intellectual (Corbett, 2006; Isenberg, 2016; Keys & Pini, 2014). Competing discourses tend portray rural working-class people as white and masculine and either a part of the "rural idyll", though which images of European settlers peacefully living and working on the land serve to erase Canada's violent history of colonialism, or as intolerant and backwards; an obstacle to Canada's "progressiveness" (Cairns, 2013). In urban areas, there is an assumption of modernism, middle-classness, and white-collar work. Cities are places that rural working-class kids are told they should want to migrate to get out of their communities (Corbett, 2006). However, perceived undesirable inner-city areas are associated with the working and poverty classes. Interestingly, in the context of research on higher education, the relationship that urban working-class students may have to universities is different than rural working-class students since universities are commonly situated in urban areas and, whether intentionally or not, are inserted into the lives of urban dwellers. Frenette (2004) found that Canadian students were less likely to attend a university if they did not live near one than those who did. It is more likely that urban working-class folks pass universities when going about their daily activities and possibly have even attended community or school events on university campuses. The notion of difference and classed identities will be further explored throughout my thesis.

Preview of Chapters

Chapter Two: Working-Class Women in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I explore the existing literature on working-class women in higher education in terms of geographic location, beginning with Canada, where my research is situated, and branching into the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), where examinations of higher education and working-class women's subjectivities are more prevalent. Themes such as

working-class women's devaluation of their own intellect, "passing" as middle-class, and feelings of guilt and shame emerge from this work.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework: Exploring the Constitution of Subjectivities

The theoretical framework chapter discusses the feminist poststructural theory that guides my analysis. I examine poststructuralist perspectives on discourse, subjectivity, agency, power, and truth to illustrate how subjectivities are constituted through discourse and how regimes of truth established in society, through power relations, place constrictions on agency. Additionally, I briefly explore Bourdieu's concept of habitus alongside of the concept of subjectivity to further explain why I have opted to examine subjectivity in my class analysis. Furthermore, I discuss another of Bourdieu's concepts found throughout my analysis, cultural capital, as a notion that has both material and discursive elements.

Chapter Four: Engaging in the Methodology of Collective Biography

In this chapter, I describe the methodology of Collective Biography (CB) and how it has been taken up by groups of scholars. I then explore how I implemented the methodology for my own research project from the process of establishing the collective, fostering group cohesion, carrying out the writing workshops, and identifying themes for analysis to an examination of group dynamics and a reflection on how CB is a fitting methodology for research on working-class women. This reflection also highlights the important political and therapeutic outcomes experienced by members of the collective.

Chapter Five: Analysis

This chapter has three parts. The first part examines the notion of smartness and how working-class women who attend university are implicated in discourses of smartness. The

second part will examine a range of psychic responses employed by Canadian working-class women in university that result from their encounters with a hostile environment that challenges they ways in which they have come to know themselves. Finally, the third part delves into the how working-class women's sense of self is shaped through relational experiences while participating in university.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Toward a more Inclusive University for Canadian-born Working-Class Women

The conclusion provides a brief summary of the main concepts of this thesis. I suggest that my research helps to fill a gap in Canadian higher education research by placing class and gender at the forefront. I also suggest that by acknowledging the discourses and affective processes that constitute Canadian-born working-class women's subjectivities, we can see how class inequalities are played out and maintained in the university. I propose that this recognition is a step toward making universities more inclusive for Canadian-born working-class women.

Chapter Two - Working-Class Women in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature

Overall, there is a dearth of research about working-class women in Canada. Some studies have focused on the labour of working-class women (Luxton, 2009; Luxton and Corman, 2001; Sangster, 2000); however, in the field of higher education there is a gap in need of bridging. While limited research on the experiences of women in higher education in Canada exists in both historical and contemporary perspectives (Bellamy & Guppy, 1991; McCargar, 2016; The York Stories Collective, 2000), little attention is given to women from the working class. This shortage in research may be partially explained by the fact that postsecondary institutions have only been more “accessible” to working-class women since the latter half of the Twentieth Century and because social class as a specific point of analysis has not been widely pursued by Canadian academics. Adult education scholar, Tom Nesbit (2005) explores the lack of discourse on social class in the field of Canadian adult education and notes “ideologies of individualism, egalitarianism, and meritocratic achievement have been more powerful forces than class solidarity” (p.9). In a climate where neoliberal ideologies have taken hold, a lack of educational attainment is attributed to low intelligence and personal failure rather than the social inequality that stems from class relations. In this chapter, I explore the existing literature on working-class women in higher education based on geographic locations, beginning with Canada, where my research is situated, and branching into the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), where examinations of higher education and working-class women’s subjectivities are more prevalent.

Canada

In some Canadian higher education research, issues of social class are discussed in the context of first-generation students' experiences in postsecondary institutions (Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Grayson; 1997; Grayson, 2011; Lane & Taber, 2012; Lehmann, 2007). Grayson (1997) finds that first-generation students are at a disadvantage compared to students with at least one parent who attended university when it comes to GPA and involvement in campus activities. Lehmann (2007) notes that Canadian first-generation students are more likely to drop out of university than their peers who have parents with postsecondary experience and discusses the fact that integrating into university life is a major issue for first-generation postsecondary students. In Lehmann's (2007) study, first-generation students, even though they may have been achieving good grades, described feelings of not fitting in at university. This contrasts with the non-first-generation students who did not speak about social awkwardness or question the value of being at university (p. 99). These findings suggest that cultural capital[11] plays a role in students' educational attainment, and when students do not possess the dominant cultural capital that is favoured in universities, the result is a feeling of inadequacy, which commonly translates into a discontinuation of studies. Lehmann (2007) also addresses the notion of stigma management as a way that students from working-class backgrounds succeed in an elite academic environment. This idea comes from a study by Granfield (1991) in which successful working-class students mimicked their middle-class peers' dress, manners of speech, and career backings, while downplaying their social class backgrounds (as cited in Lehmann, 2007, 92). Additionally, Lehmann (2007) cites another study done by Jackson and Marsden (1962), which

[11] Cultural capital refers to "a form of value associated with culturally authorized tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills, and awards." (Webb et al., 2002, p. x).

concluded "attaining higher levels of education required working-class students to completely reorient how they viewed the world and in many cases reject and devalue their working-class background" (p.92). Lehmann (2009; 2012 a; 2012 b; 2013) focuses widely on working-class students in higher education in his studies, though gender is not a point of analysis. In one study, Lehmann (2013) discusses the 'hidden injuries' of habitus[12] transformation for working-class university students. Although the students in his research noted their expansion of knowledge, increasing cultural capital, and development of new dispositions and tastes as positive, they also expressed both allegiance and contempt for their working-class roots and their friends and family members who remained in the working class. They came to see their new knowledge as superior to that of their old friends and family. Lehmann (2013) notes that even with successful completion of university and upward mobility, the feeling of being caught between two worlds continues to impact those who are from working-class backgrounds.

Additionally, Lane and Taber (2012) make some important findings in their research that support the notion that first-generation students experience disadvantages in education systems because they do not possess privileged cultural capital. They found the students in their study faced obstacles, but overcame these obstacles by either conforming to the dominant cultural expectations or using their own cultural capital to "create new ways of being academically successful within the education system" (p. 13). For example, one of the students in the study discussed her high school guidance counsellor's perception that she should pursue a college pathway because she was not suited for university. The student went on to research postsecondary institutions on her own instead of "being streamed at a young age" (Lane &

[12] Habitus refers to the ways in which individuals develop attitudes and dispositions and how people engage in practices (Webb et al., 2014, p. xii).

Taber, 2012, p. 8). The students in Lane and Taber's (2012) study also demonstrated how they conformed to the dominant cultural capital through their discussions about increasing their social capital to make use of their educational qualifications and set themselves apart from their peers. One student responded that just having a degree is not good enough but "it's who you know…it's to have good references…when you're applying for a job" (p. 10). This student clearly demonstrates an understanding of privileged cultural capital, its connection to social capital, and the role it plays in career success. Interestingly, all the participants in Lane and Taber's (2012) study are women; however, the researchers did not purposely seek all female participants and they do not employ a feminist analysis. It should also be noted that a Canadian study of working-class postsecondary students that focuses specifically on women and employs a feminist analysis could not be found. However, some autobiographical work that is evocative of working-class women's experiences (the authors do not explicitly identify as working class, but provide information that suggests their class positioning) does exist (The York Stories Collective, 2000; MacIntyre, B., 2000). This finding combined with the knowledge that higher education institutions have a history that includes the exclusion of women and working-class people, highlights the need for more research in this area, particularly on the role of class in shaping subjectivity.

United States

This absence of social class analysis in the Canadian higher education literature stands in stark contrast to a rather robust and growing body of literature on the topic produced in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). Higher Education research in the US often examines social class through the context of first-generation student experience (Hinz, 2016; Orbe, 2004; Pascarella et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2016; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Stieha, 2010;

Stuber, 2011) and more literature can be found on working-class women in higher education than in Canada. For example, Wentworth and Peterson (2001) explore identity development in older adult first-generation college women who are all from working-class backgrounds. The women in this study were attending a four-year, private liberal arts college in New England that typically attracts middle- and upper-class students. The themes that emerge from the study include the notion that other people play a significant role in offering alternatives to the women's current identity (a community college instructor has the potential to encourage a student to apply to and see themselves at a four-year college) and working-class women often experience a renegotiation of identity while attending a four-year college. While the authors of this study recognize that identities can change, there seems to be an implication that the women in the study inhabit pre-existing identity categories. Additionally, while the study focuses on women's identity development, it does not contain a strong feminist analysis.

Wendy Luttrell (1989; 1997) employs a feminist analysis in her examination of how working-class women are at a disadvantage in the American education system. In *School Smart and Motherwise: Working-class Women's Identity and Schooling*, Luttrell (1997) examines the lives of white and black working-class women who dropped out of school and are pursuing basic adult education programs. Using the life stories of her participants, Luttrell (1997) demonstrates that school plays a crucial role in constituting working-class women's identity and their sense of self-worth. The women in this study experienced exclusion and feelings of difference and illegitimacy at school, ultimately contributing to the women's belief that they were unworthy students. Luttrell (1997) uses the concept of "splitting" to describe the "psychological, cultural, and institutional forces that divide objects, people, ideas, and feelings into oppositions in which one side is de-valued and the other is idealized" (p. 9). This concept of splitting shows how

schools split off knowledge, pitting “common sense” ways of knowing (also associated with the knowledge of mothering), which the working-class women embraced, against the book knowledge privileged in schools. This splitting also results in the division of students from one another with some being labeled teacher’s pets and others who are not. Interestingly, Luttrell (1997) points out that the women in this study used their identification with common sense knowledge as a way of organizing themselves and defending themselves against others. Because of the ways school splits knowledge and students, the working-class women came to believe that intellect divided people and was the reason for their class location. This perspective conceals the fact that class relations divide people and uphold inequality (p. 28). Lutrell (1997) makes important distinctions between how the black and white women viewed common sense knowledge. While both groups valued this type of knowledge, the black women saw common sense knowledge as absolutely necessary for surviving and resisting racism in white America. This “real intelligence”,

> is collective, learned through everyday interactions *within* black communities and *against* white people’s racism. This knowledge is a particular, not universal, kind in that one must be black to have real intelligence about the world of white people who, whether they are understood to be fearful, “ignorant”, or racist, can do irreparable damage. (p.34-35)

Additionally, there were differences in the ways the women dealt with the symbolic violence they experienced in school. The white women who attended an urban school with the mission of preparing the students for working-class jobs were streamed in the “commercial track” whether they wished to be there or not. The white women did not look up to their middle-class, white, female teachers and did not have the most important aspects of their lives legitimated by their

schooling. The black women who attended a racially segregated rural school with the goal of "racial uplift" (promoting white, middle-class lifestyles as the ideal) saw their school as a part of their community and family life, unlike the white women, and did look up to some of their black, middle-class female teachers. Nonetheless, they were made to feel unworthy of being educated and streamed toward domestic labour, which they blamed on white society and not their school (p. 115). Luttrell (1997) finds that in their responses to why they had not achieved the "American Dream", the white women spoke about individually rejecting upward mobility. Conversely, the black women highlighted that they, as members of a racial group, had been rejected (p. 117). One might also consider Luttrell's (1997) findings from a geographical perspective in that the working-class identities of the white, urban, women and the black, rural, women were partially constituted by their geographical placement.

Although Luttrell's (1997) study was with women in basic adult education programs and their recollections of their earlier school experiences, I propose that her findings are transferrable to the higher education setting given universities are complicit in reproducing class inequalities due to their privileging of cultural capital of the middle and upper classes. Luttrell's (1997) work plants a seed for further research on working-class women in education, particularly on "how selves and social identities are formed at both the personal and cultural level" (p. 119). It is through this type of exploration that we can learn how power relations go unchallenged and the possibilities for challenging them.

Other noteworthy research has been conducted in the US about working-class women in higher education, including autobiographical writing. In Michelle Tea's (2003) anthology *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing up Working Class*, working-class women's uncertain relationship with higher education is addressed in the stories "Steal Away" by Dorothy

Allison and "Scholarship Baby" by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2003). Allison (2003) survives the poverty and alienation of university by stealing food and material possessions, including books from her professor's office, which she would read and return with her favourite parts underlined. This professor was somewhat intrigued by Allison, particularly because she was from a poor family, an example of the middle-class gaze that functions to "other" people from the working-class (Lawler, 1999). There is a confident resistance throughout Allison's story – she plays the game of university and does what she needs to do to graduate, but never loses touch with her working-class background, and perhaps steals as much from the University as it steals from her. This is demonstrated at the end of Allison's piece when she reveals that she stole the commemorative roses on the university's welcome sign after her graduation. She gives the roses to her mother who was attending her graduation and notes "it was the best moment I'd had in four years" (p. 20). Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2003) story is as much about her relationship with her mother and her mother's working-class background and the expectations placed on her from her mother as it is about her experience with higher education. As some of the literature on working-class women reveals, there is often a complex, paradoxical relationship between working-class mothers and their daughters (Hey & George, 2013; hooks, 1989; Luttrell, 1997; Steedman, 1986; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Although Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2003) does not meet the expectations of a middle-class life working in law or medicine that her mother envisioned for her (she gets a university degree, becomes an activist, and works for a non-profit organization) she writes a message for her mom:

> I want to tell my mom there are other options, between beauty and assimilation, failing and being shit. That life don't give us a lot of choices, but the choices are bigger than she thought. Not 'cause this is a land of opportunity, but this is a land of hustle, chaos, and a

> free market that constantly mutates what it allows. I'll get my words in print but I won't always use the right accent to stay there. (p. 205)

As in Allison's story, there is resistance in Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2003) narrative. This could be read as resistance is to the dominant discourses of success and to succumbing to the often painful self-rejection compulsory for upward mobility.

Also notable in the American literature is the body of autobiographic writing by working-class women who become academics. Feminist scholar, bell hooks (1989; 2000), writes about being a black, working-class, female university student and professor. hooks (1989) discusses the racism she experienced in university where being black and working class signified being not smart enough and not having values. She was constantly told by faculty and other students that she did not belong and notes the painful and necessary separation of herself and students like her from their working-class backgrounds:

> Slowly I began to understand fully that there was no place in academe for folks from working-class backgrounds who did not wish to leave the past behind. That was the price of the ticket. Poor students would be welcome at the best institutions of higher learning only if they were willing to surrender memory, to forget the past and claim the assimilated present as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality. (p. 36-37)

In "Class Quartet", Zandy (1990) writes about her experience as a freshman in teacher's college where she attends a Tea for Dean's List students and becomes confused by all of the accouterments associated with the event, including the many silver pots and cups and saucers. She can't tell the difference between the tea and coffee until someone assists her. She then spills tea on herself. Her social class is impossible to hide against the elegant backdrop of this elite

academic function. Zandy (1990) goes on to describe attending an academic conference for professors of English Literature. She is an adjunct professor who she claims “passes” as an academic. She notes that she has “come to see if I am smart enough to be here” (p. 85). Although Zandy is an academic, she still feels like an imposter, as if she is somewhere she does not belong. In *A Carpenter’s Daughter: A Working-Class Woman in Higher Education,* Renny Christopher (2009) details her life as a working-class woman who moves through the ranks of education to become a professor, always feeling like she does not belong. Christopher (2009) describes the unpreparedness she faced as an undergraduate student at Mills College where professors assumed she was too lazy to proofread her work instead of unaware of how to correct her punctuation and where her working-class clothes made her stand out in a sea of middle-class students. Christopher’s (2009) account of her graduate school experience further reveals the struggle that working-class women in education feel between remaining connected to their working-class roots and the university’s expectation that they will not. In *This Fine Place So Far from Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, several women similarly write about feeling like imposters in the academy (Dews & Law, 1995). Also, Thiel (2016) employs feminist new materialist analysis in the writing of her authoethnograpy. The new materialist notions of vibrant matter and intra-action (the assemblage of many bodies, including social, political, cultural, and material in a particular instant that is generative and transformative) and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of multiplicity help Thiel (2016) examine how her working-class and academic selves come together in a constant state of becoming, creating ways for her and other working-class women in higher education to resist the things that try to silence them in academia. What is so intriguing and important about the work of these women who write autobiographically and Luttrell (1997) is that they are from working-class backgrounds and seek

to recognize a "complicated psychology" (Steedman, 1987, p. 12) for themselves and for other working-class women. This challenges the notion of psychological simplicity that has been attributed to working-class people by middle-class scholars.

United Kingdom

In the UK, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and capitalism, there is no shortage of research on social class and gender and education. Many working-class women academics (Evans, 2009; Hey, 2006; Hey & George, 2013; Lawler, 1999, Loveday, 2016; Lucey et al., 2003; Reay, 1998, 2003, Skeggs, 1997; Tett, 2000; Walkerdine et al., 2001) have contributed to a significant and varied body of research on the topic of working-class women in higher education. These studies range from how working-class girls make decisions about university to how working-class women embody shame associated with their class positioning. Evans (2009) examines the way in which working-class girls structure their aspirations about higher education in the face of material inequality and the lack of cultural capital privileged in higher education. She finds that many working-class girls make decisions about higher education based on family ties and loyalty and practical attitudes toward university education, such as gaining skills to enter caring roles or skills that will be mutually beneficial for themselves and their families. Interestingly, Evans's (2009) findings that working-class girls want to study at universities close to home because of family ties challenges the negative depictions of working-class families as "chaotic and disordered" (p. 345). Tett's (2000) study of gendered experiences of working-class students in higher education similarly reveals that family obligations and potential romantic relationships structured the female participants' experience of higher education.

Perhaps of more relevance to my study is the work of academics who employ a psychosocial and feminist poststructural orientation in their research. Much of this work

examines the ways in which the subjectivities of working-class women are produced in the context of neoliberalism and higher education. In *Growing Up Girl*, Walkerdine et al. (2001) use statements collected in interviews with their research participants to explore the discursively produced subjectivities of working-class and middle-class girls and women in Britain, highlighting the material and psychological effects of naturalized neoliberal discourses. Walkerdine et al. (2001) note that a deficit model is often applied to working-class families, with much attention focusing on the link between children's educational attainment and family interaction. Thus, working-class parents are blamed for their children's lack of educational achievement rather than the inequalities produced by class relations. Walkerdine et al. (2001) demonstrate that one of the central reasons for the working-class women's educational success is not necessarily connected to their parents' behavior but to the notion that their parents want them to do better than they have done (p. 157). Although this is the case, some of the participants in the study reveal that they experienced guilt about having educational opportunities their parents did not have and that in some cases their parents were supporting something that could have the unexpected consequence of pushing them apart both materially and intellectually (p. 161). Some of the working-class girls selected universities close to home to try to prevent this separation; however, some of the participants mentioned being infantilized by family members because they chose to stay in school instead of entering the labour market. Some also discussed feelings of shame and embarrassment and anger that their parents could not be more help to them academically, demonstrating that the pathologizing of working-class parents is something that is often internalized by their children.

Expanding on *Growing Up Girl*, Lucey et al. (2003) use the concept of hybridization to analyze the interview transcripts of two educationally successful working-class women from

their study. The authors explore how the hybridization of the working-class feminine subject, through educational success and upward mobility, can incite feelings of anxiety, jealousy and ambivalence within families as well as feelings of pride and love. The women in the study employed psychic defenses such as never asking their parents for anything and “denial, projection, and splitting” (Lucey et al., 2003, p. 293). Connections can be drawn here with the splitting discussed in Luttrell’s (1997) study on working-class women in basic adult education program in the US in which the women use splitting to “protect or defend themselves against seemingly irresolvable conflicts” (p. 9). In the article by Lucey et al. (2003), Holly, a 21-year-old mixed-race woman, experienced racism in school but her knowledge that her white mother escaped a violent relationship with her father and worked hard to raise her and her siblings alone motivated her to do well. Holly viewed life as a struggle and heard her mother say that she will have to work “twice as hard as anybody else” because she is mixed-race. She stuck up for herself at school, sometimes fighting white girls, and getting a negative reputation amongst teachers. However, at home, Holly was very studious:

> Her shifting subjectivity could only be played out at school, while careful attempts were made to protect her white mother from her rejection of whiteness. Holly had to perform major feats of binary demarcations: between home and school, black and white, conformity and resistance. For instance, she managed to be both rebellious and resistant to the school’s culture at a public level, while privately conforming to the demands and discipline of academic work. (293)

The authors indicate that the psychic defenses employed by working-class women in their quest for education attainment can pose a double bind – they can cause great pain and advance the drive to succeed. Lucey et al. (2003) argue that understanding the psychodynamic processes

involved in working-class women becoming upwardly mobile are imperative to the project of equality in education and that encouraging working-class women to adopt models for success that reflect middle-class ideals is not helpful and potentially damaging for working-class people.

In “Getting out and Getting Away: Women’s Narratives of Class Mobility”, Lawler (1999) is interested in how social class is constructed through “cultural and symbolic artefacts” and how “class and class inequality inhere within people’s subjectivities” (p. 5). Lawler (1999) makes the point that cultural capital and habitus is constituted as a property of the self and when an individual’s cultural capital and habitus does not align with privileged cultural capital, it can be perceived as deficiencies in the self. The women in Lawler’s (1999) study attributed their movement from the working class into the middle class to either education (they all held degrees) or marriage to a middle-class man, which the author points out reflect dominant discourses of “equal opportunity” and “heterosexual romance” (p. 5). These dominant narratives suggest that the journey to upward mobility is a joyful and painless one; however, the accounts in this study indicate otherwise. Lawler (1999) notes that the women’s stories reflect their beliefs that class is a part of the self, rather than a label applied to material inequality, and therefore, the self can be seen as abject and something to discard by moving into a new “set of social relations” (p. 19). Similarly, in her autobiographical article about her experiences as a working-class woman in higher education, Reay (1998) discusses the pain associated with working-class educational desires, indicating that they “inevitably include elements of rejection of self; a grasping at a conscious level that which has always been known at an unconscious level – that to be what you are is “not good-enough” (p.4).

Another interesting area of exploration in the UK around social class, higher education, and subjectivity is the use of affect theory in research. Leathwood and Hey (2009) argue that in

the current neoliberal context in which the educational pathways of students, staff, and faculty are controlled by discourses of "feelings and personal skills" emotion (affect) must be included in higher education research (p. 436). The authors refute claims that a focus on affects could conspire with the neoliberal agenda of creating helpless subjects by indicating that it is only through an analysis of emotion and gender, class, and race in higher education that the ways in which "the social comes to form and wrap around the individual self" can be revealed (p. 438). Leathwood and Hey (2009) call for inquiries that recognize emotions as "about control *and* resistance, as relational and circulating, and as productive of social relationships and identities" (p. 437). Related to this, Vik Loveday (2016) examines how working-class students and staff experience shame in English higher education institutions through the 'affective practice' of moral judgment. Loveday (2016) asserts that shame is an important point of cultural class analysis because it is often misrecognized as a "naturalized property of the self" rather than a result of the social practice of judgment within the moral economy, which serves to assign worth to some people at the cost of others. Loveday (2016) acknowledges the limitations of using interview transcripts to examine affect; however, she notes a few instances when participants became silent, teary-eyed, and angry in the interviews. She points out that affect is not only generated in particular moments, but also through the process of recollection: "part of the performative capacity of shame seems to be its ability to make itself felt – sometimes unexpectedly- even years after a specific experience" (Loveday, 2016, p. 1145). Loveday (2016) explores accents and pregnancy as sites of affective practice in which evaluation precipitated shame. An undergraduate student named Hannah talks about how people hear her speak and then respond to her as if she is stupid or tease her about her speech. This causes Hannah to engage in self-evaluation, imagining what people must think of her each time she talks, such as "she can't

even talk properly" (Loveday, 2016, 1147). Another participant, Fianoa, has a graduate degree in Art History and works at the campus bookstore. She feels as though she is viewed as aggressive because of her Cockney accent and indicated that she is "in a constant editorial process" with herself (Loveday, 2016, p. 1147). Both Hannah and Fiona engage in self-regulation as ways to avoid being shamed – they work hard to change their speech to be more acceptable. Additionally, Tina, an interviewee who became pregnant during her PhD was scolded by her "posh" supervisor who told her "women like her" should not receive funding (p. 1149). The women who discussed being pregnant during their higher education experience, reported that the visibility of their pregnant bodies made them feel shame and guilt. Loveday (2016) argues that these emotions are tied up in how "the young, female working-class body is viewed as particularly excessive and overtly sexual" (p. 1150). Loveday (2016) concludes her article by indicating that shame, generated by the affective practice of judgment, is a product of social inequality and is also "a mechanism that feeds back into classed relationships, variously shoring up notions of (il)legitimacy by contributing to processes of valuation" (p. 1151).

Conclusion

Through the one-to-one interviews and autobiographical accounts of working-class women in higher education reviewed in the literature, it becomes clear that the path to upward mobility through the university is littered with painful experiences that shape how individual working-class women come to see themselves. My thesis explores these constitutive experiences in the Canadian context where social class is often swept under the rug and the focus on first-generation students has largely been about their educational attainment and their successful integration into the middle-class practices of the university, which has the potential to deny the complex psychosocial processes involved in working-class students' participation in higher

education and feed into a devaluing of the self. A collective biography of working-class women’s experiences in higher education will acknowledge this complexity by unravelling the naturalized discourses and affective processes that constitute working-class women’s subjectivity to show that class inequality is not a deficiency within individuals despite it being lived that way.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework: Exploring the Constitution of Subjectivities

To explore the constitution of working-class women's sense of self in university, I draw on feminist poststructural understandings of discourse, subjectivity, agency, power, and truth. For poststructuralists, meaning is produced within language instead of reflected by it and language is viewed as a changing system which functions in historically specific discourses (Gannon & Davies, 2007; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1997). In this research, I am concerned with exposing naturalized and oppressive class and gendered hierarchies as they relate to Canadian working-class women in higher education and to analyze the constitutive powers of discourse that serve to maintain patriarchal and class hierarchies. My thesis does not seek to understand the memories written about in our collective biography workshops with a foundationalist view of experience but follows Scott's (1991) call to deconstruct experiences to expose how knowledge is produced.

Coming together as a collective of working-class women facilitated the exposing of dominant discourses and affective processes that constituted us within the higher education milieu as we shared our stories, reflections, and discussions. My analysis illustrates how dominant discourses around smartness, contemporary femininity, race, middle-classness, neoliberalism and upskilling, geographical differences, and family roles inform the subject positions taken up by Canadian working-class women in higher education and how these discourses play out in the psychic and relational realms. In this section, I will discuss the main concepts from poststructural theory that guide my research. I will also consider some concepts from Bourdieu's theoretical work, namely habitus and cultural capital, that are useful to understand in relation to the class analysis that I undertake in this thesis.

Discourse and Subjectivity

According to Gannon and Davies (2007), discourse is “complex interconnected webs of modes of being, thinking, and acting which are always unstable, often conflicting, and situated on temporal and spatial axes” (p.82). Discursive possibilities are limitless, and language is best understood in terms of discourses that are competing to give meaning to the world (Gannon and Davies, 2007). Weedon (1997) indicates that discursive fields are made up of these competing discourses and the organization of social institutions and processes. Subjectivity, the “conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” are shaped through discourses (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Contrary to modern, humanist paradigms that view subjectivity as fixed with a true human nature assigned to each person, poststructural theory takes subjectivity to be “precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 33). Skeggs (2004) contends that it is not only discourses that constitute subjectivity, but “whole systems of inscription, exchange, perspective and practices that make it possible” (p. 19). There are relational and discursive aspects to the constitution of subjectivity. Gannon & Davies (2007) indicate that in the unsettled and ongoing processes of the shaping of subjectivity: “one is both subjected to available regimes of truth and regulatory frameworks and at the same time and through the same processes becomes an active subject” (p. 83).

Regimes of truth exist within societies and are comprised of authorized discourses and “the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, 2001, p. 1668). The role of regimes of truth in the process of becoming an active

subject is important because it is through these regimes that discourses become naturalized, or hegemonic, and their connection with power and human interests are obscured. This naturalization of discourses has the effect of restricting the agency of the subject as she negotiates the discourses available to her. This serves to benefit those in power when it works to establish and maintain hierarchical power relations. As noted by Weedon (1997), "subjectivity works most efficiently for the established hierarchy of power relations in a society when the subject position, which the individual assumes within a particular discourse, is fully identified by the individual with her interests" (Weedon, 1997, p. 109). Gannon & Davies (2007) draw on Foucault's work on power relations to explain how the topic is taken up in poststructuralist theory:

> Foucault talks more often about power relations, that is, about how power is operationalized in interactions between individuals and institutions, than about power as something apart or prior to the discursive regimes within which power is in continual circulation. Indeed, we are always within relations of power because we are always within discourse. (p. 84)

To further explore the notion of power, Skeggs (2004) draws on the work of Bourdieu and Waquant (1992) who argue that "power works though mis-recognition whereby cultural privilege and power are seen as ascribed rather than achieved – therefore thought of as natural and legitimate" (p. 11). Skeggs (2004) contends that this also happens in reverse and that those who do not possess cultural privilege and power are also assigned essentializing attributes. She states that those on the opposite end of the social scale "do not have to achieve immorality or criminality; they have been positioned and fixed by these values. This is another form of mis-recognition – not a hiding of the operations of the powerful, but a hiding of the systems of

inscription and classification (which work in the interests of the powerful)" (p. 11). Understanding that truth and power are not separate from language, but established by it is important because it emphasizes, through the acknowledgement that some discourses are accepted as legitimate while others are not, the possibilities for subjugated knowledge. As Weedon (1997) states, "where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced" (p. 109). I view this is a central aim of the collective biography methodology that I will employ in my research – to fracture the notion of fixed subjectivity to create an opening for multiple, shifting identities that provide alternate ways of thinking and acting in the world.

Differentiating Subjectivity and Habitus

It is interesting to examine this notion of subjectivity alongside Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which is sometimes a component of class analyses within higher education research. Habitus, the ways in which people express their attitudes and dispositions and perform specific practices, is shaped by cultural fields, comprised of "institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments, and titles which constitute objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorize certain discourses and activities" (Webber et al. p. 43-44). One's relation to the systems and discourses of the fields in which they find themselves produces particular ways of being, thinking, and acting. This includes physical attributes such as accent and posture as well as attitudes, dispositions, and tastes. Webber et al. note that "systems, rules, laws, structures and categories of meaning can only function effectively as habitus if we do not think about the specific sociocultural conditions or contexts of their production…" (p.39).When a woman from a working-class background enters the field of higher education, her working-class habitus may come into conflict with the authorized discourses and processes in that middle-class

space. This conflict can also produce habitus as the student incorporates these new rules and processes, or discourses, into her attitudes and dispositions. The concepts of subjectivity and habitus have similarities as they are both shaped by individuals' relationship to social world; however, habitus suggests the embodiment of predetermined attitudes and dispositions and this limits choice (Reay, 2004, p. 433) while subjectivity is fluid and always in process with agency as a key feature. Thus, the subject takes up ways of thinking and being in the world, though this is constricted by the discourses that are available to her.

Gannon and Davies (2007) indicate that possibilities for agency are made through "the contradictions and mo(ve)ments within discursive regimes" (p. 83). This project of collective biography and the deconstruction of the discourses and affective processes that have shaped working-class women in higher education creates opportunity for other modes of thinking and being outside of naturalized discourses that have positioned us in certain ways. Bourdieu's concept of habitus points out that the structures and discourses of society will have predictable impacts on people; however, while useful, this concept seems incomplete because it does not acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of subjectivity. As Gordon (2008) notes in her concept of complex personhood:

> all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. Complex personhood means that even those called other are never that. Complex personhood means that stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. Complex personhood means that people get tired and some are just plain lazy. Complex

> personhood means that groups of people will act together, that they will vehemently disagree with and sometimes harm each other, and that they will do both at the same time and expect the rest of us to figure it out for ourselves, intervening and withdrawing as the situation requires. Complex personhood means that even those who haunt our dominant institutions and their systems of value are haunted too by things that they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not. At the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straight forward and full of enormously subtle meaning." (Gordon, 2008, p. 4-5).

Gordon (2008)'s concept of complex personhood offers an avenue to move away from notions of psychological simplicity imposed on working-class subjects to an understanding of working-class women as psychologically complex and agentic; not just blank slates to be acted upon.

Cultural Capital and Discourse

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is an important point of analysis in working-class educational research and in the case of my thesis, I view it as a discursive construct that ascribes value to some and devalues others, and this has implications on subjectivity. Bourdieu (1986) notes that cultural capital exists in three forms: the embodied state (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body); the objectified state (cultural goods such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.); and the institutionalized state (educational qualifications) (p. 47). An important point in connecting the concept of cultural capital to educational attainment is that educational systems are considered sites of cultural reproduction that favour the dominant cultural capital and perpetuate class inequalities (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80). Evidently, those from

middle and upper classes who possess the dominant cultural capital mimicked in educational settings can more easily attain educational success:

> an institution officially entrusted with the transmission of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant culture which neglects methodically to transmit the instruments indispensable to the success of its undertaking is bound to become the monopoly of those social classes capable of transmitting by their own means, that is to say by that diffuse and implicit continuous educational action which operates within cultured families (often unknown to those responsible for it and to those who are subjected to it), the instruments necessary for the reception of its message, and thereby to confirm their monopoly of that culture. (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80-81)

In this passage, Bourdieu makes an important point – educational institutions require students to be familiar with the dominant culture in order to access the information and training available; however, these institutions do not provide students who lack this type of knowledge with the opportunity to become familiar with it. It is assumed that students will possess the necessary cultural capital to be successful.

One way that cultural capital is maintained is through discourse. The cultural capital valued in the university is that possessed by the middle- and upper-classes, typically because they have the economic capital to obtain the possessions and cultural experiences deemed valuable in the discursive field of the university. Things such as knowledge of academic language, engaging in cultured activities like reading classic literature and visiting cultural and historical sites, and possessing material items such as computers, books and artwork are deemed valuable in the university and in society in general. It is not just about possessing the material and dispositional characteristics of cultural capital, it is the way in which the value attached to

these possessions has become a regime of truth that serves to exclude those who do not fit in. The narrative of higher education is not part of the everyday for working-class women and this results in misfitting in the university milieu. Skeggs (1997) discusses how the social positions we occupy, based on socially constructed categories such as social class, race, and gender, limit and gain access to specific subject positions. She indicates that

> these structurally organized social positions enable and limit our access to cultural, economic, and symbolic capital and thus the ability to recognize ourselves and the subject positions we occupy. (Dis)identifications from/with and (dis)simulation of these social and subject positions are the means by which identities come to appear as coherent" (Skeggs, 1997, 12-13)

Discourses around cultural capital have an influence on the subjectivities of working-class women. The dominant discourse is that we should all work to have middle-class cultural capital rather than the practical, working-class cultural capital that the participants in my study came to know as valuable in their families and communities.

Conclusion

Feminist poststructural theory provides a way of exposing how gender and class hierarchies are maintained through language. I am interested in how the discursive fields of the university, a middle- and upper-class space, and the discursive fields of working-class culture interact when Canadian-born working-class women participate in higher education to produce particular subjectivities. It is the systems and discourses valued and in circulation in higher education that I am looking to expose to show that class is not an individual issue but a societal one. I am also concerned with illustrating how the associated discourses of cultural capital serve to restrict our subjectivities. When a working-class woman enters the field of higher education,

she comes with cultural capital that serves her well in her working-class milieu and she is confronted with a space that does not value her and what she represents. My analysis section will illustrate how these experiences shape working-class women’s sense of self in university.

Chapter Four: Engaging in the Methodology of Collective Biography

My thesis employs a modified version of the feminist methodology of Collective Biography (CB). CB is rooted in the memory work of German scholar, Frigga Haug (1987), and has been subsequently developed by feminist academics from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014; Gannon & Gonick, 2019; Onyx & Small, 2001). CB explores how subjectivity is constituted through dominant discourses and affective processes. This task is undertaken through the analysis of memory stories composed at writing workshops. Those who engage in memory work and CB projects have largely been collectives of scholars working from a range of academic disciplines such as Girlhood Studies, Disability Studies, and Education (Charteris et al., 2016; Davies et al., 2001; Davies & Gannon, 2006; De Shauwer et al., 2016; Gonick & Gannon, 2014; Hartung et al., 2017; Haug, 1987; Kern et al., 2014). CB workshop participants often select their topics together, choose theoretical or thematic readings that will prompt their writing as a group, and engage collectively in the analysis of the memory stories produced through the project. Participants usually gather at a chosen location for a period to do this memory work. There is often food and time for socializing between workshops to facilitate group cohesion.

CB workshops tend to be comprised of between 6-7 participants who must commit to attending all the scheduled workshops. Participants read agreed upon articles relating to their topic before they meet. This allows them to participate in the discussions that will eventually prompt the memory stories they will write. To be successful, a high degree of trust must be created within the group, hence the importance of group cohesion and community building. Creating a secure space allows participants to be open with each other. At each workshop,

participants discuss their chosen readings as a collective. Responding to prompts, they share their memories as they relate to the selected topic. Memories emerge as participants hear from each other. When participants feel as though they have generated enough memories about which to write, they disperse and select one or two memory stories to write up. During the writing of their memory stories, participants take themselves out of their current positioning and write their memories exactly as they remember them, evoking bodily sensations that capture past moments. To write in this embodied style, participants must be mindful of the language they use and may choose to write in the present tense and in the third person. When they reconvene, each participant reads her story aloud. Her fellow participants then probe for more details and call out any instances in which the writer may not be using embodied language and imposing their current subject positioning on the memory story. These follow-up discussions can be intense and may feel personal; however, participants have agreed to accept the interrogations and use the feedback to revise their memory stories. With feedback generated from the probing of the collective, participants tweak the memory stories and read them aloud to the group. Through this process, the collective nature of the methodology can be noted. Davies et al. (2001) describe how CB is biographical in that it focusses on the memories of participants, but also collective:

> Through the processes of talking and listening, of writing and rewriting, the edges that mark off the texts of ourselves, one from the other, are blurred. The frames and borderlines through which we made (and make) our individual identities knowable and recognisable to ourselves and others are no longer sealed off from each other—they flow into one another, making visible the fictional referential frames through which the possibilities of being are drawn. (p. 169)

When satisfied with the stories, the group moves on to the next prompt and repeats the process. There is an agreement that the stories written become a part of the collective. While all of the participants may engage in writing scholarly work as a result of the CB workshops, often one or two of the group members write an article for publication based on the memory stories written during the retreat (Gannon & Davies, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014). The articles present the authors' interpretations of how subjectivities are constituted by social and cultural practices through their analysis of the memory stories (Gannon & Davies, 2006).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the method I employed to analyze the memory stories written in our CB workshops. Broadly speaking, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with how social inequalities are established in discourse and how an analysis of discursive events can lead to social change. Jiwani (2016) elaborates on this notion when she states that CDA focuses on "how" talk and text work to make something fit into a "regime of truth" where its truth claims are naturalized, and where such claims offer specific interpretations of social phenomena and particular representations of different groups, thereby legitimizing unequal power relations (p.1-2). More specifically, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is concerned with social inequalities resulting from a patriarchal social order. Lazar (2007) states that understanding the normative notion of gender as a hegemonic, ideological structure that is discursively produced is central to FCDA. The goal of FCDA is not only to expose through deconstructive processes the ways in which women are constituted as subordinate to men through discourse in particular contexts, but also to illuminate the "material and phenomenological consequences" this discursive constitution has for groups of women and men in specific communities (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). Thus, the political aims of CB and CDA/FCDA

work in tandem to expose the discursive and affective process of subjectification and to present previously unrecognized possibilities for subject positions.

In some iterations of CB, memory stories are not attributed to individual participants because the focus is on social and affective processes of subjectification (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p.11) rather than individual experiences and life histories. The idea is that any reader may recognize herself as shaped by the same or similar processes. This approach has the potential to essentialize participants by not acknowledging the differences in the constitution of gendered identities (Onyx & Small, 2001). The ways in which race, social class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and other socially constructed identity categories intersect with gender to shape different types of subjectivities is important to address in CB. Gonick et al. (2014) explore how questions of difference can be accounted for in CB projects and view "difference as a key feature of subjectification" (p. 56). Not all stories produced in the workshops are used in the articles and decisions must be made on which to use and which to set aside, perhaps for a future project. Depending on the group, a participant may take charge of guiding the collective through the workshops or a more fluid process may arise. Expectations for the CB project, including mandatory attendance, commitment to the pre-readings and topics selected, embodied writing, offering and accepting constructive feedback, and the process for writing up the analysis are made clear from the onset, with some CB groups creating a memorandum of understanding before commencing their workshops.

CB is a methodology that falls outside of traditional research paradigms and challenges patriarchal approaches to research that privilege rational thought and the notion of a unitary human being with a true human nature (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). It has the potential to accomplish both political and therapeutic aims, resisting dominant discourses and the

naturalization of discourse (Gannon & Davies, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014), and providing participants with an opportunity to be deeply transformed by uncovering the ways in which their sense of self has been constituted through discursive and affective processes. The social aspect of the collective can also be therapeutic, forming a network of understanding and support for participants. CB is an approach that breaks down the hierarchy between researcher and participants, for they become one in the same, on a journey through which human connection and dialogue frees them from previously unrecognizable and seemingly inflexible socially imposed subject positions. It is a methodology of hopefulness - it makes room for different ways of thinking, being, and acting in the world that can disrupt the status quo.

Putting CB into Practice

Establishing the Collective

I submitted my research ethics application in January 2018 and obtained approval from the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board in February 2018. Recruiting participants became my immediate focus. To recruit participants, I approached women from working-class backgrounds in my personal network to participate in my CB workshops and I distributed a recruitment poster through the Graduate Studies in Education, Women's Studies, and Alumnae Relations departments at Mount Saint Vincent University. I also displayed recruitment posters on general bulletin boards in the University. I did not recruit more broadly because it was important for my participants to be situated close to my research base so they could travel with as much ease as possible to the CB workshops.

The recruitment criteria I set was that participants had to self-identify as Canadian-born women from working-class backgrounds who are attending or have attended liberal arts

universities. In developing my recruitment materials, it was important to consider the challenges that could impact participation in my research. Many people are uncertain about whether they are working class or were working class at any point in their lives. This uncertainty can be caused by embarrassment and shame associated with being from the working or poverty classes because of dominant ideologies that pathologize these classes as being lazy, trashy, dependent, and degenerate (Fraser & Gordon, 2013; Isenberg, 2016; Katz, 2013; Skeggs, 1997). Scholars from working-class backgrounds in the UK have written about the difficulty of revealing their working-class identities in higher education (Hey, 2006; Walkerdine, 2014). In fact, Walkerdine (2014) describes her experience writing about her working-class background as “coming out”, a term associated with revealing personal information that may bring about ridicule and humiliation. Additionally, the culture of exceptionalism that has developed in the US and Canada conceals issues of social class. Isenberg (2016) discusses the mythologies established in America around national identity in which they acknowledge an equal opportunity for all to achieve middle- or upper-class status, therefore, eliminating the working class from national discourses. In Canada, Liberal and Conservative governments have been surreptitious in the use of rhetoric that erases the working class from view, lumping most people into the middle class. For example, the current Liberal government created a new role, the Minister of Middle-class Prosperity, in 2019 with the aim of ensuring government policies are developed with the prosperity and quality of the middle class in mind (Government of Canada, 2019). Cross and Sheikh (2015) indicate that the conflation of the middle class has had material effects on the Canadian working class as resources that could go toward helping working-class people improve their lives are being directed to those who are already doing well. Within this climate of

exceptionalism and conflation, people who are working class or are from working-class backgrounds may not identify as such.

Related to this issue are the categories commonly used to define socioeconomic status and social class. Objective class categories (i.e. income, occupation, and education) which are often contested and flawed might lead people to categorize themselves in the middle class even though they identify with the working class. Rubin et al. (2014) explain that using only objective class categories based on income, occupation, and parental education, does not account for the subjective social class identity of research participants. Similarly, Urciuoli (1993) is critical of the stratification model of class identification for its effect of naturalizing perceptions of social location. Rubin et al. (2014) encourage scholars who engage in class research in higher education to include subjective self-definition as a measure of social class in combination with objective measures to provide students with more control over their social class identifications. Due to the potential ambiguities surrounding participants' willingness to identify as working class or their understanding of themselves as having working-class backgrounds, I included both subjective and objective explanations of the category "working class", including a definition of first-generation students, in my recruitment materials (See Appendix A).

Overall, 15 women who identified as being working class while in university contacted me about participating in my research. I followed up with each interested participant by emailing a formal letter explaining my research project and a consent form, which also acted as a memorandum of understanding for the project (Appendix B). In addition to me, five participants formed our Collective: Anne, Ashanti, Barb, Claudia, and Julia, who were introduced in the first chapter of this thesis.

Our CB Workshops & Working with the Memory Stories

Before meeting as a collective, I planned how our CB process would unfold. I did not expect to recruit scholars like those who have been most active in using the methodology; therefore, I decided to select autobiographical writing[13] by working-class women who attended university for the pre-readings that guided our discussion and writing prompts in our workshops. The articles focused on the authors' experiences in higher education in addition to other aspects of their working-class lives. I deliberated on whether I should use theoretical articles as emphasized by Davies & Gannon (2006) in their approach to CB; however, I decided that autobiographical writing by working-class women would be accessible to all participants and I made this decision knowing that the powerful political message of CB could still be realized through our discussion of these stories and our own memory stories. This modification to the CB process produced a particular type of writing that was both creative and reflective**.** We not only wrote about specific happenings but the embodied experiences of thinking about our class positioning during those moments. While this was not an expectation for the writing process, it was the style of writing that emerged in our collective. These moments of "thinking to ourselves" highlight the important point that social class is often lived as "class feeling" (Reay, 2017; 2005) and this is what enabled my analysis to include a chapter on psychic responses. This writing also revealed that affective processes are a particularly important consideration for my CB project on working-class women when we consider that dominant discourses about social class in Canada

[13] Our pre-readings included: Allison, D. (2003). *Steal Away*; Christopher, R. (2009). Selected readings from *A Carpenter's Daughter: A Working-Class Woman in Higher Education*, including: *Maybe I'm Not That Smart After All, Clothes Make the Student*, *The Symbolism of the Rose, and Radical Self-Reformation; Working with the Guys Again*; hooks, b. (2000). *Coming to Class Consciousness*; hooks, b. (1989). *Keeping close to home*; Johnson Black, L. (1995). *Stupid Rich Bastards*; Lakshimi Piepzna-Samarsinha, L. (2003). *Scholarship Baby*. Tokarczyk, M. (1990). *Acknowledgements*; Vasconcellos, M. (1994). *Laughter as Liberating Memory*; Zandy, J. (1990). *Class Quartet*;

group most people into one large middle class. When the working class is absent from the national discourse, affect is an important point of investigation because it is often how issues of class manifest themselves in our apparently classless society. Affect cannot be moderated. It will always circulate, reminding the working class that we are unintellectual, tasteless, pathological, and that we don't belong in middle- and upper-class spaces, but also of our pride in where we come from, working hard for what we have, and our practical ways of knowing[14]. Whetherell (2012) acknowledges that affective performances, though individual, are also "trans-individual and collective" (212). Further, she notes that affective practice is frequently unconscious; however,

> Through acts of 'paying attention', which are sometimes strenuous scenes in themselves, we can move into conscious feeling and the narrating of affect and into forms of construction, describing, and remembering. These look like acts of 'retrieval' but are in fact new forms of social action." (Wetherell, 2012, p. 129)

The methodology of CB not only exposes dominant discourses at play in processes of subjectification, but the emotions that shape sense of self and play into and/or disavow these naturalized ideas. This notion is reflected in our memory stories.

Another decision I made before our group met was to create the prompts[15] for our workshops. I based the prompts on the themes that emerged from the pre-readings. In other CB

[14] This is not an exhaustive list of messaging about the working class. I pulled these strands from the discourses that emerged from my literature review and the memory stories written in our CB workshops.

[15] The prompts for our workshops included: Recall a time when your class was made obvious to you in university; Recall a time when you became conscious of language as a class marker during your university experience; Recall a time when your working-class knowledge came into conflict or assisted you with the knowledge privileged in university; Recall a time when you became conscious of appearance as a class marker in your university experience; Recall a time when your university experience impacted your family/community relationships; Recall a time in university when your class was made obvious to you in a material way; Recall a time when your aspirations were supported or undermined in university; Recall your first memories of thinking about university as a child.

projects, the collective may generate the writing prompts together. Since I was the only participant who would write an analysis of our stories, it was not necessary for this aspect of the project to be completed together. Our collective met five times between March and May 2018 to make participation more manageable for those with competing demands. I also assumed a leadership role in scheduling and facilitating the meetings. Although this did place me in a more authoritative position in the collective, I also participated in the discussions and writing, which minimized the power dynamics at play in more traditional modes of research in which the researcher has the power to "other" research participants ((Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p.109). I was pleased to see other participants jump in and lead conversations about our pre-readings and their memory stories as our time together progressed. At times like these, I forgot that I organized the workshops.

Our initial workshop was an introduction to each other through an ice breaker activity and an introduction to my topic and the methodology of CB. I shared an explanation of our roles and responsibilities throughout the CB process, such as doing pre-readings, attending all writing workshops, writing, sharing, discussing, and revising memory stories, permitting the stories to be used as research data, and agreeing to keep participants' identities and stories confidential. We also generated guidelines for a safe and respectful environment in which we could work together. We recorded the guidelines on flipchart paper and posted them on the wall at each future workshop as a reminder. We examined examples of the embodied writing completed in other CB projects and discussed the writing style and how to approach it. We followed up this discussion with some practice writing. I presented each participant with a writing journal for their memory stories and reflections on the CB process to be collected at the end of each workshop. We also agreed upon the other dates we would meet. I assigned the first pre-readings for the next

workshop and had participants complete participant information forms. We began each workshop with food. We did a guided meditation activity led by a group member at our second workshop together and at following meetings we did check-ins where everyone had the chance to tell the group how they were feeling, either about the CB process or life or both. I situated a variety snacks in every room in the Meadows during our workshops so participants would feel at home and could graze throughout the day. We ate lunch and suppers together at the kitchen table and talked about everything from childhood memories and workplace issues to family life and weekend plans when we were not engaged in the discussion and writing components of the process. Our discussions of pre-readings took place after our meditation or check-in after which we moved on to the memory sharing process. The prompts I developed corresponded with themes from the pre-readings and these prompts helped us start our discussions of our own memories related to the topic. Our discussions started with what we found interesting about the autobiographical readings and from there we began to tell each other our own memories. One person would start, and this helped the others in the group think of the memories they wanted to share with the collective. We then chose a memory story we wanted to write up and wrote a draft. We reconvened, shared our written memory stories, provided feedback to one another and revised our stories. We then took a break after which we repeated the process for the second prompt. Our workshops ended with a reading of our revised stories and participants wrote reflections in their journals about their participation in the CB process. The reflections allowed participants to process their thinking and feelings about the methodology of CB and the topics we were discussing. I collected each participant's writing journal at the end of each workshop, and I scanned all the stories and saved them as password protected documents. (See Appendix C for a detailed breakdown of the pre-readings and writing prompts for each workshop).

After our final CB workshop, I began the task of deciding which memory stories to use in the writing of my thesis. This was a challenging process because we wrote 48 memory stories and they all illustrated various ways that discursive and affective processes shaped the subjectivities of Canadian-born working-class women in university. Although I had grouped the stories by the prompts we used during our workshops, and those prompts were generated by themes from the autobiographical reading we did, I realized upon re-reading them that three dominant themes emerged under which all of the stories could fit and these themes became the focus of my analysis: smartness, psychic responses, and relationality. I chose the stories to highlight different aspects of these themes and to show the scope of experiences that have shaped working-class women's sense of self in university.

Engaging in the CB workshops was not without challenges. I initially wanted to hold one evening workshop and three full-day Saturday workshops; however, participant schedules did not align, and we had five workshops in total – three evenings and two full-day Saturday workshops. We thought this would solve our scheduling issue; however, one participant was storm-stayed in Toronto for one of our evening sessions and another participant was ill and missed one of our gatherings. Participation is very important in CB, so I communicated with the participants who missed the workshops to recap our discussion and to share some memory stories with them over the phone. They wrote their memory stories and shared them at the next workshops. In retrospect, it would have been good to have one more workshop as we ran out of time and could not cover the prompt about appearance as a class marker in university in our first full-day workshop. We wrote these memory stories on our own and discussed them at an evening workshop which meant that it was difficult to fit our discussion, writing, probing and revisions in for a new prompt. We all found ourselves revising some stories outside of the workshops.

Another challenge that I experienced on a personal level was related to facilitating the workshops. I wanted as much as possible to break down the hierarchy between me as the researcher and the other participants. I encouraged all participants to take the lead on discussions and sharing their stories and they certainly did share this role. Still, my concern about making sure everyone felt comfortable at the workshops made it difficult for me to focus when writing with the other participants.

Group Dynamics

The intention from the beginning was to establish group cohesion in the collective so we would feel comfortable sharing stories and providing feedback to each other. We were fortunate to be able to build trust and respect together and an important aspect of this process was acknowledging our commonalities, which brought us together in that time and place, and our differences[16], including race, age, and political connections to the working-class. Ashanti, an African Nova Scotian woman with indigenous roots, wrote and shared some memory stories that were incommensurable with the stories of the white women in the group because of the complex and enduring history of racism in Nova Scotia. From the time Black Loyalists settled in the province after being promised freedom and equality for siding with the British in the American

[16] Working-class women are not a homogenous group and the ways in which social class intersects with gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and geography produces different types of working-class subjectivities. As Skeggs (2004) notes, "particular discourses and technologies make classed selves, not just through productive constitution (namely, bringing the self into existence) but also through *processes of exclusion,* by establishing constitutive limits and by fixing attributes to particular bodies" (p. 13). Research indicates that social class and race and ethnicity are often conflated. Due to a long history of colonization and oppression, brown and black people have come to be a signifier of the working-class in the US (Bettie, 2003; hooks, 2000). For white people, class is not as easily signified on the body, making it easier for them to pass as middle class, though class can also be encoded on white bodies (Smarsh, 2014). Reynolds (1997) notes that "historical, cultural and 'race' differences ensure that black women occupy separate social positions and face differing social realities from white women irrespective of social class positioning. Consequently, our experiences as black women are different." (p. 10). Additionally, within the working class there are some people who are living in poverty while others are living more comfortably. Some working-class people have a strong political consciousness, opposing government policies and corporate actions that oppress the working class and some identify more with other aspects of working-class culture, including tastes and pastimes.

Revolution to the present day, black people have been oppressed by government policies and actions. Several events including the removal and displacement of the residents from Africville in the 1960's, riots at Cole Harbour High School in the 1980's-90's stemming from racism (Julian & Borden Colley, 2019); and incidents of racial profiling by police (CBC News, 2019) demonstrate how African Nova Scotians have been marginalized in the province. This culture of systemic racism shaped Ashanti's experiences in ways that white members of our collective were unable to relate and this difference is an important part of my analysis of the memory stories.

Life stage presented itself as another difference with participants' ages ranging from 30-62 years old. While all the participants were attending university around the same time, Julia, the oldest group member, started her undergraduate studies as a mature student and expectant mother. Her memory stories reflect that she had a level of class consciousness while in university that others in the group may not have had and this shaped how she viewed herself in university and her aspirations for attending. Another difference that emerged in our group is that one participant was not able to relate to the other participants' fears of not being smart enough in university. The majority of us expressed that we had concerns about whether we had the intellect required for successful participation in the university setting. However, Claudia writes in one of her reflections: "I am only feeling self-conscious about not feeling self-conscious – about not feeling like an imposter" (Claudia, Collective Biography Reflection, and March 25, 2018). Through these differences we realized the significance of our incommensurability - while it informs our subject positions, it also exposes our similarities. Claudia notes:

> Throughout, I've struggled with…my class "in-betweenness", more socially working-class than economic thanks to my dad's business doing well during most of my childhood. But just as this project called up some discomfort with class position – why

> am I here? Should I be here? Am I rubbing a comfortable childhood in others' faces? It also resolved the same. The contours of class – the facets of comfort and discomfort, lean times and flush times, are different for everyone in the group. And that invalidated absolutely nothing that anyone had to say because working-class is not a monolith – to write it off as one is to cop to the stereotypes developed by the ruling class to penalize, divide, and conquer. (Claudia, Collective Biography Reflection, May 5, 2018).

Recognizing our differences made space for different experiences and enriched our own reflections and our connections to each other. We became a very close group over a short period of time and all of us expressed a feeling of disappointment when our workshops came to an end.

Conclusion: Reflecting on Collective Biography & Research on Working-Class Women

I view CB as a methodology that beckons for research on working-class women. It allows for the concepts of class and gender to be examined as social constructions to be analyzed rather than pre-existing truths. Additionally, the writing component of CB connects to a broader theme of writing in the lives of working-class women, including an impactful field of scholarly, literary, and autobiographical writing by women from the working class (Christopher, 2009; Hooks, 1989, 2000; Tea, 2003; Reay, 1998, 2003, 2017; Steedman, 1986; Walkerdine, 2011, 2014; Zandy, 1990, 1994). The methodology of CB allowed the participants in my study to use writing, one of the most valued scholarly skills, to undo some of the ways they were made social as working-class women in university. CB also aligns with working-class studies because of its collective process and its emphasis on practices through which the subjectivities of working-class women are constituted. CB resists the prevailing neoliberal discourses of individualism (Charteris, Gannon, Mayes, Nye, & Lauren, 2016). So often class inequalities are portrayed as deficiencies within individual working-class people rather than examining the processes that

inscribe and classify us in the interests of the powerful (Skeggs, 2004). In exploring how working-class women are produced as particular types of subjects, I hope it will become clear that class inequality is not the result of a deficiency that resides within individual working-class women, but rather a societal issue.

I found that in my adaptation of CB that the political and therapeutic were intricately bound. By way of examining readings and writing memory stories as a collective, we were active participants in producing knowledge about working-class women in university. We all contributed to the political act of unearthing dominant discourses and identifying affective processes that position working-class women in certain ways within higher education for the purpose of disrupting these discourses and affective processes. We engaged in political conversations about societal barriers for working-class people and this had powerful consequences for group members. Through our collective engagement with the pre-readings and each other's memory stories, we were attempting to comprehend our social positioning with an understanding that what we were doing in our group would reverberate beyond our collective through my thesis. To this end, we were engaged in a political act by talking about overlooked topics – social class in Canada and working-class women's participation in higher education.

The CB participants clearly articulated therapeutic outcomes from their participation. Claudia's reflection on the CB process illustrates this notion:

> Freud would be delighted because it's all about my mother. The aspects of my class position that I accept or reject, explore, revel in, deny, disavow – are all in some way tied to the class anxieties my mother carried with her from a very rough childhood…So my mom spent my childhood performing class well above our actual station. I don't think I

> would have arrived at that conclusion without this project – these workshops. (Claudia, Collective Biography Reflection, May 5, 2018).

Our discussions of how family relationships are impacted by working-class women's participation in university, enabled Claudia to discover the concept of intergenerational transmission of social class and the trauma it inflicts on generations of family members. For Ashanti, participating in the CB workshops was an opportunity to offer a voice for working-class women of African and Indigenous descent:

> Working class is not a topic that I have studied or discussed in any depth. In my life experiences, I did not think of myself in these terms. When you live in a certain way and it's what you know, you live it, you don't study it…As a woman of African descent, as a member of the Blackfoot Nation, as a black woman, I very much appreciate being able, being invited, being welcomed to share my voice, to share my life experiences within the walls of university academia. (Ashanti, Collective Biography Reflection, April 16, 2018).

Ashanti's participation in our CB workshops was a personal endeavor but also about advocating for her community and contributing to an intersectional analysis of working-class women in higher education in Canada.

Another powerful impact of our CB project was experienced by Barb, who revealed that our discussions and recollections about being working class in university allowed her to see how issues of social class were playing out in her workplace and how this had created a toxic environment for her: "I recently took leave from work due to the negative environment and psychologically damaging nature of the workplace, which I believe would not have happened without this group and the inspiration I've received from participants" (Barb,

Collective Biography Reflection, May 5, 2018). By sharing experiences of being working class and learning that others experience similar issues related to their class backgrounds, Barb found the strength to reject those responsible for her negative working environment and take pride in her working-class roots. In conversation with the group, Barb talked about how the workshops had inspired her to start “wearing her working-class background with honour”, which for her involved being more outspoken, cursing, and allowing her accent to be more pronounced when she was speaking. Though she was worried that people around her might be annoyed by this change in behaviour, she indicated that since the workshops started, she has been making a point to “take up her space” (Barb, Personal Communication, April 2018). Through our collective, Barb found a new sense of value in her working-class background that goes against the lack of worth that society attributes to the working class. I also experienced a therapeutic outcome from this CB project that I captured in one of my journal entries:

> I was visiting my parents last weekend and I told my mom and her friend, both working-class women, about my thesis. I felt like they finally knew what I was studying in university. I told them how this research has caused me to have pride in my working-class upbringing. I felt connected to my mom and her friend and I felt like they trusted me with our background and shedding light on it in an academic way. (Erin, CB Reflection, April 16, 2018)

I am thankful for a stronger connection to my family and also to have shared this experience with the other women in the collective, who could understand the changes that can occur in relationships with family and community after attending university.

Chapter Five: Analysis

I have organized my analysis chapter into three parts based on the prominent themes that emerged from the memory stories written in our CB workshops. The first part examines the theme of smartness and how dominant understandings of smartness converge with gender and race to constitute Canadian-born working-class women's subjectivity in university. The second part explores how participation in university exposes working-class women to an environment that privileges the cultural capital of the middle class, upward mobility, and middle-class femininity and this leads to psychic responses to cope with feelings of misfitting and inadequacy. Finally, part three focuses on how relationships and their discursive and intersubjective characteristics shape working-class women's sense of self in university.

Part 1 – Working-Class Women and Smartness

When women from working-class backgrounds attend university, they may find themselves negotiating between dominant views of intelligence and their own experiences of what it means to be smart. The memory stories written in our CB workshops reveal that sometimes these views are in agreement and other times it is nearly impossible to claim the title of smartness for ourselves. Alignment with practical, common sense knowledge can become a method of ascribing value to ourselves in an environment that does not recognize our working-class culture. In this section, I explore the theme of smartness and the ways in which dominant and counter discourses of "smartness" are taken up by Canadian women from working class backgrounds in university and how the relationship between "smartness" and social class converges with gender and race to produce different types of working-class subjectivities within higher education. I use the terms "intelligence" and "smartness" interchangeably.

Becoming Smart

In the following memory story, Julia, a mature student, describes an experience in her first university course where she feels excluded from a class discussion. This leads her to feel as though she is an imposter in the classroom. Julia acknowledges that she possesses intelligence while simultaneously questioning whether university is a place where her smartness can be realized.

> *I don't know what I don't know. So, I sit near the back of my first class in university. I am taking just this one class and it is English because I think I can do it. The room is just an ordinary classroom – much like high school. I have taken a desk at the back of the room so I can have an adequate vantage point to observe the other students. I am just one of about two dozen students sitting facing the front of the class. Because I am at the back, I can see the backs of everyone's head, and I feel like I am hiding behind the weight of the desks and all the other students.*
>
> *We are to study the play "The Importance of Being Ernest". A play will be fun to read. I know it will take me a while to get through it with all the characters' voices playing out in a real-time cadence in my head. I like to savour their voices or my creation of them.*
>
> *We have to talk about the play in class. I'm terrified that the desks and students in front of me won't be enough of a barrier between me and a professor who enjoys spewing questions and who expects intelligent answers. I have strong grammar; I have a strong vocabulary; I don't have experience – others seem to be able to glibly respond. They seem to have a point of reference or ideas born out of previous knowledge. I am struggling with my place in the world; it is so small. The other students talk about characters in the play using language that speaks of their familiarity with the nuances of the human condition. They seem to see and understand the cultured gaps from a point of knowledge, and they do not identify with the characters in the way that I do.*
>
> *Then, one of the other students – an older fellow sitting in the very front and centre says "There's a lot of jazz going on..." I look at the back of his balding, befreckled scalp and think "what the hell is he talking about?" I am feeling out of place; I don't understand. I don't know what is meant. He continues, "I won't say what I mean by "jazz" - this isn't appropriate language for this classroom." The professor nods at him – he gets it. No other student asks any questions. At least I don't think they do. I am too busy thinking – off on a tangent – about what I could say. I know I have a good grasp of language and understanding; I can speak well, however, my words are impoverished from a lack of personal experience. I have a narrow world view, a myopic history.*
>
> *Coming from a small town, a working-class life where there was never any money to travel or participate in activities is like understanding a beautiful place only from a*

picture. My understanding is feat with no tactile nuances of smell and feel. I'm untextured.

As I stare at the back of the bald head in front of me, I realize that this journey into a deeper education might be harder and more expansive than I first imagined. I hope I can find the words and strength to become a part of it and eventually have experiences to enrich my understanding of what it means to live in the world.

Julia is both nervous and excited about being in this English course. Her choice to sit at the back of the classroom is a strategy to cope with her fear of being called upon by the professor, whom she believes has high expectations for "intelligent" discussion in his class. This implies that she does not believe she can engage in the types of discussions desired by the professor. The desks and the other students serve as a barrier between herself and her fear of not living up to her professor's expectations. However, Julia is also excited about reading a new play and imagines giving creative voices to the characters, demonstrating that she has read plays before and enjoys them. She is aware that the way she relates to the characters is different than her classmates and she attributes this to her classmates having more depth of experience in their lives. Julia acknowledges that she has strong grammar and vocabulary, which gives her some confidence in the classroom. Still, she struggles to see how she can offer intelligent contributions to class discussions without the same level of cultural experiences that she imagines her classmates having. Therefore, central to this story is the tension that emerges between the value of the dominant notion of intellectual understanding and the cultural experiences that support intellectual understanding.

Uuniversities play a prominent role in conferring 'smartness' on some individuals at the expense of others. Sternberg (2007) notes that concepts of intelligence differ across cultures and backgrounds and it is important to consider cultural conceptions of intelligence. However, often intelligence is perceived as static, reflecting a Western notion of intelligence as someone who is invested in learning, enjoys it, and engages in it throughout their lives. This notion is evocative

of a specific type of learner – one who pursues formal education beyond the required levels and who spends a lot of time studying and engaging in academic discussion. There is a link between what is perceived as intelligence and the cultural capital that one possesses and thus, the requirement for schooling to develop one's smartness (Hatt, 2012). For a mature student like Julia, the feeling of lacking intelligence may be exacerbated because she did not pursue higher education at an expected time in her life trajectory, and the experiences she has had between secondary and postsecondary education may not be considered valuable in a formal learning context.

In Julia's story, she becomes frustrated when another student says that *"There's a lot of jazz going on..."* on in the play. The professor and the student share a moment of mutual understanding; however, the comment does not make sense to Julia. The word choice is significant because jazz is a musical genre contemporarily more likely to be accessed by the middle and upper classes, rather than people in the working class. Additionally, the student is using the word "jazz" as a figure of speech and this creates more confusion. When he says: *"I won't say what I mean by "jazz" - this isn't appropriate language for this classroom"*, Julia feels as though there is some level of meaning in the play that she has missed and that she should know what is meant by this comment since it seems that everyone else in the class understands. This results in feelings of anxiety as she tries to think of something she could add to the discussion and causes her to tune out of her surroundings. This experience also leads Julia to diminish her smartness because she lacks university cultural capital. Rather than viewing this as a product of class inequity, Julia considers the exclusion she feels in the class discussion to be a result of a deficiency of herself: *"I have a narrow worldview, a myopic history."* Self-doubt and

a feeling of unworthiness is generated from feeling excluded from the class conversation because she does not have a wide range of cultural experiences from which to draw.

Julia has the desire to fit in and to be intelligent like her classmates and this means trying to acquire the cultural experiences to support her smartness. This leads to her rejection of the working-class culture from which she comes because it is not able to help her succeed in these intellectual discussions: "*Coming from a small town, a working class life where there was never any money to travel or participate in activities is like understanding a beautiful place only from a picture. My understanding is feat with no tactile nuances of smell and feel. I'm untextured.*" Here Julia is suggesting that her working-class background has been a disadvantage to her because it has given her no opportunities to engage in the world beyond her small town. Since Julia's working-class way of knowing is not helping her in the university, she does not consider it to be intelligence. It is apparent that Julia views herself through a middle-class lens when she thinks that her working-class existence hasn't enabled her to understand what it is like to live in the world, as if the only existence that can do this is a middle-class way of life. Experiencing this tension in the classroom could easily lead working-class students to reject the university experience; however, Julia is hopeful that she will *"find the words and strength to become a part of it."* This willingness to join the intellectual world of university may be a result of Julia's age, class-consciousness, desire for class-mobility, and her confidence in her vocabulary and grammar skills. These factors may allow Julia to see herself in an intellectual way and this is perhaps enough to give her hope that she will eventually fit in.

Smart Enough?

An internal sense of possessing smartness, whether it be the smartness traditionally valued by the university or the "commonsense" smartness often valued by the working class, is

not universal. Ashanti, an African Nova Scotian woman with Indigenous roots, questions why she is completing a university application:

> *As I sit filling out applications for university, I hear Kool and the Gang playing in the background. I am sitting at the kitchen table in the 2-bedroom apartment in the COOP where my mother and I live in Halifax's North End on Charles and Creighton streets. I can smell the apple crisp that I have baking in the oven. Why am I applying to university? I think. I have a few teachers who have encouraged me because they see potential in me to be successful in attaining higher education. I want to continue learning. But who do I know that has attended university? No one in my family. None of my friends, they all have babies. Black students from the North End don't go to university. Black girls who grow up with no fathers present, raised by their mothers don't go to university. Universities don't come looking for us. Who do I think I am?*
>
> *Wait a minute…Colleen's at the University right now. She's black like me. Her mother raised her by herself. She got a scholarship from church. Maybe I can do this. If Colleen can do this. I can do this too. I can work this summer to pay for tuition. I can apply for grants and scholarships. I can live at home and work part-time. I can work really hard to be successful. I can get a bus pass and map out the bus route to get to the University. I fill out the applications and pray. I know that going to university is an opportunity to learn more than I know now.*

An analysis of Ashanti's memory story must begin with the acknowledgement of the historical role of universities, and specifically the role of the education system in Nova Scotia, in the oppression of marginalized communities. The university has been both a symbol of smartness and implicated in the production of harmful, dominant views of intelligence as a characteristic that is inherent within individuals. That is, the notion that some people naturally possess intelligence and others do not. Hatt (2012) examines smartness as a culturally produced concept that is informed by relations of power. In the West, the idea of intelligence emerged from patriarchal, scientific paradigms that have been utilized to oppress minority groups while maintaining power for upper-class, white men. For example, Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests developed in the field of Psychology to measure intelligence served to keep African Americans and women out of public life (Hatt, 2012). Throughout the Twentieth Century, systems of schooling solidified smartness as a feature of white superiority (Hatt, 2016). In Canada, this is

illustrated through government imposed Residential Schools[17] and through the low expectations for academic achievement placed on black students in the public education system, noticeably in Nova Scotia as revealed by the BLAC report (1994)[18]. Who is labelled intelligent is contingent on who succeeds in an education system that has traditionally privileged Eurocentric and middle-class values. It is within this context that Ashanti finds herself doubting why she should be applying for admission to an educational institution that has not focused on attracting or welcoming students like her.

As Ashanti reflects on the process of applying to university, she is seeing herself through the eyes of a racist, middle-class, white society in which unchallenged systemic racism signals to her that black girls from Halifax's North End[19] do not go to university. W.E.B. Du Bois (2015) identifies the experience of always looking at oneself through others' eyes as double consciousness:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this

[17] Residential Schools were implemented to remove indigenous children from their families to be stripped of their language and cultural practices, which were thought to be inferior to those of the dominant white, European culture (Where are the Children, 2001).

[18] The Black Learning Advisory Committee (BLAC) Report (1994), highlights how over two hundred years of individual and systemic racism, operating overtly and covertly, has resulted in unequal educational opportunities for black students in Nova Scotia, including access to postsecondary education. The report notes that in the 1970's between 70-85% of black student were enrolled in "general" courses rather than the "academic" courses that could lead to postsecondary education, showing that black students were not expected to go on to university (p.35). A 2009 report, which reviewed the impact of programs implemented as a result of the BLAC report, revealed an increase in African Nova Scotian students participating in postsecondary education – 378 students in 2008, up from 246 in 2004. The report notes that more must be done to improve access to higher education and scholarships that support participation in higher education. (Lee & Marshall, 2009).

[19] The North End of Halifax, Nova Scotia is a vibrant place with strong African Nova Scotian roots. The area is also the site of one of Canada's most egregious examples of institutional racism. The expropriation of Africville, a small, thriving black community existing from the early 1800's to the 1960's, by municipal and provincial governments for the purpose of "urban renewal" resulted in residents not being fairly compensated for the land they owned and people being forced into debt and public housing, despite promises they would be relocated to better housing (McRae (n.d.); Tattrie , 2014).

> American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (xxiii)

According to Itzigsohn and Brown (2015), three ideas emerge from Du Bois's theory of double consciousness – the veil, twoness, and second-sight. The veil is what separates the races. Whites project their construction of Blacks onto the veil and these projections "become realities that Black subjects have to process in their self-formation." (p. 235). Twoness is the process through which racialized people assume positions in two different worlds: "the Black world, which they intersubjectively construct behind the veil, and the White world, which dehumanizes them through lack of recognition" (p.235). The third concept, second-sight is viewed as both contending with the misrecognition and dehumanization imposed on them by Whites, but also creating the opportunity for racialized people to see how they have been constituted through a white, racist lens in order to fight against this misrecognition (p. 236). Building on Du Bois's theory of Double Consciousness, Black Feminist scholars have theorized the concept of Triple Consciousness to consider the intersection of race and gender (Beale, 2008; Welang, 2018). Triple Consciousness Theory contends that Black women view themselves through three lenses rather than two: white, patriarchal, racist society, blackness, and womanhood, in which white, heterosexual women's experiences are prioritized (Welang, 2018). Like Double Consciousness, Triple Consciousness allows for Black women to see how they have been constituted and

reimagine their subjectivities. These theoretical components can be identified in Ashanti's memory story.

Ashanti struggles to reconcile her desire to continue academic learning and the positive encouragement she has received from her teachers regarding her intellect and abilities with the appropriateness of applying to university because black people have been excluded from higher education. Ashanti's thoughts are shaped by white projections on the veil, which historically have not depicted black people as university educated, and position black, single mothers as pathological and welfare dependent (Fraser & Gordon, 2013). When Ashanti thinks to herself: "*Black girls who grow up with no fathers present, raised by their mothers don't go to university*", she may be tapping into a dominant myth created by white politicians and perpetuated through the media that serves to remove responsibility for the inequalities faced by the poverty and working classes from the state and place it on individuals – a myth through which poor, black women have been villainized (Winfrey Harris, 2015). Ashanti does not indicate that she has been labelled in this way; however, I argue that the discourses that fuel the myth of the pathological, welfare dependent, black single mother affects how she sees herself. Demeaning images of black women who are single mothers and their children do not make it easy for Ashanti to see herself in an academic way.

Ashanti's question: *"Who do I think I am?"* may speak to a concern that she is not smart enough to attend university and to a fear of betraying her community by not following a similar path to the other girls she knows. She mentions that none of her friends have gone to university because they all have babies. Just as Ashanti is seeing herself through the projections of the white gaze, she is also seeing herself through the gaze of her black friends, both causing her to second guess her decision to apply to university. As Hatt and Otto (2011) note "for so long smart

has been seen as un-cool, traitorous and used as a taunt aimed at other Brown and Black kids for whom smartness equals acting White" (p. 508). However, Ashanti experiences the second-sight phenomenon that Du Bois addresses in his theory of double consciousness. That is, she realizes that she has an opportunity to take up other ways of being and knowing outside of the projections of white society. She thinks about the one black girl she knows who is currently attending university, and this ignites a sense of possibility that she can do the same. Ashanti's church community also plays a role in her ability to see herself as a university student since her church has provided scholarships for university attendance. Ashanti's planning for how she will get to university, including living at home, applying for scholarships and grants, buying a bus pass, and mapping her route to campus, demonstrates a type of working-class, practical smartness that she has the knowledge and resources to achieve her goal. When Ashanti says, *"I can work really hard to be successful"*, she is resisting the messages she has received about not being smart enough. She is finding the internal resources to pursue her wishes – maybe some of the encouragement her teachers have given her about their beliefs in her abilities as well as her church community have served to counter some of the dominant narratives about what is expected of "black girls from the North End."

Outsmarting the System

While working-class women can view their class backgrounds as a detriment to being recognized as intelligent in the university, they can also pit their working-class knowledge off against the book knowledge valued in university to create a space for themselves and a sense of being valued. Barb, a transfer student to university from community college, prides herself in her ingenuity in beating the university system:

Barb pays the taxi driver, thanking him as she tries to exit the car with as much grace as she can muster. It's her third trip to the city – ever. With no bearings or confidence, she climbs the stairs to the imposing grey brick building. Her future is inside.

Click. Click. Click. She tries to quiet the animal-like trot her fancy boots make on the polished floors. Room 233. The door is open and a young woman greets her as she enters the sunny office.

"You must be Barb!" the poised and polished recruiter says as she reaches to shake Barb's hand. "I took a look at your transcripts to see which courses we could give you credit for – we might have to look at your course syllabus from Abnormal Psychology to confirm another transfer credit."

Barb grows more nervous – what is a syllabus!? A silly bus? Clearly that's not what she meant. Barb, don't be stupid. She smiles and nods, hoping the recruiter doesn't sense her panic and confusion.

"Overall, you're in a good position – we were able to give you 10 full credits"... She begins to explain which courses will be required during the first year, but Barb is not listening. She is back in her Grade 12 Pre-Calculus class...A conversation about university...

"No one in ***this*** *class will go to community college. That's for the kids in Foundations Math down the hall." Barb internalized this belief that smart people go to university – you only go to trade school if you aren't book smart. Everyone knows that.*

...4 years later, Barb sits in the recruiter's office listening to this poised and polished woman outline the possibilities that lay ahead.

"You have a lot of the pre-requisites already, so take a look at some electives! Is there anything you're interested in?"

Barb smiles to herself – everyone else's first year was filled with intro courses, writing courses, with little choice available. Here she was, allowed to learn about whatever may tickle her fancy. Her grin grows. And think about the money I saved! College only cost $2600/year for tuition, I lived at home, saving on rent and living costs – but yeah, I'm not book smart.

The image of her Pre-Calculus teacher re-appears. She smiles wider. The recruiter asks a question, jolting Barb back to reality. As they say goodbye, Barb leaves with a pep in her step – it's the first time feeling like she has an advantage.

Stupid mucky mucks with more money than brains – never had this silly family saying been more appropriate.

In 2008, Barb arrives at university for the first time alone, not with supportive family or friends as many traditional university students now do[20]. She has yet to have a university encounter but has internalized a sense of needing to change herself to belong there. She alters her behaviour, striving for a *"graceful"* exit of the cab and attempts to quiet her heels in the hallways of the academic building, describing her walk as an *"animal-like trot"*. Barb has dressed-up for the occasion in her *"fancy boots"*; however, she doubts whether she looks appropriate for the university. She meets a recruiter who she describes as *"poised"* and *"polished"* in comparison to herself. These concerns about Barb's appearance are tied up in socially constructed notions of respectability and "proper femininity", which are elements of some contemporary representations of intelligence. Although women have historically been excluded from notions of intelligence, this has changed with wider participation of women in higher education and increased occupation in white collar jobs. It is important to note, however, that depictions of smart women tend to reflect white, middle-class women who can access higher education and commodities that reflect smartness. In their exploration of how media images portray smartness as a commodity in the current context of the knowledge economy[21], Hatt and Otto (2011) find that smartness is an "attribute associated with whiteness and patriarchy, and

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[20] University norms have changed over time. It is now commonplace for parents to accompany students to university recruitment events. Many universities offer programming for parents during Orientation Week.

[21] Drummond (2003) identifies the knowledge economy as a shift from manufacturing to service industries. He notes that the knowledge economy relates to "the technological infrastructure of knowledge and an increasing shift in the treatment of knowledge itself" (p.58). Hatt & Otto (2011) indicate that "schooling becomes key within a knowledge economy because far higher levels of literacy and technological skills are required of consumers and workers than those levels required of previous generations. A newly-complex level of literacy necessitates workers exhibit innovation, creativity, and technological problem-solving skills, so more and more workers need and are expected to have educational credentials beyond the secondary level. Simultaneously, industry comes to recognize the importance of higher education to the strength of the over-all economy. Globally, schooling—higher education especially—becomes viewed as key to a healthy economy" (p. 509-510). The knowledge economy is problematic in that it is closely aligned to human capital theory which leads to the evaluation of education and individuals in terms of economic growth and development (Hatt & Otto, 2011).

outside of the personal sphere" (p.514). Further, advertisements in which white women are positioned as smart are either connected to mothering or in relation to fashion choices rather than through their ability to use technology or engage in wealth management like white men. When women do not have access to fashionable products, they are portrayed as not possessing intelligence. Hatt and Otto (2011) find that the commodities advertised in these depictions of smartness operate as "technologies of power" that perpetuate class, racial, and gender inequalities (p.522). Working-class women participating in university in the current context of the knowledge economy, who can't afford the commodities and brand names that have come to signify smartness, or who do not see the value in these commodities, are at risk of being identified as unintelligent.

Barb desires to look smart and to be afforded respect as she enters the unfamiliar, middle-class territory of university. A lot is at stake for her as she believes *"her future is inside"*. Lawler (2005) notes that since respectability is identified as a characteristic of 'proper' femininity, which has not traditionally been conferred on women from the working class, they

> must constantly guard against being dis-respectable, but no matter how carefully they do this, they are always at risk of being judged as wanting by middle-class observers. And this is a double jeopardy since if working-class women can be rendered disgusting by dis-respectability and excess, they have also been rendered comic or disgusting in their attempts to be respectable (p. 435-436).

To be rendered comic or disgusting when not soliciting this response is also to be rendered uneducated. Until recently, women who attended university were mostly from middle- and upper-class families and they would have the markers of respectability that are also associated with intelligence. This is different for working-class women like Barb who do not possess the

signifiers of wealth and smartness; their lack of these signifiers can be conflated with lack of intelligence. Barb's surveillance of her own body in the university is driven by a concern that she may be found out as an undesirable student who should not be there. In her text on working-class women and respectability, Skegg's (1997) notes of her research participants that they either imagined or experienced a "superior other" that resulted in policing themselves and the opening up of all aspects of their lives to judgement and inspection. Unable to feel comfortable with themselves the women were "always convinced that others will find something about them unwaning and undesirable" (p. 162). Barb's surveillance of her appearance could be in response to an expectation that her respectability, and therefore, her intelligence, will be called into question.

Appearance is not the only thing Barb polices about herself. She is careful not to say anything that might expose her lack of knowledge about university as demonstrated when she becomes confused about the word "syllabus": *"Barb grows more nervous – what is a syllabus!? A silly bus? Clearly that's not what she meant. Barb, don't be stupid. She smiles and nods, hoping the recruiter doesn't sense her panic and confusion."* This internal dialogue is fuelled by Barb's internalization of what it means to be smart in university. She believes she should know what a syllabus is already and verbalizing her question would be a sign of stupidity. Asking questions is often proclaimed as a key feature of smartness; however, Barb knows that only certain types of questions qualify. As Barb's story indicates, there is an exclusiveness to university that appears designed to keep certain groups of students out. This leads back to her experience with her pre-calculus teacher saying who should go to university and who should not. This highlights that schools stream students, both informally and formally, and class inequalities are perpetuated at all levels of schooling.

Barb counteracts her insecurities about not belonging in university by taking pleasure in the fact that her common-sense knowledge helped her outwit the university system and all the other students who do university the traditional way. As discussed in the literature (Luttrell, 1989; Skeggs, 1997), working-class women who have not attended university often align themselves with what is frequently portrayed as the antithesis to the Western notion of intelligence – common sense. For working-class women, common sense is depicted as knowledge acquired through life experience, such as mothering, practical jobs, and tending to housework, whereas intelligence is knowledge gained through formal education that could be in conflict with the common sense knowledge that enables working-class women carry out the demands of everyday life (Luttrell, 1989, p. 38). Luttrell (1997) points out that working-class women use their identification with common sense knowledge as a way of organizing themselves and defending themselves against others. Since common sense knowledge is seen to be practical and real, working-class women can view the educated upper and middle classes as snobby and fake. This application of moral judgement allows working-class women to attribute value to themselves, even though this value is unrecognized outside of the working-class. As Skeggs (2004) notes, critiquing middle-class pretentiousness, especially through popular culture, became a way for the working class to resist and challenge the moral judgments imposed on them by the middle class: "The power of the anti-pretension critique is [...] about *not authorizing* those who have been positioned with more moral authority; it is about blocking their ability to apply moral judgement" (p. 90). Since the working-class has been portrayed as intellectually lacking, positioning book knowledge as pretentious and bogus and common-sense knowledge as "real intelligence", is a defensive move designed to protect sense of self. The idea that Barb has outsmarted the system and only has to pay for two full years of university after doing the first

two years at a community college makes her proud as does the thought that she is proving her pre-calculus teacher wrong. A main theme here is possessing working-class, practical knowledge and being able to work the system and outsmart authority figures. Evoking this common-sense knowledge may also be a way to keep herself grounded in her familiar, working-class culture. Barb refers to the authority figures associated with the university as *"mucky-mucks with more money than brains"* and this allows her to place a moral judgement on them just as she feels they may be doing to her. It may be this counter judgement that makes space for Barb in the university.

Conclusion

Smartness is a socially constructed concept laden in relations and discourses of power that serve to advance some and marginalize those who do not subscribe to the dominant notion of intelligence. Universities are implicated in the shaping of exclusive notions of smartness and are symbols of intelligence in Western society. The memory stories in this section reveal the types of negotiations that Canadian working-class women make between their own conceptions of smartness and the intelligence valued in the University.

Julia, a mature student, feels left out of a class discussion because she does not possess the cultural capital valued in the university. She recognizes that she has the grammar and vocabulary skills to be successful and for these reasons thinks she can do university. However, to make a space for herself in higher education, Julia negates her working-class background and hopes that what she will learn in university will change her and allow her to achieve greater understanding of the world around her. Rather than seeing her working-class experience as being valuable in the university context, she sees it as a barrier that must be overcome to make way for academic learning.

Ashanti finds herself questioning why she is applying to university in a province where Black students have not been encouraged to obtain postsecondary education and in a society which Black people have been excluded from university. She sees herself through the eyes of a racist, patriarchal, white society which has not often portrayed Black people as intellectual, and she also fears betraying her family, friends, and community by choosing university and not following similar paths to them. Ashanti identifies the projections being placed on her and she can see that other pathways are possible. She recalls another girl from her church who is attending university, the financial supports that she could access, and the positive reinforcement from her teachers and realizes that she can go to university. She draws on practical, working-class knowledge to plan how she will make her goal of attending university a reality.

Finally, Barb arrives at the university feeling as though she could be discovered as a student who does not belong there. Her concerns about her appearance and understanding of university language are wrapped up in ideas round respectability and value and her desire to be both respected and valued in this academic space. Barb does not have the signifiers of wealth and, therefore, smartness and this causes her to feel as though her respectability and intelligence will be questioned. To cope with this feeling of misfitting, Barb prides herself for outsmarting the university system by transferring credits from her college diploma so she can complete a degree faster and with less expenses than traditional university students. Barb blocks any perceived moral judgement about her belonging in university by placing value on her common-sense working-class knowledge that she thinks has given her an advantage over other students and the institution.

These memory stories show that Canadian working-class women who choose to attend university begin their scholarly journeys with ambivalence about being smart enough to fit in.

White, middle-class discourses of intelligence shape how we see ourselves in relation to the university and spur varied responses ranging from distancing from our working-class identities in order to make way for "intellectual" learning to assigning our own value to our working-class common-sense knowledge in order to feel respected in the university environment.

Part 2 - Psychic Responses and Class

Our memory stories are filled with instances of attempting to legitimate our participation in university. This leads to a range of psychic responses in order to contend with feelings of inadequacy, not belonging, and forgetting where we come from. Diane Reay (2017; 2005) refers to this as "class feeling" or the "psychic landscape of class" and indicates that "psychic responses and class inequalities contribute powerfully to the making of class" (Reay, 2005, p. 912). This section explores some of the individual psychic responses found in our memory stories and the ways in which they are dealt with, including through expressions of regional pride, attempts to pass, and acquiescing to class differences. These psychic responses are linked to social and affective processes that come to bear on the subjectivities of working-class women who participate in university. We can see that the ways social class is closely tied to geographical regions in Canada as well as the ways in which working-class women are blocked from the dominant modes of contemporary femininity they are expected to embody have a profound impact on the shaping of working-class women's sense of self in university.

Pride in Class

University is a place where Canadian-born working-class women can experience a deep sense of pride in their backgrounds. This pride can perform as a psychic response, offering protection from class insecurities and devaluation in a sometimes hostile middle-class environment. It can also compel an insertion of working-class culture into the university. In

Claudia's memory stories about being a working-class graduate student from Nova Scotia studying in a prominent university in Victoria, British Columbia in 2007, regional class differences intersect with her participation in university to produce an irrefutable sense of pride for her working-class and Atlantic Canadian[22] culture:

> *You could hear a pin drop in that classroom.*
>
> *"I know it's tricky, especially out loud." Our prof tries to coax us. "No volunteers?"*
>
> *We're all graduate students, I think. Surely (I'm itching to read). Aching for that singsong. That gallop. I want to blurt out that I read Chaucer at parties, for the hell of it, to friends who have had more rum than I have. At least I did back home. Friends slipping themselves back into their parents' parents' four-hundred-year-old tongues from the Rock, the island, the other Island, the Valley, the port, the woods. Their parents' parents' parents' parents' skedaddling from famine, enclosure, petty theft.*
>
> *And I'm out West on a rich little island, parched from the dry season. "The droghte...hath perced to the roote." I'm thirsty for language in that little classroom. That's what we're here for. Aren't we all? Surely..."I'll read."*
>
> *All eyes on the girl who talks like a pirate. Of course she would. No vocal fry, no uptalk. Her gratuitous growly consonants, stingy with her vowels (until she isn't and they toll like bells). Things I never thought about until I moved out here. Things I didn't realize were in me classed me. A little flag on my head, stamp on my forehead saying "Back East", "Podunk", "Old Timey," "Hick".*
>
> *I clear my throat [Read I have a gentil cock]. I realize halfway through that I am bobbing like a metronome, ducking and dipping in my seat like a court jester and when I am done, I have no breath left.*
>
> *My classmates are blonde blank-faced little moons. My professor looks pleased and relieved. Content. I am beaming, I am sure of it. I feel older than everyone in the room combined. I've brought my dirt farmers and miners and lumberjacks with me. Reading has "bathed every regime in swich licour." The people sharing my heart with me – we have already outlived all of you. You can't do what I have done just now.*

In this story, Claudia juxtaposes Eastern Canada, where her home province is situated, with Vancouver Island, in the much wealthier Western province of British Columbia. Claudia strongly identifies with the idea of "back home" and the distinctive cultural constructs associated

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[22] I am using Atlantic Canada synonymously with the terms Maritimes and East Coast in this analysis.

with the Maritime region and its people. The parties at which she reads Chaucer to her inebriated friends, the local dialects passed down from European, working-class ancestors, and the "dirt farmers and miners and lumberjacks" from which she draws pride suggest that Claudia is not only shaped by her knowledge of Maritime history and her working-class background, but by dominant portrayals of Maritime identity. Kitchen parties, storytelling, and hard-working, down-to-earth, folks (mostly white men) have featured prominently in depictions of the Maritime region and in Maritime self-construction. McKay (1994) describes how Nova Scotia was transformed into a "folk society" in the early Twentieth Century by a newly created Tourism industry[23] and middle-class cultural producers to attract wealthy, sophisticated visitors to the area. The strategy for doing this was, paradoxically, to present Nova Scotia as a place of rurality and innocence, unscathed by capitalism and technology, where the people, mostly portrayed as residents of fishing villages, were friendly, self-sustaining, and simple. A place in which visitors could step back in time and get away from their busy, commercialized lives. Though this culturally produced depiction obscures the economic and social realities of Nova Scotia, it nonetheless persists and shapes how those outside and inside the province see the region and its people. Drawing from Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of Imagined Communities, Wylie (2011) discusses the idea of region as a constructed space:

> region is increasingly being viewed not as a geographical/cultural/political given but as a construct, a kind of imagined and at times strategic sense of cohesion and community,

[23] The development of the Nova Scotia Tourism industry was spurred by a downturn in economic prosperity in the province's once booming natural resource sectors and inadequate federal support for development of the region with the fall of these sectors. Ironically, the Tourism industry was created as an economic driver to make up for this disparity; however, depictions of the province portrayed Nova Scotia and its people as immune to capitalist development and modernization (McKay,1994; Wylie, 2011).

> projected usually from without but also from within. The concept of region can be seen as an assumed or imposed homogeneity and/or unity. (p.8)

Claudia draws strength and pride from the imagined community of Atlantic Canada and an assumed unity with working-class Maritimers, past and present, in order to negotiate between that for which she feels judged, her accent which marks her class and regional status, and the expectations of what it means to be a graduate student in a province in which people may view Atlantic Canada with disregard[24]. By doing this, she attributes value to the parts of herself that she feels are not respected in the university and province where she is studying.

Part of what allows Claudia to feel pride for her working-class and Maritime identity is how she views her current location in British Columbia: *"And I'm out West on a rich little island, parched from the dry season."* Just as Atlantic Canadians have been viewed as rural, regressive, and simple, British Columbians have been portrayed as urban, smug, snobby, and without the ability to cope with adversity[25]. For Claudia, this classroom is pretentious, the students are aloof,

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[24] Wylie (2011) notes that Canadians outside of Atlantic Canada view the region as the "impoverished East Coast" – the poor provinces that richer provinces like Ontario and British Columbia have had to prop up through federal equalization programs. To elaborate on this, the labels of "have" and "have-not" provinces have come to signify those provinces that receive equalization payments (intended to assist provinces with providing equal access to public services) from the Federal Government and those who are wealthy enough not to require these payments (Abedi, 2018). This leads to animosity between the provinces and is felt at the individual level. When Newfoundland moved from being a "have-not" to a "have" province in 2008, former Premier, Danny Williams, stated: "At times we've been presented as the poor cousins in Canada. Now we can hold our heads high and feel very good about it … I consider it to be a very significant day for all the people of the province" (CBC News, 2008). Here, Williams alludes to the humiliation and resentment that can be cast upon "have-not" provinces by wealthier provinces who feel they are unfairly forced to support these poorer provinces. These regional divisions inform how the people from "have" and "have-not" provinces come to see themselves and people in other provinces as depicted in Claudia's memory stories.

[25] BC playwright Lister Sinclair (1958), argues that British Columbians are snobs in a humorous opinion piece in Macleans's magazine. Among other things, he pokes fun at the "conceited pride" people take in the natural landscape of the province even though they are not responsible for it. He also jests about the belief that BC architecture is superior to any other province and how snobby people can be about the weather: "But we are even snobbish about the climate, for we become petulant if our precious rainfall is too much discussed, while we jeer gleefully at the snows and storms of the hateful east" (para. 16). In "Pass the crumpets, please…", McGillivray (2011) notes: "Victorians have a reputation for being "more British than the British," in part due to our enduring love of flower baskets, tearooms and lawn bowling" (para. 1).

and it frustrates her that her enthusiasm for language is not shared in the way that she wants it to be. It is baffling to Claudia that her presumably rich classmates are not engaging in the material: *"I'm thirsty for language in that little classroom. That's what we're here for. Aren't we all?"* When Claudia volunteers to read, she realizes her dialect identifies her as a Maritimer and working class and this leads to a fear of judgement from her classmates:

> *All eyes on the girl who talks like a pirate. Of course she would. No vocal fry, no uptalk. Her gratuitous growly consonants, stingy with her vowels (until she isn't and they toll like bells). Things I didn't realize were in me classed me. A little flag on my head, stamp on my forehead saying "Back East", "Podunk", "Old Timey" "Hick".*

Claudia is conscious that the way people speak is conflated with social class and thus, intellect or lack thereof. This is playing out in a graduate level English course where a lot can be at stake when it comes to the identity of students, particularly around the correct pronunciation of words, producing quality literary analysis and demonstrating intellect. Although Claudia is insecure about the way she speaks, she volunteers to read the passage from Chaucer with great anticipation. Accent is something that can be altered or lost, and it is likely that some working-class students who have been made to feel inadequate because of their dialect may try to modify it in a university setting. Claudia, however, feels no need for this type of modification and seems to emphasize her East Coast "pirate" accent. The practice of hyperbolizing accents has been used by other working-class women. UK scholar, Valerie Hey (1997) notes:

> I play games through my accent. Whilst I have generally modulated my accent…I continue to constitute my accent as something of a tribal trophy. I frequently and deliberately exaggerate its broadness as a reminder that I am not an endemic member of the class that is invisible to itself. (145)

The embellishment of attributes associated with the working class is a strategy to deal with feelings of inadequacy. Reading aloud in a graduate-level classroom in British Columbia, Claudia is connected to her Atlantic Canadian and working-class identity and this emboldens her and makes her feel unique. The "dirt farmers, and miners, and lumberjacks" from whom she has inherited her accent become attachments that empower her. Claudia's reference to her classmates as *"blank-faced little moons"* suggests that they are boring, uninteresting, and not as lively as Claudia is. Through her reading and acknowledgement of her working-class history and geography, she has become figuratively bigger, and better than them.

In another of Claudia's memory stories, a vocalized craving for potato chips to her fellow students leads to a feeling of pride in her Maritime working-class background:

> *"God, could I ever go for a friggin' bag of chips." I do my hungry/raptured performance thing I do, where I lean forward over the table and close my eyes for emphasis and run my hand through my hair as I say "chips". Real herbal essences or Harry Met Sally shit: "CHIPS."*
>
> *We're taking 5, half-way through our three-hour seminar on British Youth Subcultures in Twentieth Century Literature. I listen for reverberations and the first is from the only other person in the class from Nova Scotia. She has lived in BC for years by this point, so it's doubly satisfying to hear her say, "Yes, god, chips."*
>
> *The other reverberations aren't so ecstatic, so hungry for salt and oil and home. The girl whose personality is that she doesn't eat anything from a can and tries to fuck everybody, looks at me, then at the other east coast pirate-talkin', chip crunchin' shameless bitch like we've shit in her granola.*
>
> *"Ewww." She doesn't even give our little reverie two syllables. But once she's on board, so is everyone else around the clapped together seminar table in the musty, concrete, brutalist classroom. All 8 of them.*
>
> *"God, chips are so gross," chimes the prim one whose whole life is her charity case dog and her complexion. "Yeah, so unhealthy." This from Mr. Machismo, who is currently fucking Ms. No-Cans, being extra gym-ratty for her, and coasting through with less financial aid than anyone in the room.*
>
> *I am indignant, spiteful, haughty, topping from below. Yes, I say car with six r's and wipe my chip grease on my leg, and no, you'll never know those old, earthy glories.*

Instead of dialect, food becomes a class marker/maker in this situation. Although potato chips are widely available and consumed throughout Canada, the Maritime Provinces have a strong affiliation with this affordable, greasy snack food (Baron Cadaloff, 2017; Lee, 2015; Cuisine of the Maritimes, n.d., para. 3). Claudia clearly associates her love of chips with being from Nova Scotia: *"I listen for reverberations and the first is from the only other person in the class from Nova Scotia. She has lived in BC for years by this point, so it's doubly satisfying to hear her say, "Yes, god, chips." The other reverberations aren't so ecstatic, so hungry for salt and oil and home."* The chip incident reinforces Wright's (2015) contention that even in the Twenty-First Century, taste is still a significant force in the shaping of social and cultural life. Through the chip incident, Claudia becomes the object of middle-class disgust, particularly when her classmate says, *"Ewww"* and the others join in to condemn the craving. Lawler (2005) indicates that middle-class disgust toward the working class is at the heart of middle-class subjectivity: "their very selves are produced in opposition to the 'low' and the low cannot do anything but repulse them" (p. 430). When another student says *"God, chips are so gross"* she is affirming her identity in opposition to Claudia. In her mind, Claudia responds to this threat to her subjectivity by distinguishing herself from her middle-class classmates, similar to the way she distinguishes the Maritimes from the "rich little island" of Vancouver, in the form of personal attacks on their appearance, sexual behaviours, perceived trivial concerns (i.e. the charity-case dog), financial security and the food they will eat (granola) versus the food they won't (chips and canned goods) and though her command of language. Through the process of labelling her classmates she achieves a type of moral superiority which allows her to experience pride in her Maritime working-class background. According to Sayer (2005), taking pride in being working class is different than having pride in being middle or upper class because

> being proud to be working class has a rationale, in that its members occupy the moral high ground as a consequence of their lack of any undeserved advantage relative to others. Their merits and internal goods cannot be attributed to the accident of birth and inheritance but have been achieved in more difficult circumstances than those enjoyed by the better off... (p. 182)

Through her pride in class and region, Claudia makes a claim to authenticity that she thinks the other students lack. Although she does not overtly say it, Claudia implies that her classmates are entitled and have not had to work very hard for anything. In the chip story, she also labels herself and the other student from Nova Scotia with the attributes that clearly differentiate them from the other students. These are also the attributes she believes the students are ascribing to them: *"east coast"*, *"pirate-talkin'"*, *"chip crunchin'"*, *"shameless"*, and *"bitch"*. By claiming these attributes, Claudia blocks the judgement of her classmates. Claudia embraces her identity as a working-class woman from the Maritimes in a prideful way: *"Yes, I say car with six r's and wipe my chip grease on my leg, and no, you'll never know those old, earthy glories."* Claudia draws boundaries between herself and her classmates through her pride in the fact that she is not like the students who are so critical of her love of chips and do not access the joy she experiences in simple pleasures. What Claudia also seems to be indicating here is not so much that her classmates will never eat chips, but that they will never feel as unconstrained as she does to express her subjectivity. There is a class element to the freedom Claudia feels to express herself. Her working-class, Maritime culture has not placed expectations on her to embody middle-class decorum that would place limitations on her tastes and behaviours. While Claudia recognizes that she is being judged by the white, middle-class standards of respectability and femininity, she happily rejects these standards.

In fact, Claudia seems to be mocking contemporary notions of femininity and therefore, resisting them: *"I do my hungry/raptured performance thing I do, where I lean forward over the table and close my eyes for emphasis and run my hand through my hair as I say "chips". Real herbal essences or Harry Met Sally shit: "CHIPS."* Claudia is referring to the classic scene in the film "When Harry Met Sally" where Sally acts out how women fake orgasms in a restaurant to prove to Harry that women do fake orgasms. Sally's behaviour does not reflect appropriate femininity and Claudia's emulation of this behaviour suggests that she is also striving to be inappropriately feminine. Her public expression of feminine desire – leaning across the table, closing her eyes, and running her hands through her hair - toward the chips is ironic and amusing, especially since this type of desire is supposed to be directed at men and not potato chips. What starts as a possible attempt to amuse the class during a break quickly becomes a maddening interaction in which Claudia explicitly draws a line between herself and the hyperfeminine and hypermasculine middle-class students who surround her. The reaction she gets from most of them is unexpected and unwanted and it is at this point, when her sense of self feels threatened, that feelings of pride for her working-class attributes – her dialect, mannerism, tastes – surface. Claudia may be viewed as disgusting and unfeminine by the middle-class students; however, she shapes an identity for herself based on her identification with the Maritimes and her working-class background that is unconfined by the expectations of middle-class gender roles.

In both of Claudia's stories, she establishes moral advantages (Lehmann, 2009) or "badges of dignity" (Sennet & Cobb, 1993) around her Maritime working-class identity, which fuels a sense of pride that allows her to combat the real and imagined class scrutiny and class difference she feels in university. Claudia's experience of reading Chaucer in her thick East

Coast accent and being the only student to volunteer to read in the class gives her a sense of superiority over the other students. She is beaming after her performance. She doubts the ability of any other student in the room to do the reading better than her - *"you can't do what I have done just now."* Sennett and Cobb (1993) found in their study of American working-class men that breaking rules was "an act "nobodies" can share with each other" and they identified this rule-breaking as attempts to create "badges of dignity" that could not be destroyed by authority figures (p. 54). Though Claudia breaks no formal rules in either memory story, it can be argued that she is searching for dignity and respect in an environment that only affords it to those who possess the dominant cultural capital of the institution. In a sense, she breaks the unwritten rules of the university classroom where she is expected to display middle-class propriety, or at least try. She rejects the standards of contemporary femininity, which allows her to set herself apart from the other women in her class and, paradoxically, creates success in the classroom setting as her lack of inhibitions work in her favour. Since Claudia feels unlikely to gain respect and belonging in the university classroom, she creates her own sense of belonging within her class background, which includes the imagined community of Atlantic Canada and this serves as a barrier to keep out the judgement of her middle-class peers. A working-class and Maritime background is something they cannot have that Claudia does possess and in which she takes great pride. In both stories, Claudia feels, deeply, the judgement placed upon her and performs the class positioning for which she feels judged. For Claudia, the university is a place where she identifies more strongly with her working-class background and her geographical roots. Perhaps as she feels pressure to take up an acceptable middle-class feminine identity like the majority of the women in the university, a fear of losing herself elicits a response is to do the opposite.

In Debt for Sexiness: Attempting to Pass in the Campus Residence

Another way that Canadian working-class women attempt to feel a sense of belonging in university is to attempt to pass as middle class. Passing refers to the seeking out or going along with assumed identification with a social group to which one does not belong. Passing can be deliberate or unintentional and can occur for various reasons including economic and physical survival and avoiding stigma (Gianoulis, 2015; Renfrow, 2004). Stigma management[26] is a main reason for the instances of attempts to pass in the memory stories and it is how discursively produced ideas about social class and gender lead to stigma, and thus, attempts to pass, that I am concerned with exploring. Passing can be examined through the lens of non-ironic and ironic passing; the former seeks to be taken seriously and the later seeks to displace the normative and may even produce pleasure from the act of passing (Skeggs, 1997). The passing working-class people attempt to do when mimicking middle-class tastes, attitudes, and behaviours is non-ironic because it is passing which seeks to be taken seriously and this produces anxiety and insecurity. The anxiety and insecurity that working-class people feel when they attempt to pass originates from concerns of not getting it right, being found out, and distancing oneself from their loved ones who do not feel the need to pass (Skeggs, 1997, p. 87).

Canadian working-class women's attempts to pass in university are not always connected to the academic aspects of higher education. Campus residences are spaces where there is considerable pressure to fit in, particularly with expectations of contemporary femininity. Many scholars have examined changing femininities under the powerful forces of neoliberalism and

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[26] Erving Goffman's (1963) work on stigma has been of significant influence in understanding passing and stigma management. However, Goffman has been critiqued for only examining stigma as a function of interactions at the individual level. Hannem (2012) argues that using Foucault's perspective on the production of knowledge, truth and power provides a useful way to consider the construction of stigma at the societal and institutional levels.

postfeminism (Charles, 2010; Gill & Kanai, 2018; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harvey & Gill, 2011; Gonick, 2004; McRobbie, 2007; Walkerdine et al., 2001). It has been noted that young women have been positioned as the ideal subjects under neoliberalism, in which they are encouraged to be "flexible, entrepreneurial, mobile and responsible for their own destinies, which involves effective planning and self-monitoring" and which ensures they will not rely on the state for support (Charles, 2010, p. 62-63). Moreover, equality and empowerment discourses of postfeminism urge young women to participate in consumer culture that appears to preclude patriarchal influence (especially as it relates to fashion and beauty), be sexually experienced and adventurous, but within the confines of heterosexual desire and prevention of pregnancy, and to be educationally and professionally successful (McRobbie, 2007; Harvey & Gill, 2011). This notion of the beautiful, sexually experienced, educated, professional woman is a position reserved for middle-class girls with the economic, cultural, and social capital to achieve it; however, it is an ideal that is expected of all women (Charles, 2010). So, what can happen when working-class women feel the pressure to fit into this contemporary, hypersexual version of femininity? My research suggests that universities can be rich environments for exploring this question, as the student populations of Canadian postsecondary institutions are comprised of more middle- and working-class women than ever before (Ferguson, 2016) and their social interactions with one another can reveal much about the negotiations involved in the shaping of their gendered subjectivity. The university is a space that has always privileged middle-class culture and it has not gone untouched by neoliberal policies and ideologies (Giroux, 2014; Saunders, 2007). In fact, it seems to be a vital apparatus in the making of the ideal neoliberal feminine subject who must blend beauty and sex appeal with smartness. It can be expected that young working-class women who attend university and live in campus dorms may encounter a

pressure they have never felt prior to entering the institution, or at least to such an extent, to live up to dominant expectations of contemporary femininity. As Anne's memory story reveals, attempting to meet these expectations while living in residence at her university comes at a psychological and economic cost:

> *I take my index finger and carefully slide it into the envelope flap to rip it open. I pull out a piece of paper with a card attached. My first credit card. I'm a little surprised I got approved for it, but I did make some good money this summer working as a forklift driver on the base in military supply. My dad would probably kill me if he knew I got a credit card. But it's only for emergencies, I tell myself. My parents are six provinces away in Alberta – they're not here to help me if I need money for something. Dad always said credit cards should only be used for emergencies – otherwise the interest will pile up and you'll never get out of owing money.*
>
> *I hear a squeal from outside my dorm room. I open my door to see what all the fuss is about. Andrea is holding about five shopping bags and tells the girls crowding around her, "Look what I got from La Senza. Matthew's going to cum in his pants when he sees this on me." She pulls out a lacey red bra with a G-string to match. I've never seen anything so skimpy. I mean, I've been to La Senza, sure, but for the flannel pjs. The bras and panties look uncomfortable, and they're too expensive anyway. Still, I feel a little ashamed of my completely ass-covering Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear from Walmart. She's talking about how her boyfriend is coming to visit for the weekend and I'm jealous. My chub, frizzy hair, acne problems, and bank account can't compete with girls like this.*
>
> *I walk into the open door of Nina's room and sit on the edge of her unmade bed. Nina is really the only friend I have in residence. Unlike the other girls here, Nina wears hoodies and sweatpants, and spent her summer working in a pig processing plant. And I'd bet that her underwear covers her whole ass too.*
>
> *"Let's get out of rez. I'm bored," I say. "Wanna go to the mall" So we walk down the hill and catch a bus. Anything to procrastinate from schoolwork.*
>
> *"Any particular store you wanna go to?" I ask Nina once we're in the Halifax Shopping Centre.*
>
> *"No. I don't really have any money to buy anything right now. You?"*
>
> *"Yeah, I wanna check out La Senza," I say.*
>
> *I can feel the weight of my shiny new credit card in my wallet. It can't hurt to buy just one thing.*

First, it is important to clarify that Anne's story takes place in the early 2000's, before parents could e-transfer money to their children living away on university campuses, and she lives in an all-female residence at a predominantly female university. Anne's feelings of inadequacy and shame about her physical appearance and perceived inability to attract men lead her to believe that she must spend money she does not have in order to emulate the hyperfemininity of the other girls living in residence and to compete with them for heterosexual relationships. Anne and Nina, the other recognizably working-class girl in residence, are outsiders and do not fit in with the girls on their floor. They are not a part of the group that gathers around to see Andrea's newly purchased items from La Senza, a popular Canadian lingerie store targeted at teens and young women. Anne distinguishes herself and Nina from the other girls through their choice of clothing and the type of manual labour they must engage in to earn money during the summer months: *"Unlike the other girls here, Nina wears hoodies and sweatpants, and spent her summer working in a pig processing plant. And I'd bet that her underwear covers her whole ass too."* Anne mentions that she spent the summer driving a forklift at a military base. There is an implication that Anne does not believe the other girls must engage in this type of manual work to support their participation in university. Anne also positions herself as different from the other girls by highlighting the parts of her physical appearance that she thinks makes her unable to compete with them for heterosexual relationships: *"My chub, frizzy hair, acne problems, and bank account can't compete with girls like this."* Witnessing the interaction between Andrea and the other girls is enough to make Anne want to try to fit in and meet the expectations of the contemporary femininity she sees before her.

On one hand, Anne seems turned off by the bra and g-string: *"I've never seen anything so skimpy. I mean, I've been to La Senza, sure, but for the flannel pjs. The bras and panties look*

uncomfortable…" Anne's working-class practicality is incongruent with dominant notions of contemporary femininity and sexuality. Her desire to be comfortable is important to her. On the other hand, she feels ashamed of her underwear from Walmart and therefore, she feels less feminine and unlikely to fit in with and compete with the other girls. Being surrounded by students in residence who seem to have more money than she does causes Anne to want to buy more products to make herself look more desirable and hopefully feel a sense of belonging. She is aware that underwear from La Senza is viewed with more prestige and sex appeal than the cheaper, less revealing underwear from Walmart, which come with a stigma of being lower class. Even though the other girls may not know what type of underwear Anne wears, she sees enough of herself through their eyes to imagine how they see her – as unattractive, unfeminine, and unable to attract men as it is when she views the interaction between Andrea and the other girls in the hallway that she is confronted with the idea that her own appearance and underwear is not good enough. While femininity may not have been a concern before coming to university, Anne is now faced with the realization that what she can afford and feels the most comfortable in is no longer acceptable and she must purchase more expensive brands and skimpy underwear to be attractive to men and to compete with girls like Andrea. Anne does not want to purchase and wear skimpy lingerie as a source of pleasure for herself, rather to meet societal expectations of contemporary middle-class femininity and sexuality and to try and pass as middle-class. Anne's story reveals that even though the university girls are talking about lingerie in the context of pleasing men, what is also unfolding is an intense competition between the girls in residence to fit into an ideal version of contemporary femininity – one where having money to invest in appearance and wearing sexy but respected brands of lingerie ascribes value and belonging.

Harvey and Gill (2011) discuss the concept of sexual entrepreneurship as a way to think through changes that occurred during the first decade of the Twenty-First Century regarding postfeminist representations of women as "desirable and sexually agentic" (p.54). This concept is informed by Foucault's (1988) notion of 'technologies of the self' and Radner's (1999) 'technology of sexiness.' Technologies of the self refers to the means by which people employ procedures on their bodies, minds, and actions that transform who they are within the parameters of available discourses and resistances to or within these discourses (Foucault, 1988, as cited in Harvey & Gill, 2011, p. 56). The concept of a 'technology of sexiness' posits that virtues such as innocence and goodness are no longer good enough to bring to the sexual/marriage marketplace as contemporary romances call for a 'technology of sexiness'. Harvey and Gill (2011) extend this idea to indicate: "in the postfeminist, post-*Cosmopolitan* West, heroines must no longer embody virginity but are required to be skilled in a variety of sexual behaviours and practices, and the performance of confident sexual agency is central to this technology of the self" (p. 56). Through their concept of sexual entrepreneurship, Harvey and Gill (2011) explore a new mode of femininity to which sexual entrepreneurialism is a necessity:

> This modern, postfeminist subject...is incited to be compulsorily sexy and always 'up for it', and is interpellated though discourses in which sex is work that requires constant labour and reskilling (as well a budget capable of stretching to a wardrobe full of sexy outfits and drawers stuffed with sex toys). Beauty, desirability and sexual performance(s) constitute her ongoing projects and she is exhorted to lead a 'spiced up' sex life, whose limits – not least heterosexuality and monogamy – are tightly policed, even as they are effaced or disavowed through discourses of playfulness and experimentation." (p. 56).

Like entrepreneurs in a business sense, sexual entrepreneurs require capital in order to start-up and to continue to operate. Anne turns to her newly acquired credit card to help with this. The credit card is an important part of Anne's story because it is ultimately how she achieves a financial independence, of sorts, from her parents, who would otherwise have control over her purchases. This independence allows her to invest in products she believes are necessary to be feminine and sexually desirable, even though this clashes with her desire to be a good daughter and heed her father's advice about financial responsibility as well as her desire to invest in cheap, comfortable clothing. Andrea's public display of her lingerie, and thus her femininity, seems to send an indirect challenge to the other girls about their own femininity. Anne hears this challenge and is willing to use her newly acquired credit card to enter the competition and to try and fit in. She knows that she must reinvent herself to embody this ideal, although she does so unconvinced that she will be able to get it right. Her physical attributes and her lack of material resources make her feel unable to mimic and compete with the other girls; however, these concerns are not enough to prevent her from trying.

A Lesson in Longing and Accepting Class Differences

Sometimes attempting to pass in university is not possible for Canadian working-class women. Julia, a mature working-class woman attending university in the late 1990's, contends with feelings of misfitting, loneliness and longing to feel a part of the university environment:

> *Being already married with a kid on the way, I see myself as separate from the other regular students. I am only part-time, taking one course and all the students in my evening class are either full-time students trying to fit in a mandatory English class or people like myself, maybe a bit older and trying out a novel university experience.*
>
> *I am not at university often enough to feel part of the environment and I secretly like the university logos and school colours on jackets and bums; I wish that I could feel comfortable being part of that scene. I wish I could wear what they wear. Maybe I would feel more part of things. I become aware of myself looking at the students on campus. They hang in groups and innocently ignore me. They don't know I want to be included.*

I look at what I am wearing: sensible clothes, mommy clothes. It isn't the hand-me-downs I often had to wear to school as a kid, but I still feel on the outside looking in. Maybe if I could have gone to university right after high school, I would be more like them. Maybe if I could have had the opportunity to have choices, but circumstances and finances always play a deciding role. I am always hyper aware that being poor or living in circumstances that are not ideal has and still is interfering with my ability to have a lot of choices.

I am out of touch with where I fit anymore. I am comfortable with understanding the course material even though I struggle to feel comfortable with my abilities to write well and express myself in a way that is meaningful. Also, I can't figure out if I look and sound ok. I am unfamiliar with the markers or signs that tell me who is who. I have been at home too long away from the outside world and fashion. I am all too familiar with seeing myself as poor in relation to my friends and fellow students.

Growing up most of my clothes were hand-me-downs from my cousins or handmade – lovingly created, cut-out, sewn together sometimes from new material, sometimes from materials reclaimed from garments large enough to be re-made into something new to me. My mother's hands, her creativity and ingenuity produced most of what I wore. I learned to accept being different; I would never hurt her by telling her that I wanted the store-bought things everyone else wore. My feelings about my clothes changed somewhat near the end of 8th grade when one of the rich girls said, "I suppose your mother will make you a whole new wardrobe from high school? High school started in grade 9 and what surprised me was that she wasn't being mean; she was serious. I proudly started high school wearing really cool dresses my mom made for me. Early 70's my dresses were orange paisley and pink flowers. Groovy. But I still longed to be able to wear the things the other girls had.

That seems so long ago now. I am still on the outside looking in but for more complicated reasons now – even though I still sort of envy their clothes. As I think about it more deeply I realize that my desire to be at university, to be allowed to be here and be part of an education that I always dreamed about, is what really matters and I have to keep that foremost in my mind. I can't let my insecurity and doubts lessen this experience for me. Somehow, I have to make my lack of "fit" not matter so much. I have my kids to think about and a future where they can have choices.

Longing has followed Julia throughout her working-class life and revisits her once again on the university campus. The main example in her story is about clothing and desiring clothes that will help her fit in with the traditional university students; however, Julia's memory story more broadly captures a longing for choices that she has never had because of her class positioning and the outsider status this lack of choices ascribes to her. As Carolyn Steedman

(1986) illustrates in her autobiographical account of her relationship with her working-class mother, longing for “fine clothes, glamour, money; to be what she wasn’t” characterized her mother’s life and, in turn, shaped Steedman’s own childhood. Her mother was not the iconic working-class mother that appeared in sentimental working-class texts; rather she was a single mother who had not really wanted children (p. 6). Through an examination of her mother’s longing for clothes, material possessions, and a life that she could not attain, Steedman (1986) creates an interpretive device through which to explore the gendered subjectivity of her mother, herself, and working-class girlhood and to disrupt accounts of a psychological simplicity imposed on the working class. Julia’s memory story illustrates how longing shapes her sense of self. Instead of a “New Look” coat desired by Steedman’s mother, she desires sweatshirts and sweatpants adorned with university logos. Clothing that symbolizes, like the coat, a class positioning beyond the one she has occupied throughout her life, but clothing that she feels she does not belong in. Despite being enrolled in a course at university, Julia feels as though she has not escaped the confines of her working-class background: *“I am always hyper aware that being poor or living in circumstances that are not ideal has and still is interfering with my ability to have a lot of choices.”* This level of class consciousness seems to provide Julia a reflexive lens through which to view her situation as a mature student. Although she feels like she does not belong, she understands why she feels this way. This consciousness could be a result of her age and life experience. Nonetheless, she feels as though she is missing out on the traditional university experience due to her age and roles as wife and mother-to-be: *“I am not at university often enough to feel part of the environment and I secretly like the university logos and school colours on jackets and bums; I wish that I could feel comfortable being part of that scene. I wish I could wear what they wear. Maybe I would feel more part of things... I look at what I am*

wearing: sensible clothes, mommy clothes." The university clothing that the other students wear creates a community of which Julia does not feel a part. Ideas about aging and what it means to be young and old shape how Julia sees herself in university and how she thinks the other students view her. Dominant ideas about life trajectories indicate that the right time to pursue postsecondary education is immediately after high school and Julia feels as though she does not belong because she did not follow this expected route: *"Maybe if I could have gone to university right after high school I would be more like them."* Some of Julia's feelings about being a mature student can be traced back to the way in which contemporary universities are marketed to potential students. A scan of university webpages and viewbooks reveal numerous photos of traditionally aged university students, socializing with each other on campus, many wearing the university attire that Julia refers to in her memory story. Mature students are not represented in these images. Universities are full of young women who have taken up new modes of femininity, different from the modes presented to Julia when she was their age. These new femininities in which beauty, self-re-invention, sexiness, and smartness are key features do not leave room for working-class women in general let alone mature, pregnant, working-class women. This is isolating to Julia and fuels her sense of longing. She thinks the other students do not acknowledge her because of her differences: *"I become aware of myself looking at the students on campus. They hang in groups and innocently ignore me. They don't know I want to be included."* Julia's social positioning as a mature, pregnant, working-class woman, a wife, and part-time student mean that she does not fit the archetype of a typical university student. As Julia reflects on her feelings of not fitting in because she feels too old, and perhaps too pregnant, to wear the same clothing as the other university students, she is reminded of a parallel experience in high school where she also felt like a misfit because of the clothes she must wear due to her

class positioning. Back then it was the clothes her mother made for her because she could not afford to buy her the clothing many of the middle- and upper-class girls wore. High school-aged Julia finds a way to reconcile her feelings about her homemade clothing and her longing for store-bought clothes*: "I learned to accept being different."* Even though she wants to wear what the other girls in her class wear, she begins to take pride in the clothing her mother makes for her. Perhaps she realizes that her homemade clothing was noticed by one of the rich girls and this made her feel unique and valued. That this memory floods into Julia's consciousness suggests the memory could be buffering the effects of her experience of misfitting in university. The other factor that seems to allow her to deal with feelings of not belonging are the stronger feelings that she has for her family. As a child, Julia does not want to hurt her mother's feelings by telling her that she would rather have clothing that is purchased at a store, so she chooses to be proud of the unique clothing her mother makes for her. Similarly, at university, Julia indicates that it is her future children that she must be concerned about rather than her lack of fit at the university. This gives her a sense of purpose to continue even though she feels as though she does not fit in. This aligns with Reay's (2003) findings in her study of mature working-class students in the UK. She notes that the women were motivated to return to university out a of a need to help other people, including family and community, something that did not show up in interviews with both younger and mature middle-class women. Julia's recognition that she is not just going to university for herself but for her future children reflects a larger discourse of "doing it for the family" reflected in other research studies with mature working-class women who return to university (Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Reay, 2003; Tett, 2000). Reay (2003) cites Archer and Leathwood (2003) who indicate that when women express the notion that their participation in university is to create a better life for their children, it enables them to take up an acceptable

mode of femininity – that of being a selfless mother whose children's' needs are a priority. Working-class mothers have been wrongly pathologized and blamed for the poor performance of working-class students in the school system (Walkerdine & Lucy, 1989; Walkerdine et al., 2001) so attending university is a way to show a commitment to learning and supporting their children's learning (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Julia has clearly framed her participation in university as a way to provide the choices she never had to her future children. Overall, Julia does not fit in at university because she is working class; however, there are differences imprinted on her body that also prevent her from fitting in. Julia is visibly older and she is pregnant, so even if she were able to hide her class-markers and wear the right clothes and use the right language, she is never going to look like the majority of the other women in the university; she is never going to fully pass. This automatically forces her into a different mindset with respect to fitting in and her participation in university. She comes to terms with her misfitting and it could be her class consciousness, the parallel experience in high school, and the desire to create a better life for her future children that help her be okay with it.

Conclusion

In this section, I have discussed some of the ways in which social and affective processes encountered by Canadian-born working-class women in university lead to certain psychic responses to cope with threats to their subjectivity. Naturalized discourses around regional class differences, contemporary middle-class femininity, tastes, and age bring about a range of responses, including pride and resistance to dominant discourses about class and gender, attempts to pass as middle-class, and acquiescence to class differences. Though these responses are meant to protect from stigma and feelings of misfitting, they may also reinforce class differences. The examples in this chapter demonstrate how attempting to legitimize participation

in university leads to the activation of psychic responses. These responses serve to safeguard and protect the subjectivities of working-class women in university.

Claudia rejects the expectation that she will exhibit middle-class propriety as a graduate student in a well-known university in British Columbia. While an anticipated strategy for dealing with her feelings of misfitting may have been for her to drop aspects of her Maritime working-class identity, she instead takes pride in her Atlantic Canadian roots and her class background to amplify the characteristics that identify her as such. Pride as a psychic response enables Claudia to block the real and imagined judgement of her classmates and prove to herself that she is good enough to be at the university with all the other students. She redirects judgement back on the classmates who are evaluating her and makes a claim to authenticity that she believes they lack. This performance of her working-class, Maritime identity works in Claudia's favour because she gains the approval of her professor for her courageous act of reading aloud and through her undeniable command of language, which shines through her East Coast dialect. Claudia resists the dominant discourses that privilege middle-class tastes and femininity which would suggest that she should attempt to pass as middle class.

Passing as a psychic defence is a way to supress the characteristics that others may find undesirable in working-class women. Hiding these aspects allows them to avoid stigma and harassment that might occur in a middle-class environment like university. The non-ironic passing that Canadian working-class women do in higher education is an anxiety inducing experience because there is a constant fear of being found out. Anne's attempts to pass in an all-female university residence are connected to changing expectations to fit into a contemporary, hypersexual version of femininity that has occurred under the forces of neoliberalism and postfeminism. These are expectations that Anne may not have encountered in her working-class

family and community. To fit in and compete with the middle-class girls in residence, Anne purchases expensive lingerie, that she otherwise cannot afford to buy, with a newly acquired credit card. This provokes inner conflict as she negotiates her desire to wear comfortable and inexpensive underwear and her desire to follow her father's pragmatic financial advice, with her wish to belong. However, this conflict is not enough to prevent Anne from trying to pass and fit in with the other girls in residence. This neoliberal, postfeminist discourse creates a powerful pull to ignore and supress her working-class identity.

While attempting to pass seems possible for Anne, for other Canadian working-class women in university, their working-class identities are marked on their bodies. Julia is not able to attempt to pass in university even though she longs to belong to the middle class university environment. Julia is visibly pregnant and older than all of the other students and she only studies part-time. Julia is conscious of her class positioning and the limitations it has presented throughout her schooling and she has experience not fitting in. This helps her deal with her longing in this memory story. Julia finds strength to resist dominant discourses about who traditional university students should be, and to accept that she is not like the other students, she draws on another discourse prevalent for working-class women who attend postsecondary education – that is one of opportunity and making a better life for her children and family.

Part 3 – The Discursive and Intersubjective Nature of Canadian Working-Class Women's Relationships in Higher Education

Relationality plays a central role in the constitution of Canadian working-class women's subjectivity in university. In the sense that we are shaped in relation to that which we are not, but to which we may be aspiring to belong, the middle class, and also in the sense that we are constituted through our relations with others. Hollway (2006) proposes a psychosocial approach

to examining how subjectivities are constituted through relationships and employs the term 'intersubjectivity' to acknowledge the "idea of a person whose internal world is made up of parts of all the people who have affected him or her" (p. 474.) This approach distinguishes between the secondary processes we experience on a conscious level as individual and coherent selves and others, and "primary process, characterized by unconscious intersubjectivity, which is experientially prior and never thoroughly superseded by consciousness, continuing to exert a defining influence on subjectivity, actions and relations" (Hollway, 2006, p. 476). We carry imprints of our past relationships and subconscious influences which impact how we see ourselves and how we bring ourselves to new relationships and relational situations.

Additionally, Drewery (2005) notes that "while individuals are both the site and the subject of a discursive struggle for identity, these identities are formed in relationship with others, mostly (but not entirely) through language" (p. 319). Drewery (2005) also indicates that conversational interactions within networks of relationships across numerous social locations are sites in which the "struggle for agentive participation in the production of one's life" take place (p. 319). In the context of this section, significant social locations such as higher education settings and home sites present interactions that produce internal struggles for the participants; the discourse and relating that occur at these locations presents opportunity and constriction on subjectivities.

Both the intersubjective and discursive perspectives on relationality inform my analysis in this section. In the memory stories, intergenerational transmission of class generates tension between a working-class mother and daughter; working-class parents' lack of understanding about their daughter's employment, education, and mothering decisions fuels discord in their relationship, and a mature, black, working-class graduate student who is positioned in her

professor's middle-class gaze resists the notion that she should move away to pursue a PhD. Each memory story reveals the complexity of relationality and how unconscious and discursive processes are at work, constraining and liberating working-class women's sense of self.

Keeping Up Appearances: The Intergenerational Transmission of Class

In a memory story that takes place in the early 2000's, the summer before Claudia leaves home for her first year of university, she has a relational interaction with her mother that demonstrates how her mother's class anxieties impact their relationship and make her feel like she is not the type of daughter that her mother desires.

> *I am skimming bugs out of the pool with the blue net attached to the telescope handle. Sometimes there are frogs or water beetles, but nothing special this time. Horseflies mostly. I fling their drowned little bodies over the fence. My mother comes through the gate. She just put the pool in last year, maxed out the credit card to do it. The grass hasn't even grown back around the fence yet. My mom is sneering at me behind her sunglasses. I can't see her eyes, but the curl of her lip says it all. I'm getting the eye.*
>
> *"You can't dress like that in university – you'll look like an idiot."*
>
> *I keep skimming and flinging bugs but take a moment to think about my clothes: cut off jean shorts, flip flops, black smashing pumpkins t-shirt that I've cut up and put back together. But I'm cleaning her pool! Surely...*
>
> *"Torn up jeans and a shirt like that. No one will take you seriously. You'll lose marks. What if you get...an Incomplete?"*
>
> *The theme to Psycho plays in my head. My mom once got an "incomplete" in Home Ec. because she played hookie too much and it has always been her greatest fear for her children – that and looking "poor". She was sent to school in clothes that were one step up from stained shop rags.*
>
> *My self-styled attempts at looking rock and roll – my complete indifference to trends, femininity, professionalism – start most of our fights that summer. She probably wished for a flirty, girly daughter who wanted to sneak out in micro minis – instead, she had one who stole her dad's old shirts and wore farming pants with pride.*
>
> *"Mom! I visited the school three months ago. It's super casual. And this is who I am!" I feel shafted. Why can't she be happy for my scholarship? I never even, like, go to parties. I read and I get good grades and so what if I like to do my own thing with clothes? I catapult a few more bugs. Spiders, water striders. A leaf.*

"I'm a really good kid, mom. I don't feel like you appreciate it."

"Jesus Christ, why can't you just be normal? Am I going to have to send spies up there?" says my eccentric mom with her public job – says my mom who gets paid to make prank phone calls!

"I feel like you just think I'm a fool!" I hit the pole against the fence harder, and harder.

"What? Don't be foolish!"

A scream of pure teenage angst. A final blow on the fence. "Mom!"

Here, Claudia becomes frustrated with her mother's disapproval of her clothing choices and rejection of traditional femininity and feels as though her mother's class anxieties are being taken out on her. Claudia does not associate the clothing she is wearing with social class or looking poor and she is comfortable in her stitched-together t-shirt and cut-off jean shorts. She strives to achieve a "rock and roll" style and does not care about meeting expectations of traditional femininity; she proudly wears conventionally masculine, working-class clothing that belongs to her father. However, her mother is afraid that this type of clothing will not only make Claudia look lower class but will result in poor performance in university. The sources of these fears seem to be Claudia's mother's experience growing up poor, being forced to wear clothing that resembled rags to school, and missing class time and receiving an "Incomplete" in one of her courses as a result. Claudia's mother may also be afraid of being compared to her own mother who, according to a journal reflection written by Claudia (2018) at one of our workshops, was "reckless" with the small amount of money the family did have, spending it on what might seem like frivolous items such as "chocolate, dolls, furniture, curtains, cigarettes, and wind chimes", rather than food and clothing for her children. Claudia's reflection enables an exploration of her story in the context of intergenerational transmission of class.

Walkerdine (2014) presents the concept of intergenerational transmission of class as "not about establishing hopeless pathology of working-class families but an understanding of the

place of history in the making of affective experience and its transmission across generational boundaries" (para. 18). Additionally, Walkerdine (2015) suggests that analyses of class transmission should consider "how experience of oppression and exploitation is embodied and passed on relating to new historical circumstances, perpetuating feelings of lack of safety and anxiety, as well as physical effects" rather than viewed with an approach that separates psychology from the embodied experience of history (p. 168). Claudia's mother's response to her daughter's fashion choices and lack of femininity emerge from affective and material experiences of class inequality. The shame and hurt that Claudia's mother feels is from how her own mother's actions were perceived as "recklessness" and "irresponsible" and she does not want to be characterized in the same way. What is not considered is that the supposed "recklessness" with which Claudia's grandmother acted is perhaps how she experienced and responded to the cruelty of systemic class oppression. It is possible that Claudia's grandmother purchased those items to hide or cope with her class positioning, and perhaps Claudia's mother is purchasing items that show other people and herself that she can afford middle-class luxuries.

A closer look at the discourses of recklessness and irresponsibility imposed on Claudia's grandmother, and other working-class people, reveals that working-class women, especially those who are mothers, have no room to put themselves first, to make questionable decisions, to be as human as the middle and upper classes, who can obtain most or all of the items they desire, without being labelled as "egocentric" and "insensitive" (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) mothers. Claudia's mother's actions in the story are defenses against the judgement and shame cast upon her own mother and her family for being poor. Claudia's mother also wants to live up to what she perceives to be the image of a good mother, who can raise a respectable child who will go on to be a respectable adult.

Although Claudia's mother seems to be in a different economic position than her own mother was, she carries the effects of this class trauma with her. Claudia's mother's fear of class judgement and shame impacts her relationship with her daughter. The clothes Claudia chooses to wear are not suitable because they may symbolize the clothing that her mother and aunts and uncles had to wear as children. Claudia's mother cannot understand why these clothes would be desirable. This is not unlike a phenomenon I have encountered where my working-class family members criticize people who wear jeans with holes in them as a fashion statement. They are incredulous that these items would earn anyone respect as they believe that only people who cannot afford new clothing would resort to wearing clothes with holes in them. This seems to be a sentiment that drives Claudia's mother's criticism of her daughter's "rock and roll" style. Claudia's mother is trying to disidentify with her own working-class background and attempts to do so by regulating her daughter's appearance and their home (specifically with the purchase of the pool) because these sites – the body and home – are sites that convey symbols of social class (Skeggs, 1997).

Working-class women who try to distance themselves from their class positioning can be caught up in discourses of "improvement" in which they try to better themselves and their families through enhancements to their "appearance; their bodies; their mind; their flats/houses; their relationships; their future" (Skeggs, 1997). The idea behind improvement is that it will result in an increase of cultural capital which can be traded in wider contexts and it differentiates those who take action to improve from those who do not try or cannot improve (Skeggs, 1997). Claudia's mother is caught up in the improvement discourse and sees her daughter as someone who needs improvement and feels responsible for her improvement. This clashes with how Claudia views herself. She sees no need to alter her appearance and cannot understand why her

mother cannot simply be proud of her academic accomplishments. Claudia seems very secure in her choice of fashion and her understanding of what university will be like as she counters her mother's claims: *"Mom! I visited the school three months ago. It's super casual. And this is who I am!"* Claudia does not associate the clothing she chooses to wear with social class because she sees them reflected in the media and popular culture and perhaps because what would previously have been considered working-class attire has now been co-opted by the middle class (it is "cool" to look like you are not putting in effort despite putting in a lot of effort to look like you are not); therefore, the boundaries that signify working class and middle and upper class are not always as clear as they may have once been in relation to clothing. Skeggs's (1997) has pointed out how middle-class and upper-class folks can play around with clothing and dress like working-class people as a fashion statement but do not have to worry about the economic or social repercussions of being working class. One can see how Claudia would not necessarily connect her clothing choices with social class. However, Claudia's mother does not understand this shift and fears for her daughter's image, and this creates tension in their relationship.

Another important aspect in the story is Claudia's mother's fear that Claudia will fail in university. It seems that this fear comes from the possibility of Claudia repeating her mother's mistake of skipping school and/or that professors will look down upon her ripped jeans and pieced-together t-shirt and make assumptions about her intellect and seriousness toward education. This demonstrates Claudia's mother's misunderstanding of many contemporary universities as they are places where pyjamas and sweat suits are regularly worn to class and some professors often wear jeans and t-shirts[27] to deliver their lectures. It is not surprising,

[27] I acknowledge that this notion is more applicable in some academic programs than others and is also gendered. Some faculties may have different expectations around attire and women may feel more pressure to dress professionally to succeed in the academy.

however, that Claudia's mother expects that her daughter should dress professionally in university. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, society tells us that smart people dress professionally and university is one of the places where one might expect to see dominant understandings of professionalism played out as this is where many people go in the age of the knowledge economy to be groomed to enter the professional world. Aside from a fear of others judging her daughter's appearance in university, Claudia's mother could be concerned about how the clothing her daughter wears reflect upon her as a mother. Although Claudia's mother seems to be trying very hard to disidentify with the working class, the interaction that she has with Claudia in this story is unlikely to pass for "ideal" middle-class mothering[28] which would more likely encourage a discussion around Claudia's appearance over the argumentative approach she takes with Claudia in attempt to get her to dress differently. She all but refers to Claudia as an "idiot" and swears at her, demonstrating behaviour that would not be associated with "proper" middle-class parenting. It is likely that Claudia's mother's class anxiety blocks the ability to have a calm discussion about her attire. This interaction does not have the desired consequence of making Claudia feel like she should "improve" her clothing; rather it has the effect of making Claudia think she is not the daughter her mother really wants: *"My self-styled attempts at looking rock and roll – my complete indifference to trends, femininity, professionalism – start most of our fights that summer. She probably wished for a flirty, girly daughter who wanted to sneak out in micro minis."* For women, a sign of being middle-class is also being feminine. Claudia's lack

[28] Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) explore the regulation of women through constructions of good and bad mothering practices. Middle-class mothers are positioned as sensitive mothers who put their children's and family's needs above all else, including their own. They are encouraged to turn their domestic work into fun, learning activities for their daughters and avoid conflict with them. This is intended to lead to the development of model, democratic citizens. These middle-class mothering practices are placed in opposition to the pathologized working-class mothering practices, which view working-class mothers as authoritative, argumentative, insensitive, and selfish.

of interest in looking feminine heightens her mother's fears about how she will be perceived in university.

It is important to consider that developmental psychology discourses indicate that a typical aspect of adolescents maturing to young adulthood is seeking to individualize and gain independence from adults (Erickson, 1963); therefore, a reading of the relational conflict in this story from a developmental psychology perspective may view this as a "normal" part of growing up whether connected to social class or not. Claudia is seeking her own style and own ways of thinking about the world and her mother does not agree with her. This is not much different than many other mother/daughter conflicts. However, this tension is exacerbated by the fear that Claudia's mother has about her daughter being perceived as lower class and failing in university. Class anxieties play a leading role in the interaction. The clothes and Claudia's casual attitude are a symbol to the mother that Claudia may not achieve upward mobility and thus, she herself will fail as a mother. This interaction also has the effect of raising Claudia's defences against her mother's expectations of her. She refers to her mother as "eccentric" and mocks her job. Claudia thinks her mother's purchase of the pool that she is cleaning is rather reckless: "*She just put the pool in last year, maxed out the credit card to do it. The grass hasn't even grown back around the fence yet."* Though Claudia might enjoy the pool, there is a sense that she thinks it was not a responsible purchase. Perhaps the pool mirrors the type of spending of Claudia's mother when she was child and Claudia, who is aware of how her grandmother has been characterized, is equating some of her own mother's behaviour to this. Claudia's memory story and reflection implies that her grandmother's "habit" of improper spending is viewed by her mother and herself as a character flaw, demonstrating that dominant discourses that pathologize the working-class shape how working-class family members may view each other as well.

Claudia's memory story is an example of how the intergenerational transmission of class can impact relationships between working-class mothers and their daughters. A mother's fear of not raising a respectable, feminine, upwardly mobile daughter comes from a fear of being perceived as a bad mother, a working-class mother. The daughter on the receiving end of her mother's class anxieties comes to believe she is not the daughter her mother really wants and her defences are heightened. To protect against feeling unwanted and not good enough, she mocks the very things her mother has done to try and provide a "better" life for her daughter. The hidden injuries of class become obvious in this interaction.

A Neoliberal Conundrum: An Already-Educated Working-Class Daughter Explains the need to 'Upskill' to her Working-Class Parents

Some working-class women struggle to gain understanding and/or approval from their family members regarding the educational routes they take to become upwardly mobile. In the following memory story, Anne must defend to her parents why she is planning to return to university to complete another degree.

> *"What do you mean you're going back to school?" Mom says with annoyance.*
>
> *I repeat myself: "I got accepted into the Master of Library and Information Studies program at DAL."*
>
> *"And how much is that going to cost you?" she replies and puts me on speakerphone, so my dad can hear.*
>
> *"It won't cost me too much. I work full time at the University, so I get a tuition waiver."*
>
> *"But won't you need to quit your job? What about Alex?" she buts in.*
>
> *"No, I'm only doing this part-time. Just one or two courses a semester. I'm not so stupid as to quit my job when I'm a single mother, Mom. And the tuition waiver means I only need to pay for textbooks and student fees."*

"Well, that can still be expensive," Dad chimes in. "You better not be getting more student loans," he continues. "You're already in enough debt that you can't pay off."

"Yeah, I know, Dad. Thanks. I'm not going to get anymore student loans. I'll budget for my school expenses."

"Don't you already have enough education?" he asks. "Why do you need another degree?"

"This one is a professional program. I should be able to get a better paying job after I graduate."

"That's what you thought when you were doing a Master's in English. That didn't work out very well."

He drudges up memories of having to dumb down my resume after graduation so I could get a job. Apparently, the words "Master of Arts in English Literature" makes me overqualified for everything and qualified for nothing.

I continue to explain myself, seeking his approval.

"Well, a lot of employers don't understand that the kind of skills you get from an English degree are transferrable to employable skills. But with an MLIS I can be a librarian or go into data or information management, which is a growing field right now. Maybe I could even get a government job."

He perks up at "government job."

"You want to get a job in government," he says. "Good benefits and a pension. But I still don't understand why you don't just get a PhD and be a professor."

I laugh.

"If it was hard for me to find a full-time, permanent job with an MA, it'll be nearly impossible for me to find a job with a PhD. Tenure-track jobs are pretty hard to find these days," I explain.

He has no idea what tenure-track means.

"Besides," I continue, "I don't want a PhD. Or a job as a professor."

"But you'd be a doctor."

He doesn't understand.

"Well, maybe I just want to be a librarian," I reply.

> *He doesn't respond. He takes me off speakerphone and Mom starts talking again about the flowers she wants to plant in the garden this spring.*

In this phone conversation from 2016, Anne reveals to her parents that she is planning to return to university, part-time, to obtain a graduate degree in Library and Information Studies. This will be Anne's third degree, after completing a Bachelor of Arts with a Major in English and a Master of Arts in English Literature. Now a mother, Anne feels the need to study in a field that will allow her to get a better paying job to support her son. This memory story illustrates that Anne is caught in between two worlds – that of being a good daughter who wishes to gain the approval of her parents and that of being a good mother. She wants these worlds to exist harmoniously; however, her relationship with her parents is strained in this interaction because her parents cannot relate to her educational choices and, particularly her mother, cannot imagine how going to university again will be helpful for Anne's young son. The tension in this interaction is rooted predominantly in competing discourses around employment, education, and mothering. The notion that Anne relies on her parents to help her with her son, as she revealed in other memory stories and in workshop discussions, is an added dimension in this conversation and probably contributes to her desire to obtain their approval about going back to school. Anne's parents have a different understanding of employment, education, and mothering than she does; however, everyone in this interaction desires the same outcomes – for Anne to be upwardly mobile and a good mother to Alex. The issue is how she should go about achieving these goals.

Anne, who works in a clerical role at a university, expresses to her parents that she is going back to school to get a better paying job. Anne's parents question why she is not already working in a good paying job after completing two university degrees, one of which is a graduate

degree. *"Don't you already have enough education?"* Anne's father asks. *"Why do you need another degree?"* Clearly, Anne's parents do not understand what it is like to try and achieve upward mobility in the current post-industrial, neoliberal context. When they were Anne's age, a high school diploma could secure a job for life in a range of sectors. They may understand that their daughter requires college or university-level education to find jobs; however, Anne's parents do not understand why she would need more than one degree to find good work. They are under the impression, just as Anne may have been at the beginning of her university studies, that simply having a degree makes her employable. In my academic advising job, most students I see are attending university so they can get a job after graduation so the idea that university education will lead to a job is prevalent. The reality seems to be that this is often not enough and workers are thrust into a cycle of lifelong learning, not for the purpose of fulfilling a desire to learn, but to expand their human capital[29]. Presently, university or college education, and often multiple forms of formal and informal on and off the job training programs, are a necessity to obtain and keep a job, with no guarantee of job security. Anne is now embarking on her third degree because she has found that working in a clerical job at a university will not allow her to independently support herself and her son. Anne acknowledges that employers do not see the value in certain types of degrees, such as her literature degrees, yet she places the blame for this on the types of degrees she has done and believes a professional degree will lead her to an area where there is job growth. Anne does not seem to consider the role of the market and the lack of government regulation as reasons why her degrees and her skills go unrecognized. She has effectively assumed responsibility for why she must continue to amass more credentials.

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[29] In their discussion of Adult Education policy in Canada, Elfert & Rubenson (2013) indicate that in most Canadian provinces, adult education is becoming equated with job-related skills training targeted at employment and reducing costs for welfare and government-funded programs.

According to Feher (2009), under neoliberalism, not only has the market become the method through which enterprise is organized, it has also become the method through which the self is organized: “individuals are driven to see themselves as a portfolio of action proficiencies of which they themselves are both the managers and agents of reference” (as cited in Patrinieri (2017), p. 466). Anne sees it as her responsibility to increase her skills and, thus, her employability in the labour market. When Anne’s father asks, *“Don’t you already have enough education?”,* he is relying on his own and/or the experience of others in his generation who secured a good paying job with minimal education. Anne’s father believes that there is such a thing as having too much education, suggesting that he thinks of education as merely a means to an end. This belief could also come from a feeling that he cannot relate as much to his daughter now that she has two degrees and his concerns about the practicalities of her attending university, including the high cost of tuition: “*You better not be getting more student loans,” he continues. “You’re already in enough debt that you can’t pay off.”* Although the accrual of high levels of debt are a common occurrence for university students, Anne’s father does not see this as an investment in the way that attending university is often pitched to students. His comment suggests that obtaining her previous two degrees may not have been a wise decision since Anne cannot pay off her debt even though she is working full-time. Walkerdine et al. (2001) discuss the relational impacts between working-class family members and women who pursue higher education, indicating that some of the young working-class women in their study were made to feel guilty about continuing their studies in university rather than working. Negative constructions of university students as being “idle” and partying all the time played into some of this (p. 159).

In Anne's case, it seems as though her parents are doubtful that she could be as productive at university as she could be if she remained in the workforce. The piece that Anne's parents do not understand is the economic and political shift from jobs for life to the constant need for those entering the workforce, and even those who have been working for most of their lives, to further their learning and training to prove they have skills for employment. Schugurensky (2007) acknowledges that a widespread trend in lifelong learning in Canada is to position learning as a type of human capital to contribute to economic development and the improvement of economic performance. The only possible way to keep up with the speed of technology and information changes is to commit oneself to lifelong learning and skill development. As Schugurensky (2007) succinctly puts it, job security is being replaced by skill security" (as cited in Gibb and Walker (2011), p. 383). This notion of skill security, rather than job security, is driving Anne's decision to go back to university to take a professional program. Although she may make a great librarian or information management professional already with her education and experience, she must get the degree so that her skills can be recognized. I do not say this to imply that librarians do not hold a specialized skill set; rather, I mean to indicate that these specialized skills could be acquired on the job which would enable Anne's education and experience to be considered for the role. Anne has skills that English Literature scholars argue are relevant and valuable to modern organizations (Enright & Wodsku, 2020; Matz, 2016); however, in Anne's experience, these skills are not recognized as being a match for higher income jobs. She must acquire a different degree to get the skill recognition and higher salary she desires. Interestingly, the program in which she plans to enrol has since undergone a name change, from a Master of Library and Information Studies to a Master of Information. I speculate that the decision to make this name change was influenced by this economic and political shift to

skill development to be more enticing to those looking to “broaden their skillset” and the organizations to which they will apply for jobs upon graduation. As Gibb and Walker (2011) note, despite rhetoric around developing a highly skilled knowledge economy in Canada, the Canadian Federal Government’s employment and training policy is unlikely to achieve this aim with programs that are targeted at low-skill jobs and do not reach significantly marginalized populations who do not possess at least some cultural and economic capital. They point out that the Social Investment State policy, rather than a Welfare State approach “shifts emphasis away from social and employment security to individualised and continuous skills investment” (p. 394). Thus, the onus is on the individual to increase her skillset rather than the government to develop equitable policies that ensure the collective economic and social security of its citizens. Anne is taking it upon herself to obtain more skills, while her parents do not understand why she needs more than she already has. This generates some of the tension in their discussion.

There is also some contradiction in this interaction. On one hand, Anne’s father is delighted that her preference would be to get a government job because the perception exists that working for the government is something to aspire to and the possibility of having a secure job might be greater in government than in other sectors of the economy. Despite the approval shown by her father, her parents continue to call into question her decision to have completed an MA in Literature and they are annoyed and puzzled about why she wants to do a graduate degree in Library and Information Studies instead of becoming a professor, the most logical decision in the mind of her father since she has spent all this time in school anyway. Anne’s parents question her ability to make a good decision for herself as if her previous university degrees have removed the common sense from her head and replaced it with book knowledge that is unhelpful in making practical life decisions. Anne’s status as a single mother comes into play here.

Although Anne works in a clerical role at the university where she will also study and her tuition will be significantly reduced, her mother is concerned about the financial implication as well as the impact of going back to school on her ability to be a good mother: *"But won't you need to quit your job? What about Alex?" she buts in.* Anne is forced to explain that she would never quit her job as a single mother. Now that Anne is a mother, her mother thinks she should put schooling aside. Anne does not indicate what type of mother her own mother was to her; however, it seems that Anne's mother is viewing motherhood through an antiquated and middle-class lens where mothering is the top priority and mothers are devoted solely to their children. This may be connected to the improvement discourses and class disidentification discussed in the previous memory story in which Anne's mother may be trying to disidentify from the working-class and help her daughter avoid a being stigmatized as a pathological, working-class mother. However, Anne has a more modern view of motherhood that would allow her do school and be a good mother. Her desire to get a better paying job is because she wants to provide a better life for her son. Anne's mother cannot understand this because being a mother and going to university was not her experience. Interestingly, Anne's father's suggestion that she should just become a professor is in contradiction with his wife's concerns about her going back to school. It also contradicts a question he poses early in the conversation: *"Don't you already have enough education?" he asks. "Why do you need another degree?"* He does not think going back to school is a good idea; however, he is also pushing Anne to do more schooling. It could be that he is caught up in the esteem it might bring to Anne and her parents if she becomes a "doctor." What is obvious is the frustration that Anne feels from not receiving the validation she is seeking from her parents about her return to university to do the program she wishes to do. This memory story shows the in-betweenness of wanting to be a good daughter and good mother. Anne wishes

to be supported by her parents, but they have their own ideas about employment, education, and mothering. It is unclear if there is some support for her idea of going back to school because her parents send contradictory messages. Even more frustrating is that the discussion seems to be quickly dismissed when she is firm about wanting to become a librarian and she is left feeling that they do not approve.

Value, Risk, and Diversity: A Professor's Presumptions and a Graduate Student's Resistance to doing a PhD

The previous memory stories in this chapter are concerned with the relationships between working-class women and their parents. The following story explores the relationships that form between women from working-class backgrounds and their professors and how discourses of value, risk, and diversity shape these interactions. Ashanti, who is African Nova Scotian, recalls an experience as a graduate student where her professor encourages her to pursue a PhD. This may seem like an experience that all graduate students would find gratifying and motivational; however, Ashanti's reaction is one of incredulity and irritation toward the professor.

> *I am reading the various quotes, newspaper headlines, and jokes posted on the professor's door. I am curious about why she has asked me to come and see her. I have passed all of my assignments and completed my in-class presentation. The professor's door opens, and I am invited into her office. She thanks me for coming and asks me if I have considered doing a PhD in Education.*
>
> *I am totally unprepared for this question. I have never considered pursuing a PhD. I think only really smart people reach that level. Only people who have a true passion and great knowledge seek to attain that level of study. I am not one of those people with great knowledge. I ask, "why do you think this is a good idea?"*
>
> *"You have a good mind, with good insights, a strong work ethic, you're young, there are not many women with doctorates in education and fewer minority women in the field," she responds.*
>
> *"How would I go about something like this?"*

"Well, the University of Alberta has a program, I know some people there and could probably help you get a scholarship. What does your husband do?"

"He's a banker"."

"Oh, I'm sure he could apply for a transfer and you and your family could move to Alberta for a year."

I imagine going home and telling my husband that he needs to apply for a transfer to Alberta to work for a year and that our family will be moving so I can go to school to get a doctorate in education. I imagine me telling him that we are leaving everything and everyone we know to go somewhere we have never been before just because I want to go to school to get a PhD.

The professor breaks into my thoughts. "Or if your husband can't get a transfer or doesn't want to go, you could just go for the year and do your PhD. I'm sure that you could get a study leave from your job and there are lots of university jobs working with professors to offset expenses."

My thoughts drift. You really think I would uproot my family, go across the country, basically on a wing and a prayer, without meticulous planning, preparation, and a safety net to pursue a degree that you think I should have. I appreciate the vote of confidence, but I can't get my head around this whole idea. I have responsibilities here. I have people here to support me and my family, I have communities here that I must keep. I do not have a bank account to support a whole year's salary when I am not actually working. I cannot imagine this suggestion in any other way than jumping off a tightrope without a safety net. If this was something I wanted, had discussed with my family and planned for, I am sure we would find a way, but not like this.

Her voice drifts back to me. "Well, think about it. If you are interested in attending the University of Alberta next year, I would be happy to help with the application and making contacts for you."

"Thank you," I say, as I stumble out of her office, awestruck by her presumption that I could and would just uproot my whole life and just go.

Ashanti's memory story begins with her waiting nervously outside her professor's door, uncertain about why she is there. She assures herself that she has completed all assignments for the course, and this suggests that she equates being asked to meet with her professor with something negative, such as not completing a course requirement. This also suggests that Ashanti has not experienced positive faculty advising or mentor relationships beyond specific course advising throughout her university education. As discussed in the literature review and in

the chapter on smartness, many students from working-class backgrounds are intimidated by their professors because they hold positions as authority figures and they possess the cultural capital and smartness that is valued in the university. This feeling of intimidation can be increased for racialized, working-class students in predominantly white universities in which there are few or no faculty who resemble them. Although Ashanti does not indicate the professor's race, it is significant to note that research indicates the importance of black students having black faculty mentors or when this is not possible, culturally proficient cross-race faculty mentors (Barker, 2011; Bartman, 2015). It appears that this professor is trying to positively mentor Ashanti; however, Ashanti does not see her professor as a mentor, or at least not outside of the context of her academic program. This is important to note because the interaction that left Ashanti feeling irritated and misunderstood may have happened differently if she and her professor had knowingly entered a mentoring relationship based on trust and an understanding of each other's contexts. Instead, what occurs is a perceived overstepping of boundaries on the part of the professor and a clashing of their perspectives about Ashanti's life trajectory. These clashes are informed by discourses of value, risk, and diversity.

The professor obviously places a lot of value on postsecondary education. By encouraging Ashanti to pursue a PhD, she is promoting a predominantly middle-class notion that more formal education is desirable for everyone. This is informed by her own educational experiences and the perceived benefits she experiences from having a PhD and working as a professor as well as her experience as a woman in the academy. The professor is trying to empower Ashanti to pursue a level of postsecondary education that is dominated by white men and she is attempting to be a role model for Ashanti. Additionally, the professor recognizes the importance of more "minority women" entering academia as professors and she sees an

opportunity to use her role as a professor to inspire Ashanti to help bridge this gap. The professor points out that Ashanti is bright and young; however, it is her mention of Ashanti's status as a minority student that stands out. This is undoubtedly intended to be positive encouragement; however, it is possible that Ashanti feels as though she is being encouraged to pursue a PhD only because of her status as a minority student. Drewery (2005) notes that exclusion occurs through the use of "ethnicity" discourses in cultures dominated by Caucasians: "For people thus excluded, the opportunities for developing moral and personal commitment in their own terms are constrained within dominating public discourses" (p. 320). Ashanti is also constrained by discourses around 'smartness' as she does not consider herself to be smart enough to do a PhD: *"I think only really smart people reach that level. Only people who have a true passion and great knowledge seek to attain that level of study. I am not one of those people with great knowledge."* This connects to previous discussions about the oppression African Nova Scotian students have faced at all levels of the school system as well as the obstacles working-class women face in relation to considering themselves to be smart.

Ashanti does express a curiosity after this is broached by her professor about how she would go about pursuing a PhD, although this curiosity could also actually be doubt about being able to make it happen. The professor presents options for how Ashanti could make this happen, suggesting that her husband could apply for a work transfer or that she could take a study leave from her job and relocate to another province for a year to get the process started. These suggestions do not seem unusual or unattainable to the professor; they are merely the steps people take when they wish to pursue a PhD. At the time of this discussion, there was not a PhD program in Education in Nova Scotia, the province in which Ashanti's memory story takes place, so moving away to study or online learning were the only options available. Also, the idea that

one should move away from their hometown to study at the Graduate and Doctoral levels has shaped the educational choices of many academics, and reflects a dominant belief that moving away is the only way to become a successful academic and perhaps even a well-rounded person. The idea of moving away from her home and uprooting her family does not correspond with Ashanti's identities of being black and being from a working-class background, a wife, mother, and community member. The professor sees Ashanti through her middle-class gaze which perceives a PhD as something to strive for and she does not recognize that her suggestion for more formal education is in conflict with the value Ashanti places on family and community and the way she sees herself within the university.

Postsecondary education has only recently been focussed on attracting non-traditional students and still has the reputation of being a predominantly middle-class institution. It can be difficult for students who have not been traditionally represented in the university to begin and complete postsecondary studies because they feel like they do not really belong in that space. Archer & Hutchings (2000) found that the working-class respondents in their study of ethnically diverse students in the UK positioned themselves as outsiders in higher education. They saw it as a white and/or middle-class space that could potentially benefit them but did not seem themselves as "owners" of the space. Higher education was viewed as posing threats to their working-class identities (p. 570). This also seems to be the case for Ashanti. She positions herself outside the university through her negation of her "smartness" and the separation of higher education from the things she values – her family and community. Ashanti does not see the university as her space; however, she is completing a graduate degree which suggests that she sees higher education as benefiting her in some ways. It seems that for Ashanti, completing an undergraduate degree and Master's degree may be all of the formal education she desires and

that she does not value higher education in the same way as the professor. In broaching the topic of pursuing a PhD with Ashanti, the professor does not account for the financial and social risks that she would have to make as a result. The professor speaks only about her academic achievements and her status as a minority student and she seems to think it is very possible for Ashanti to move to another province; however, what flashes before Ashanti's eyes are these risks, which she knows very well by now since she has occupied the risky position of being a black, working-class woman pursing higher education for some time. Archer and Hutchings (2000) note that "the inherently riskier position occupied by our working-class respondents means that they cannot make choices regarding participation in the same way as relatively 'protected' middle-class students." (p. 569). This is what the professor seemingly fails to consider.

This memory story reveals differing beliefs about the value of education and the risks involved in becoming *too* educated. Ashanti does not want to betray her family and community relationships, and this prevents her from considering the PhD. Going beyond her home to study and achieve a career could be more lucrative and fulfilling for her. She could add her diverse perspectives to an overly white, male-dominated field and help mentor and inspire other black women to do the same. Her perception of herself as someone who does not possess the knowledge to do this, along with her family and community responsibilities keeps this suggestion from the professor in the realm of the impossible. Pursuing a PhD and being a good mother, wife, and community member do not correspond. On the other hand, obtaining a PhD and moving away from her home should not be valued over important relationships and connection to community and place. Unfortunately, the dominant discourse in university education and society more generally is that students should want to achieve success on a

grander scale and have the mobility to follow market demands, which often means for working-class students, moving away from the places they grew up, losing or weakening relationships with loved ones, and feeling like an imposter. Ashanti resists the idea that she should do more education at the expense of these things that shore up her sense of self. Neither the idea that Ashanti should pursue a PhD in another province, nor the desire for her to stay in Nova Scotia with her family without doing more higher education are necessarily wrong. It is the dominance of the middle-class value placed on higher education over important family and community connections that is espoused by the professor without understanding Ashanti's social and cultural context that is problematic and the reason for Ashanti's inner resistance to the idea. In her consideration of what her professor has mentioned to her, she thinks:

> *You really think I would uproot my family, go across the country, basically on a wing and a prayer, without meticulous planning, preparation, and a safety net to pursue a degree that you think I should have. I appreciate the vote of confidence, but I can't get my head around this whole idea. I have responsibilities here. I have people here to support me and my family, I have communities here that I must keep. I do not have a bank account to support a whole year's salary when I am not actually working. I cannot imagine this suggestion in any other way than jumping off a tightrope without a safety net. If this was something I wanted, had discussed with my family and planned for, I am sure we would find a way, but not like this.*

Ashanti does not see her professor's suggestion as something that she wants for herself; only something her professor wants her to do. The professor is in a position of power and privilege and uses this position to try and influence Ashanti to pursue a direction that she thinks would be good for her. It is the professor's position of authority in this setting that gives her the boldness

to assume that Ashanti would want to pursue a PhD like she once did and that this would be seen as a positive suggestion in Ashanti's eyes. As stated by Ball (2012), "the discursive rules that produce and define reason are linked to the exercise of power" (p. 21). Within academia, the professor has available to her a set of dominant discursive rules about the value of higher education and in this interaction, she acts within these dominant rules. This leaves Ashanti feeling irritated, misunderstood, and resistant to the professor's suggestion.

Conclusion

In this section, we see three instances of complex relational situations impacting Canadian working-class women in university. Claudia's mother approaches the relational interaction with her daughter, bringing with her the relationship with her own mother and the intergenerational transmission of class. Simultaneously, Claudia brings her own intersubjectivity to the interaction, influenced by experiences in other relational situations. The conflict that they have emerges from a subconscious location that holds these intersubjectivities. What may seem like a typical mother-daughter argument is laden with the hidden injuries of class. Discourse is an important consideration in this story because it is how we see the subconscious injuries playing out in the present. Claudia's mother is influenced by her own experiences growing up poor, her fears of being a bad mother, and by her hopes for her daughter's future being one of upward mobility.

The interaction between Anne and her parents in the second memory story is primarily discourse driven. Ideas about education, being a good mother/daughter, and having a good job shape this interaction. Anne's parents believe that there can be such a thing as too much education and the pursual of education conflicts with being a good mother. The discourse that Anne is taking up is driven by a neoliberal system in which she must continuously upgrade her

skills to gain employment that will allow her to independently support her son. She has proven to herself that she can pursue more education and be a good mother. In fact, she thinks it will make her a better mother because she will be instilling the value of education and hard work in her son and she will be more upwardly mobile. The idea that Anne and her parents are subscribing to different discourses is related to their intersubjectivities. Anne is subject to the market in ways that her parents are not. The resulting conflict makes it hard for them to relate to each other.

Finally, in the third memory story, Ashanti demonstrates a strong awareness of her sense of self and what she values and what she is willing to risk. She and her professor bring their intersubjectivities to this interaction and because they are both solid in these parts of themselves, there is a conflict. The professor does not consider Ashanti's intersubjectivity and the risks she has taken by pursuing higher education and seems to attempt a rather ad hoc mentoring situation where relationality is undefined, and the borders of their roles are blurring. This takes Ashanti by surprise, leading her to inwardly resist the idea, and quite likely leaves both unsatisfied with the interaction. This highlights the importance of purposeful and meaningful communication and a desire to meet students where they are and learn about their subjectivities. Ashanti assumes a risky position by being a working-class woman in higher education and an African Nova Scotian woman in a Nova Scotian university. These intersubjectivities are evident as Ashanti values family and community over individualized educational pursuits that would disrupt her family and community relationships.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Toward a more Inclusive University for Canadian-born Working-class Women

It is the afternoon of May 5, 2018 and our collective has finished reading our final pieces of writing aloud. The Meadows is glowing with mid-afternoon sunshine and there is no longer a need to turn on the heat like there was on the first night we met. The passage of time has brought warm spring days and a stronger connection than we could have anticipated through our memory stories and sharing of personal experiences. I collect the writing journals; however, no one moves toward the door right away. We remain in the space a while longer, discussing how much we will miss each other, the writing, the talking, and the mutual understanding of our commonalties and differences. I think to myself about how wonderful it would be to analyze our stories together, like many of the scholars who work together on academic articles after their collective biography workshops. Alas, I know the next phase of this thesis is one I will pursue on my own. I will not really be alone though; memory stories are little pieces of all of us and they will see me through to the end.

~

And here I am at the end. This thesis has been as much of a personal journey as it has been an academic one. More than a requirement to fulfill my Master's degree, it has been a chance to for me to acknowledge my rural, working-class background and to realize that my feelings of inadequacy in the university are the result of how class and gender operate through discourses I did not previously recognize. Social class is not widely discussed in Canada and this collective biography project has demonstrated a need and desire to identify and talk about class. With an increase in Canadian-born working-class women participating in higher education in recent years, universities are important sites to explore how the dominant discourses in

circulation within the higher education field constitute the subjectivities of working-class women.

While it can be viewed as beneficial to examine how to help working-class women acquire the cultural capital valued in the university in order to be successful, it is also important to call into question the processes and discourses that uphold class, gender, and racial hierarchies that have come to be seen as legitimate through the naturalization of discourses. I believe that higher education research that takes up a class focus should attempt to expose class as social construction. This is not to ignore the material implications of social class, but to recognize that class is not inherent within individuals and is established through discourses and relations of power. Within the university context, these discourses lead to affective processes through which Canadian-born working-class women experience a range of class feelings. These feelings feed into the construction of class and maintain class inequalities.

In my analysis of the memory stories and participant reflections I uncovered three main themes that I chose to address in this thesis: smartness, psychic responses, and relational aspects of working-class women's participation in university. Smartness was a major topic from my literature review that featured prominently in the memory stories. Canadian-born working-class women negotiate between dominant and counter discourses of smartness within the university. These dominant discourses of smartness are tied to middle-class cultural capital, contemporary notions of femininity and respectability, and whiteness. When working-class women do not possess the cultural capital, including the technologies and fashion that signify smartness in the current knowledge economy, they may doubt their intellect and negate their working-class backgrounds, question whether they should be participating in higher education, or take up a counter discourse of smartness in which they see their working-class knowledge as helping them

outsmart the system - they are aware that they are getting this degree to show others that they have the smartness valued by middle-class society, but view it as just a hoop through which to jump. Smartness discourses intersect with race and this can be seen through the systemic racial barriers at all levels of education. Racialized women see themselves reflected through the discourses of white society which signal that they do not belong in university; however, resistance to these discourses is possible when brought to the level of consciousness. The feeling of mis-fitting brought about by questioning the intelligence to participate in higher education has impacts on the psyche of working-class women in university.

Psychic responses arise as a protective mechanism in the face of threats to subjectivity. Pride in working-class culture and geography is employed by Canadian working-class women as a strategy for giving value to themselves in university despite the discourses that tell them they do not belong. In Canada, regional class differences are more frequently discussed in the media than class differences between people and these geographical class differences play out at the level of the individual in a university setting that brings together students from different Canadian provinces. Expressions of pride can solidify class differences as an attempt is made to stay connected to working-class culture.

Passing is a psychic response enacted by working-class women in university to try and appear to be middle-class. These attempts to pass are anxiety-inducing because of the desire to not be found out as working class. The inherent social nature of university residences means they are places where working-class women cannot escape dominant discourses that remind them that they are misfits. Particularly, in all-girls residences, a competition ensues to live up to expectations of hypersexual, middle-class contemporary femininity. This includes acquiring material goods to look the part; to attempt to pass as middle class. However, sometimes

attempting to pass is not an option. For mature, pregnant Canadian-born working-class women in higher education, trying to pass as a traditional middle-class university student is impossible. Class markers are imprinted on their bodies and they must negotiate their feelings of not belonging with their desire to find a place within higher education. Discourses around bettering oneself and improving life for their families, though not a remedy for the longing they feel to fit in, may create a space for them in the university.

Finally, the memory stories show the complexity of relationality for working-class women in university. Intergenerational transmission of class can lead to conflict between working-class mothers and their daughters. Mothers who want their daughters to become upwardly mobile and to escape the pathologizing discourses used to characterize the working class can lead to working-class daughters believing that they are not good daughters. Additionally, working-class parents who are unfamiliar with current neoliberal employment context do not understand why their already educated daughters need to acquire more university education to obtain a job that will allow them to support themselves. For working-class women who have children, going back to school can be viewed as irresponsible by their working-class mothers who did not attend university and see it as unnecessary. Working-class women are simultaneously caught between the desire to be good daughters and mothers and their need and want to return to the classroom. Family relationships are not the only relationships that working-class women must navigate in university. Tension can arise in relationships between working-class women and their professors who position them in their middle-class gaze. In the case of black, working-class women, conflict can arise between professors who believe they should be aspiring to do doctoral studies and the value and risk associated with participating in higher education. This can bring about a resistance to white, middle-class views of academic success.

Overall, this collective biography journey has allowed for greater understanding of how Canadian-born working-class women's subjectivities are shaped through their participation in university. This thesis helps address a gap in the Canadian higher education literature by placing class and gender at the forefront. By exposing some of the dominant discourses and affective processes that constitute working-class women's subjectivity, we have created an awareness of how class inequalities are played out and perpetuated in university. With this awareness, a more inclusive university is possible. Conversations must take place at all levels of the university about how to recognize and resist dominant, pathologizing discourses that suggest class is an individual issue rather than a societal one. Moreover, universities must create opportunities for Canadian-born working-class women to see themselves reflected in the institution. This begins with acknowledging and valuing working-class backgrounds.

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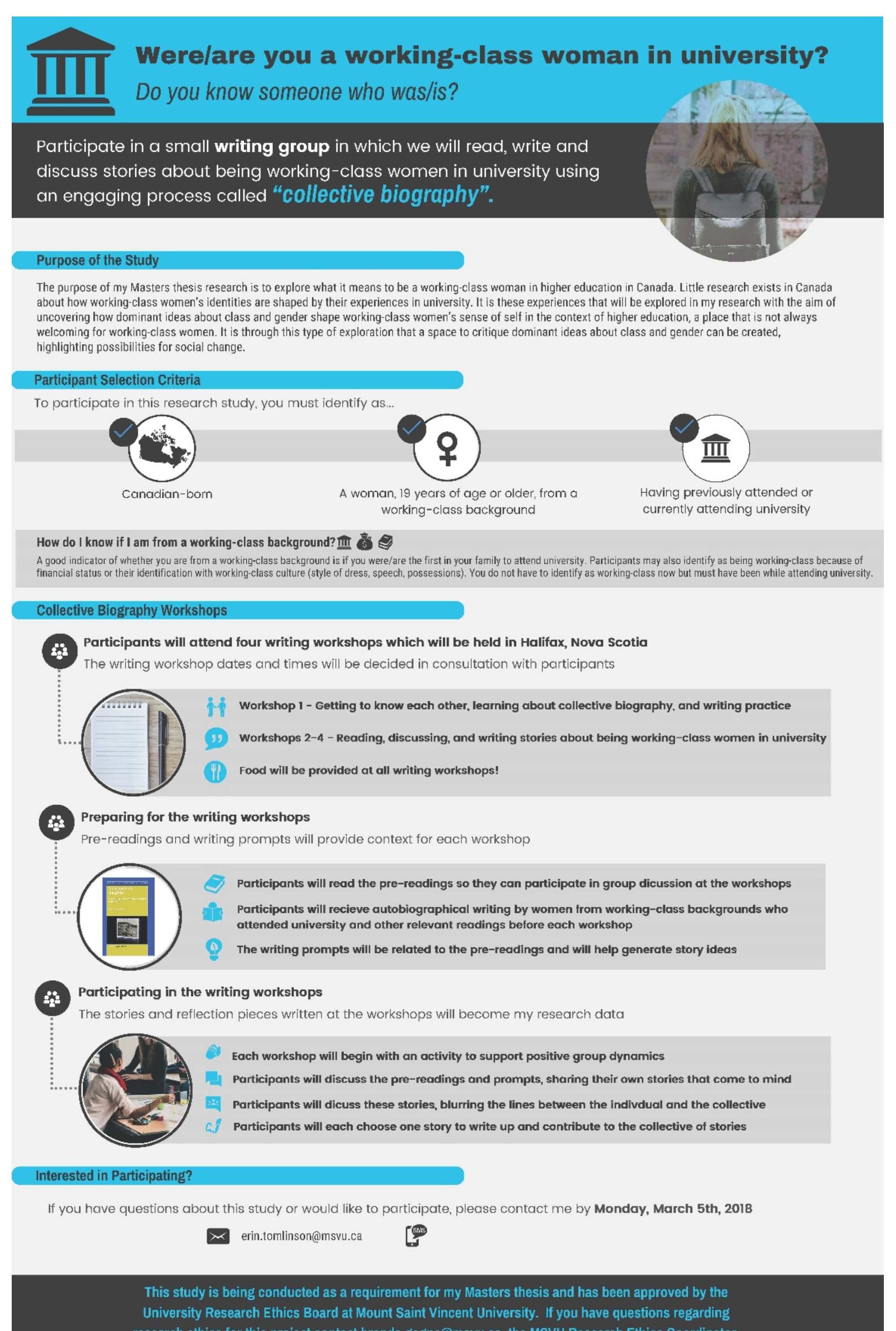
Appendices

Appendix A – Recruitment Poster



Appendix B - Letter of Invitation and Participant Consent Form

Collective Biography and Working-class Women in Higher Education

Letter of Invitation and Participant Consent Form

Hello!

My name is Erin Tomlinson and I am a graduate student in the Lifelong Learning program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I invite you to voluntarily participate in my thesis research on the topic of working-class women in higher education. This research is being conducted as a requirement for my Masters thesis. Let me tell you more about my project.

Why I am doing the study
The purpose of this study is to explore what it means to be a working-class woman in higher education in Canada. Little research exists in Canada about how working-class women's identities are shaped by their experiences in university. It is these experiences that I am interested in exploring with the aim of uncovering how dominant ideas about class and gender shape working-class women's sense of self in the context of higher education, a space that is not always welcoming for working-class women. It is through this type of exploration that a space to critique these ideas can be created, highlighting possibilities for social change.

How I will do the study
I will be using the methodology of collective biography to do this research. This will involve facilitating at least four writing workshops in the Halifax Regional Municipality for a small group of women from working-class backgrounds who are attending or have attended university. I will also be a participant in the writing workshops. We will read, discuss, tell and write stories about being working-class women in university.

The first workshop will involve participants working together to establish group protocols. I will also explain the methodology of collective biography in more detail and we will engage in some practice writing. This will be a 3-hour workshop. Before each meeting, I will distribute pre-readings consisting of autobiographical writing by women from working-class backgrounds who have attended university, other related readings, and some writing prompts. The writing workshops will be about 6 hours.

Each writing workshop will begin with an activity to promote supportive group dynamics. We will discuss the readings and prompts, each sharing stories that come to mind. Participants will discuss and ask questions about the stories to help us write the details as though we are in the moment when the story is taking place. This questioning and discussion phase serves to bring us into each of the stories where the lines between the individual and the collective will blur. The stories become not just our own, but stories of the collective in which any working-class woman who has attended university might recognize herself as being shaped by the same or similar processes that emerge from the stories. The discussions we have about the stories will be video recorded. We will choose one or two of our stories to write individually and share with the group. Participants will also engage in reflection writing during the workshops in which they

offer thoughts on the collective biography process and provide more information about the stories they write. The stories, reflections, and video recordings will become the data for my thesis.

Participants will identify as Canadian-born women from working-class backgrounds who are attending or have attended university. All participants must be 19 years or older. Participants do not have to identify as working-class now but must have been working-class at the time of their participation in university. Participants can identify as being from a working-class background because of their financial status or their identification with working-class culture (speech, activities, dress, possessions) or both. A common indicator of being from a working-class background is if you are/were a first-generation student (your parents did not attend college or university).

Expectations for participants

- attend all the writing workshops from beginning to end
- complete the pre-readings before each workshop
- share your stories and listen respectfully to other's stories
- provide constructive feedback to other participants regarding their stories
- write only the stories you wish to contribute to the study
- permit the video recording of our story-telling discussions
- acknowledge that the stories you write will become part of a collective of stories in which individual authorship is not attributed
- allow other participants to interact with your stories, including asking questions, making suggestions, and re-writing your stories from other perspectives
- permit me to use the stories written during the writing workshops in my thesis
- maintain the confidentiality of all group members

Expectations for me, the researcher

- work with all participants to schedule the writing workshops at times that work well for everyone
- be sensitive/respectful of issues of race, culture, ability, and sexual orientation
- work with all participants to develop procedures for a respectful and safe group environment in which we all feel comfortable participating
- distribute pre-readings and writing prompts at least one week before each writing workshop
- provide refreshments for each workshop
- ensure your confidentiality in the writing of my thesis
- share the results of my thesis with you

Benefits of participating
You will have the opportunity to be a part of a supportive group of women who have similar and unique experiences of being working-class women in higher education. We will engage in the often therapeutic practices of sharing and writing stories. Moreover, you will

experience the powerful political message of the methodology of collective biography: that social change is possible by making visible and critiquing the dominant and oppressive ideas about class and gender that shape working-class women's subjectivity.

Protecting your privacy
Your privacy is very important and I will make every effort to ensure that your participation in this study is confidential. Your demographic information (i.e. contact information, age, ethnicity) will be kept separate from the stories and reflection pieces that you write during the workshops. Any identifying characteristics in your stories will be removed before they are incorporated into my thesis. In the writing of my thesis, a pseudonym (fictional name) will be assigned to participants to preserve confidentiality. I will keep all demographic information and written work in a locked filing cabinet that is only accessible to me. Any video recordings of our group discussions will be kept on a password protected USB stick and the footage will be securely deleted from the recording device.

Risks of participating
The risks of participating in this study are no greater than those you would encounter in your daily life. It is possible that talking about our experiences of being working-class women in university may bring about mixed emotions. We can talk through difficult stories together. Additionally, the writing workshops will be time consuming. I will work with you to ensure the workshops are scheduled at the best possible times for all participants to allay interference with work and family obligations.

Right to withdraw
Participating in this research is voluntary. Whether you decide to participate or not, there will be no impact on your enrollment in university or your academic standing (if this currently applies to you) or any other aspect of your life. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at anytime. If you withdraw, you'll need to tell me at that time, or no later than one week after your withdraw date, if you do not permit me to use the stories and reflection pieces you write during the writing workshops. If you wish to have your stories and reflections removed from this study, I will securely discard your contributions. If you do not indicate otherwise, the stories and reflection pieces that you write during the workshops will be used in my thesis.

Sharing the results
After I have completed my thesis, I will present my findings at a thesis defence that is open to the public. You will be informed by email of the date of my thesis defence. Additionally, my thesis will be made available on the Mount Saint Vincent University Graduate Theses Collection E-Commons page. Also, I will send you an electronic copy of the final version of my thesis.

Questions
Please contact me at erin.tomlinson@msvu.ca if you have questions about this study. The application for this research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have questions regarding research ethics for this study,

contact Brenda Gagne, the MSVU Research Ethics Coordinator, at Brenda.gagne@msvu.ca or 902-457-6350.

Consent From: Collective Biography and Working-Class Women in Higher Education

I, (please print name) ______________________________________, have read the above information and I agree to participate in the study. I understand that my participation in the writing workshops is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I understand that I will be participating in at least four writing workshops which will take approximately 25- 30 hours of my time over the course of 6-8 weeks. I understand that the stories and reflection pieces I write along with any recorded video footage of workshop discussions will be kept by the researcher for a minimum of five years. By signing the research consent section below, I agree to participate in the study as outlined in the above pages and give permission to use my written stories and reflections and video footage in which I will be involved in group discussions in this research. My signature indicates that:

- The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered
- Each page of the letter of invitation and consent form has been read
- I understand the expectations of participating in this study
- I understand the risks of the study
- I agree to participate in the study

Participant's Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________

Researcher's Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________

Researcher's Contact Information
Erin Tomlinson
erin.tomlinson@msvu.ca

Appendix C – Collective Biography Workshop Schedule

Workshop 1 – Friday, March 23, 2018, 6-9 pm

Introduction to CB, Establishing Group Procedures, and Practice Writing

- Complete information form and consent form upon arrival
- Round of introductions and icebreaker (15 mins)
- Review Letter of Consent/ Establishing procedures for our CB group
    - Collectively discuss this (document on chart paper)
    - Mention the idea of starting each session with (morning and afternoon) with an activity or something that each participant introduces.
- Introduction to Collective Biography
    - Selected reading from one of the CB books
    - The difference between CB and other narrative methods such as Life History
    - Describe how the process works – pre-reading, discussion, writing, more discussion, choosing story to write, re-convening for more discussion
    - Why I've decided to use CB for my research on working-class women in higher education
- Practice writing
    - Show examples of previous CB writing (Dr. Gonick's article: "The Blank Page: Literacy, Girlhood, and Neoliberalism" from *becoming girl: collective biography and the production of girlhood*
    - Provide prompt: Recall a time when your class was made obvious to you in university
- Distribute hard copies of the pre-readings for tomorrow
- Conclude

*Food and refreshments: vegetable and hummus tray, fruit, cookies, assortment of candy, coffee, tea, soft drinks.

Workshop 2 – Saturday, March 24, 2018, 9 am – 4 pm

Language/Knowledge/Appearance (Imposter Syndrome)

Pre-readings: *Stupid Rich Bastards* by Laurel Johnson Black*; Class Quartet* by Janet Zandy, *Maybe I'm Not That Smart After All, Clothes Make the Student*, *The Symbolism of the Rose, and Radical Self-Reformation; Working with the Guys Again* by Renny Christopher

Prompt 1: Recall a time when you became conscious of language as a class marker in your university experience.

Prompt 2: Recall a time when your working-class knowledge came into conflict or assisted you with the knowledge privileged in university.

Prompt 3: Recall a time when you became conscious of appearance as a class marker in your university experience.

- 8:45 am – Breakfast/check-in
- 9:00 am - Guided meditation led by Barb
- 9:15 am – 10:15 am Discuss stories related to prompt #1 and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 10:15-10:30 – Break
- 10:30-11 am – Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 11am-noon – read stories to the group, more probing for detail, make revisions
- noon-1 pm – Lunch & walk around the Meadows if desired
- 1-2pm: Discuss prompt #2 and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 2-2:30pm - Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 2:30-2:45 pm Break
- 2:45-3:45pm – Read stories aloud, more probing for detail, and make revisions
- Check-in before concluding and submit writing journals

Writing at home due to time constraints: recall a time when you became conscious of appearance as a class marker in your university experience (share stories at the next workshop).

*Food and refreshments: breakfast cookies, fruit, yogurt, oatmeal, cookies and tea for breakfast; wraps, kale and strawberry salad, and assortment of squares for lunch; and fruit, chips, soft drinks, and assortment of candy.

Workshop 3 – Wednesday, April 16, 2018, 6 – 9 pm

Family and Community Relationships

Pre-readings: *Coming to Class Consciousness* by bell hooks; *Keeping close to home* by bell hooks; *Steal Away* by Dorothy Allison; *Acknowledgements* by M. Tokarczyk';

Prompt: Recall a time when your university experience impacted your family/community relationships.

- 6:00 - 6: 45pm – Supper/check-in/discussion of writing done at home
- 6:45 – 7:30 pm – Discuss stories related to prompt and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 7:30 pm – 8:15 pm - Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 8:15 – 8: 45 - Read stories to the group, more probing for detail, make revisions
- 8:45 – 9 pm – Check-in and wrap up

Workshop 4 – Monday, April 30, 2018, 6-9 pm

Material Lack

Pre-readings: *Coming to Class Consciousness* by bell hooks; *Keeping close to home* by bell hooks; *Steal Away* by Dorothy Allison; *Acknowledgements* by M. Tokarczyk';

Prompt: Recall a time in university when your class was made obvious to you in a material way.

- 6:00 - 6: 45pm – Supper/check-in/discussion of writing done at home
- 6:45 – 7:30 pm – Discuss stories related to prompt and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 7:30 pm – 8:15 pm - Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 8:15 – 8: 45 - Read stories to the group, more probing for detail, make revisions
- 8:45 – 9 pm – Check-in and wrap up

*Food and refreshments: Chili, Caesar salad, Assorted Squares and Cookies, Water, Coffee and Tea.

Workshop 5 - Saturday, May 5, 2018, 9 am – 4 pm

Aspirations in university/Childhood memories of thinking about university

Pre-readings: *Laughter as Liberating Memory* by Joann Maria Vasconcellos; *Scholarship Baby* by Leah Lakshimi Piepzna-Samarsinha

Prompt 1: Recall a time when your aspirations were supported or undermined in university.

Prompt 2: Recall your first memories of thinking about university as a child.

- 8:45 – 9:15 am – Breakfast/check-in
- 9:15 am – 10:15 am Discuss stories related to prompt 1 and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 10:15-10:30 – Break
- 10:30-11 am – Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 11am-noon – Read stories to the group, more probing for detail, make revisions
- noon-1 pm – Lunch
- 1-2pm: Discuss prompt #2 and what memories they evoked for us, whole group probes for more details
- 2-2:30pm - Break off from group and write one or two memory stories
- 2:30-2:45 pm Break
- 2:45-3:45pm – Read stories aloud, more probing for detail, and make revisions
- Check-in before concluding and submit writing journals

*Food and refreshments: Barb volunteered to bring cinnamon buns from her partner's café for breakfast; chicken satays, meatballs, vegetable spring rolls, variety of dips and pita; and fruit, chips, soft drinks, and assortment of candy.