Intersectionality & Higher Education

THEORY, RESEARCH, & PRAXIS

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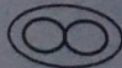
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Raw Tongue

How Black Women and Latinas Bring Their Multiple Identities into Collegiate Classrooms

SHELLY A. PERDOMO

If one considers the intersecting identities of race, socioeconomic status, and gender in relation to verbal participation in classrooms, a number of feminist and educational scholars suggest that women of color employ voice and silence differently than White women (Anzaldúa, 1990; Blue, 2001; Collins, 2000; Fordham, 1993; Gilmore, 1997; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1996; Lorde; 1984; Luke, 1994). Unlike some White women, a number of women of color deliberately adopt voice and silence as methods of knowledge acquisition and/or resistance within classrooms (Hurtado, 1996). Although verbal participation and silence within a classroom have the potential to function as a process of knowledge acquisition and learning for women of color, women of color must constantly be aware of what they say and how they speak within classroom settings, because of the visible markers of race and gender (Hurtado, 1996; Luke, 1994; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Because voice and silence have come to occupy vitally important places in U.S. educational systems (Kim & Markus, 2005), and voice is linked to effective learning in classrooms for women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Hayes, 2000; Hurtado, 1996), this chapter explores how voice and silence, especially for Black women and Latinas, are never neutral or without meaning in collegiate classrooms.

The chapter focuses on undergraduate Black women and Latinas because racial and gender stereotypes, institutional climate, admissions criteria, socioeconomic issues, and financial need continue to be factors impacting their educational persistence (Allen, 1995; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Howard-Vital, 1989; Hurtado,

1996; Vasquez, 1997). According to Kerby (2012), "in 2010, 30 percent of white women had a college degree or higher, compared to 21.4 percent of black women and a mere 14.9 percent of Hispanic women" (p. 5). Additionally, more than half of African American women students and Latina students are low income (Kerby, 2012). Although, Black women and Latinas are completing college at a higher rate and obtaining advanced degrees in higher numbers than their male counterparts, Black women and Latinas continue to lag behind White and Asian American women in academic enrollment and degree attainment (Kerby, 2012). With lower completion rates than White women and financial barriers that continue to hinder their full potential (Kerby, 2012), there have been relatively few empirical studies examining how Black women and Latinas experience and understand their learning. As such, in the larger study that informed this research, "Unpacking Voice and Silence: A Phenomenological Study of Black Women and Latinas in College Classrooms" (Perdomo, 2012), I explored how Black women and Latinas employed their intersectional identities to develop nuances of voice and silence that allowed them to navigate formal and informal structures of collegiate classrooms. This chapter focuses on the development of a raw tongue, a product of the intersectional identities of Black women and Latina participants and how collegiate classrooms of a traditional, single-sex, White institution can force Black women and Latinas to deny the expression of their multiple identities.

By placing the academic experiences of Black women and Latinas at the center of analysis, the intention of this chapter is to share relevant information that will help students, faculty, higher education administrators, and student affairs practitioners to understand how Black women and Latinas attempt to use their raw tongue to navigate institutional climate and cultural stereotypes that distort the ways they are perceived, evaluated, and treated by their student peers and professors. Moreover, this research is not an attempt to essentialize, minimize, or disregard the experiences of ethno-racial groups. Black women and Latinas are not a monolithic group, and there is no one size fits all. Nevertheless, this research is an effort to understand the intricacies of how diverse Black women and Latinas navigate the traditionally White collegiate classroom. As such, the concepts of linguistic habitus and oppositional/multiple consciousness (outsider-within) serve as theoretical tools for this study.

BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF LINGUISTIC HABITUS

Bourdieu's (1977) linguistic habitus forces one to examine how social institutions (family and schools, specifically) function to provide individuals with linguistic expressions/forms that influence individual dispositions and preferences, which in turn affect how individuals interact with their social world. Central to

understanding linguistic variations/exchanges within and among groups is social class affiliation, as it has the ability to provide individuals with linguistic competency or linguistic deficiency. For Bourdieu, variations in the forms of linguistic expression and speech are based on class variations (Thompson, 1991). Lacking the means of legitimate expression, according to Bourdieu, led individuals to silence. Linguistic competence yields linguistic capital. Individuals not endowed with the dominant language or those lacking dominant modes of language use were at a distinct disadvantage.

Because Bourdieu's (1977) theory of linguistic habitus was based on the fairly rigid and class-based determinist framework, class variation cannot solely explain the difference or lack of linguistic/verbal expressions of Black women and Latinas. Historically, Black women (including women of African descent) have been seen as having nothing important to say (Davies, 1995). "When a black women gets up in a crowd to speak or present herself publicly, she has to battle all the cultural and historical meanings about her even to begin to speak and then the content of her speaking is already framed as non-speech or not important" (Davies, 1995, p. 5). The boundaries imposed to render Black women and Latinas incapable of full expression of their creativity and knowledge are based on a host of structural and ideological forms of oppression. As such, the denial of voice of Black women and Latinas is rooted in relationships of power and oppressive systems, more so than class variations, as Black and Latina feminists suggest.

BLACK AND LATINA FEMINIST THEORY OF OPPOSITIONAL AND MULTIPLE CONSCIOUSNESS

The writings of Black and Latina feminists (Anzaldúa, 1987; Davies, 1995; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984) have addressed the need for finding multiple ways that women of color can raise their own voices and locate sources of their power. Feminists of color, such as Anzaldúa (1987), wrote about a "home tongue" (p. 58), where women of color communicate the realities and values that are true to themselves. Lorde (1984) referred to the transformation of silence into words to find the source of women's power. hooks's (1989) concept of *transgressive speech* forces women to challenge situations of oppression and power by talking back to authority when necessary, regardless of the consequences. In one way or another, moving from silence to voice requires that Black women and Latinas engage in a process of (re)defining themselves and asserting their agency. As such, silence, muteness, and voicelessness for women of color must be understood in the context of a racist, sexist, and classist society that acts to suppress and marginalize their multiple identities. However, Black women and Latinas are in a unique position to challenge the negative images existing about their identities. Existing and living in

an "outsider-within" (Collins, 2000, p. 11) status entails interacting and gaining knowledge of a dominant group without repudiating one's cultural experience but rather by building from this unique marginal position (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Jackson, 2002). Anzaldúa (1987) best described the outsider-within/border crossing process as a state of reaching a *nueva concienca* (new consciousness). Anzaldúa explicitly argued that the outsider-within process of culturally navigating many worlds brings Latina and women of color to self-definition, self-reflection, and self-valuation. Hence, as Black women and Latinas become aware of their position within a racist, classist, sexist, oppressive environment, they enter a process of critical consciousness/new consciousness.

When a Woman of color develops a new consciousness, she transforms silence into voice. A Woman transgresses, she moves beyond, becoming empowered to express her personal creative power, personal passions, thus engaging in transformational politics (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984). Because of these factors, the full expression of Black women and Latinas voices is more complicated than simply lacking linguistic capital. Social structures and ideologies still exist that deny women of color their voice.

METHOD

Unlike previous studies on voice that have employed an ethnographic research genre (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986; Fordham, 1993; Luke 1994), hermeneutic phenomenology was the most suitable methodological approach for this study because it emphasizes the interpretation of the phenomenon of voice as experienced and understood by Black and Latina participants (Laverty, 2003). Following the structure of in-depth phenomenological interviewing, nine undergraduate women (four Black women, four Latinas, and one who identified as Afro-Latina) from various majors and class years underwent a series of three 90-minute intensive and iterative interviews to discuss and reflect on their lived experiences of using their voice in educational settings. The first set of 90-minute interviews focused on life history, which requires participants to reconstruct and share as much as possible about their early educational classroom experience with voice and silence. The second set of interviews allowed participants to reflect on their current academic collegiate experience, and the third set of questions required participants to reflect on the information provided to generate an overall impression of their academic experience.

Purposeful sampling was employed to identify a diverse group of working-class, poor, or middle-class women. None of the participants identified herself or her family as wealthy/rich. All the participants were in the process of completing their bachelor's degree at Noel College (a pseudonym for a highly selective, non-denominational, residential, liberal arts college for women). While "women at

single-sex institutions reported being more engaged in effective educational practices and reported higher levels of feelings of support and greater gains in college" (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007, p. 145), the majority of the research on single-sex education focuses mostly on White women samples (Sax, Arms, Woodruff, Riggers, & Eagon, 2007). Thus, it is my hope that a deeper understanding of the academic experiences of Black women and Latinas attending traditionally White, single-sex institutions is reached.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black women and Latinas experience and understand their voice in collegiate classrooms?
2. What meanings do Black women and Latinas ascribe to their voice?
3. What do Black women and Latinas perceive to be the academic implications of engaging in a politics of voice?

Because the phenomenological structure of reflecting on the past and present experiences generated extensive data from the nine participants, analysis of interview transcripts was based on an inductive approach geared to identifying patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. Themes emerged from the participants' meanings and shared meaning that came from the variations on how each participant described her own understanding and experience of voice. Three distinguishing features of voice emerged for participants: *instrumental voice, raw tongue,* and *symbolic voice.* This chapter illustrates how Black women and Latina participants attempted to bring their whole selves (multiple identities) in collegiate classrooms through employing their raw tongue, but internal collegiate classroom dynamics, or what Weaver and Qi (2005) referred to as formal classroom structures (class size, faculty as the authority of knowledge, faculty-student interaction, student-student interaction, and fear or professor's criticism) and informal classroom structures (fear of peer disapproval, excessive student participation, and student attributes), prohibit this process.

RAW TONGUE

When participants entered the collegiate classrooms of Noel College, they had an established pattern of talk. In fact, like any student, Black women and Latina participants entered Noel College with a raw tongue. Whether they described themselves as outspoken or more reserved, these women expressed what one participant referred to as "rawness" or what I deem to be a "raw tongue," which builds from Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of "a home tongue."

Home tongue refers to a type of language/dialect spoken in the company of sisters, brothers, friends, and community. In this case, raw tongue is a mixed, fluid

dialect. It is neither proper Spanish nor Standard English. Their raw tongues consist of an English slang, working-class English, Ebonics/Black English, or Spanglish. It is a language/dialect that is unrefined, untrained, honest, full of emotions, passion, and often filled with hostility/anger. It is a language/dialect that grounded these women in their families, social communities, and their multiple interlocking ethno-racial/social identities. As such, the raw tongue of participants was as much a product of their intersectional identities as it was a process of their linguistic habitus, a socialization rooted in family and community. Regardless of the socioeconomic background and cultural/ethno-racial makeup of their families and communities, each Woman was socialized to speak and interact with individuals (within their family, community members, and friends) utilizing a raw tongue. It is a voice that developed from the intersections of race, class, and gender in the lives of these women. Raw tongue is a synergy of cultures that is literally manifested in language. When Black women and Latinas used their raw tongue within the traditionally White collegiate classrooms of Noel College, their voice became a marker of their racial identity and economic status, which is seen in the following example:

> [Responding to a White student's comment] Who am I? You don't know who I am! I am sick and tired of always having to educate…. The girls in the classroom were like, "Wow!" We were talking about being poor and living in poor communities. And the term ghetto was being thrown around like nothing. By the second week of class, I said I was sick and tired of all you [White students] talking about the ghetto! Let me tell you about the ghetto! Let me tell you what fucking welfare is, and I just went off on them! In another situation I went off again on the teacher and the students. We were talking about poverty and privilege, and I said to [the] professor, "How dare you tell me that I was formerly poor? You don't know me! You don't know what it took for me to be here! You don't know how sad I am that my mom is in a small apartment, and I am here taking classes, not working and unable to assist her the way I would want to!" And my professor looked at me, and he said, "Tell us, Dalis," and I said, "No! I am not going to be your guinea pig right now!" (Dalis)

This example illustrates how classroom discussions and interactions with White peers and some professors forced participants to employ their raw tongue out of discomfort and frustration of not being understood, heard, and/or taken seriously within collegiate classrooms. As a result, their raw tongue created discomfort and tension amongst their White peers and even with some faculty. Their blunt, assertive responses toward their White peers' White privilege, entitlement, and lack of sensitivity and racial understanding, created situations where participants spoke with no inhibitions or filters. When Black women and Latina participants used their raw tongue in collegiate classrooms, their honest and heartfelt responses were often misunderstood by their White peers. Their White peers often perceived such interactions/responses as "hostile," "aggressive," "too firm," and/or "unfriendly." Instead of listening to the comments and questions posed by Black women and

Latina participants, White students and faculty were either intrigued and wanted to learn more about their lived experiences or they expressed discomfort through explicit verbal and nonverbal cues: "White students loved to hear what I had to say. Professors too, they saw me as an exotic contribution, an exotic addition. I brought validity to the Latina experience! Whatever that means" (Dalis). Another partic- ipant (Jada) shared the following: "I expected something different, but in class I do feel this overemphasis on what I say, especially when we are talking about race. The White students become very interested in my opinions."

When Black women and Latina participants used their raw tongue, they became visible/spotlighted/on display within the classroom, impacting their level of verbal participation/engagement. Participants believed that White peers judged them according to unconscious/conscious stereotypes and attitudes. This was the kind of prejudice that was not overt; instead, it was subconscious, subtle, and learned through early socialization. As a result, how White peers looked at and understood participants was connected to how they heard them within collegiate classrooms. The raw tongue of Black women and Latinas in this study was perceived as "too ghetto" by their White peers. "Too ghetto" usually refers to the experiences of people of a particular race or ethno-racial group who act or are perceived to behave improperly through fulfilling negative stereotypes. Being perceived as "too ghetto" by their White peers had serious implications for par- ticipants. One student candidly expressed how she felt after employing her raw tongue during a discussion: "People were looking at me and…what came out of my mouth, it wasn't really what I wanted to say or how I wanted it to come out.… I didn't sound intelligent, especially in an academic space. I sounded angry" (Dalis). Because the raw tongue of participants was juxtaposed to what was considered the "appropriate academic discourse," they were led to believe that their linguistic skills were deficient. Although some of the women in this study were monolingual and brought different linguistic backgrounds and forms of expressions to classrooms, their linguistic styles were not valued. Instead, through a number of encounters/ interactions with students and faculty, participants received explicit and implicit cues that their raw tongue was not only a risk but a responsibility that needed to be self-monitored to speak and be heard.

RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY: SELF-MONITORING BEHAVIOR

Prior to attending Noel College, participants did not perceive their raw tongue or linguistic skills as deficient; rather, they entered the collegiate environment with their diverse linguistic backgrounds, eager to be part of a learning commu- nity of intelligent women. Yet, for the first time in their academic experience, these women believed they were forced to learn a different language from the

raw tongue they learned from their parents and social communities. They recognized that a particular type of voice was required for them to be heard in their classrooms.

The academic discourse that participants were forced to employ was not by their own choosing but was imposed by the institution, professors, and student peers; "They [White female] talk a language that is very elite. Sometimes, they will say things that, shit, I have never heard in my life! It's different, and it's something I am not used to, but I have had to learn how to talk like that!" (Yoli). Participants realized early in their educational trajectory that their raw tongue functioned as both a risk and a responsibility within collegiate classrooms. With their every utterance in class, participants were aware that they were at risk of fulfilling negative stereotypes held of their ethno-racial group:

> I think at first it [speaking] was risky. It felt like I was vulnerable because I didn't know what their [White peers'] response would be to my response.... I just felt alone in my contributions.... I felt scared to be confronted with not being intelligent or being looked down upon or fulfilling the stereotype of all my people, so it was a lot of responsibility...or at times I was so pissed off at their ignorant comments that I could not even blink 'cause that thing was going to come out! That rawness and that again I will fulfill a stereotype. (Dalis)

> It's even more pressure when you are at a high caliber institution, and, you know, there is that pressure that you are here and you're Latina. I think about it every day. As a Latina there is this fear that if I say something stupid or if I go off on a tangent that is going to be blamed on the fact that I am Latina. *Oh mira esa Latina tan Estupida* (oh look at the Latina, so stupid). She has no idea what she is talking about.... I don't want them to think I am stupid...so if I don't say something really smart, I prefer not to say anything. (Issy)

Speaking within the collegiate classroom was considered a risk because these women did not want to be perceived by their White peers and professors as unintelligent, incompetent women fulfilling negative stereotypes of their entire ethno-racial group. Because the way White students looked at and understood participants was so predicated on how they heard them speak in class, women in this study felt pressure and responsibility to speak and demonstrate that individuals in their ethno-racial group could successfully enter and complete college. The responsibility to speak and attempt to dispel/undo the negative stereotypes, that their peers and/or professors may have, also forced participants to modify their behavior within classrooms.

To speak and be heard, participants had the burden of self-monitoring their behavior in their classrooms. Because their communication patterns often determined how they were perceived in collegiate classrooms, participants became more conscious of what they said and how they expressed themselves. This self-monitoring took the form of modifying their voice and/or behavior in classrooms to refute the negative stereotypes of being "too ghetto," "too angry," and to prove

they are serious students. Dalis and Yoli described the change in their behavior as follows: "I am not raw anymore, I was at the beginning, but I don't talk like that anymore" (Dalis). "There has been so many times, I can't even count, that we have been told to hush, that we are too loud...so I am very cautious of what I say and how I say things in the classrooms now" (Yoli). Thus, voice for participants, as expressed through their raw tongue, was not simply about expressing themselves, their thoughts, ideas, and feelings; their raw tongue became a negative marker of their racial, gendered, and economic status that required them to self-monitor their behavior and to modify their linguistic expressions to be viewed as academically serious.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY AND STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONERS

Much of the discomfort and alienation experienced by participants resulted from negative faculty-student interactions in classrooms, lack of diversity, and racial consciousness of peers and faculty, White privilege/entitlement of student peers and/or faculty, and stereotype threat existing in collegiate classrooms. Because much of the ways that participants experienced collegiate classrooms was determined by their interactions and academic engagement with faculty and student peers, having curricula and co-curricular programming that addresses diverse cultures, abilities, and experiences might provide all students with exposure to diverse perspectives. Incorporating scholarly works by people of color and other marginalized groups in the curriculum has the ability to heighten diversity awareness of White students enrolled in these courses and to empower students of color. White students who learn about diversity and engage in cross-cultural discussions have the potential to help create a climate where students of color and other marginalized groups feel more comfortable. At the same time, if faculty acknowledge and value the diverse linguistic forms of expression and communication that Black women and Latinas bring to the classroom, students of color will not feel the need to alter their behavior and/or to give up who they are in order to be heard within collegiate classrooms. However, where curricula fall short in addressing diversity or when institutions reflect cultural insensitivity, faculty and student affairs practitioners can become more supportive by creating educational spaces that allow for safe, meaningful exchanges among students. One way this might be accomplished is by employing pedagogies and programs that support and promote collaborative learning environments where students' ideas, voices, and contributions to knowledge are heard and acknowledged in creative ways. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to confine multiculturalism, social justice, and diversity teaching to classrooms. Congruent messages from faculty and academic and student affairs practitioners

could support a more diverse and supportive academic environment that promotes student development for students of color.

Campus communities that value and promote an understanding of diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusivity could become more supportive of students of color by providing workshops/forums to engage all students in transformative learning to empower them to become agents of social change. Inviting speakers of color to add diversity education to campus programs and speak of their lived experience as agents of effective social change could contribute to personal growth and inclusive and intentional learning for students. These processes can also benefit White students who would be better equipped to serve as allies to students of color, and students of color could develop strategies of empowerment where they learn to express themselves with no inhibitions. Creating and supporting co-curricular programs that acknowledge students' diverse experiences and cultures in a positive light could invite students to engage and participate without forcing them to change and alter who they are in classroom and co-curricular activities.

CONCLUSION

As someone who shares a Black and Latina ethno-racial identity, research on voice and silence was important to my work as an educator. Anzaldúa (1987) said it best when she stated, "ethnic identity becomes twin skin to linguistic identity" (p. 59). Because language is so intricately linked to ethno-racial identity and cultural expression of a people, honoring raw tongue is important for students who belong to marginalized groups. It validates their lived experience in collegiate classrooms and allows them to express their perspectives without having to modify their voice or feel as though they have assimilated and abandon their ethno-racial identities. As such, it is important for faculty and academic and student affairs practitioners to be aware that nuances of voice, like raw tongue, exist for Black women, Latinas, and targeted groups who share multiple marginalized identities.

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Identity Constellations

An Intersectional Analysis of Female Student Veterans

SUSAN V. IVERSON

Researchers are increasingly aware of the limitations of identity dimensions as singular analytic categories (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Montoya, 1998; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Many feminist researchers, by example, have critiqued the use of gender as a sole identity category for analysis, and scholars have sought a framework to describe and understand the interaction of different forms of oppression and disadvantage, including race, sexuality, and gender (Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotolo, & Messner, 2000; Collins, 1998; Fine, 1994; McCall, 2005). While many scholars have grappled with conceptualizations to describe the complexity of interrelated forces acting on dimensions of identity (e.g., Andersen, 2005; Baca Zinn et al., 2000; Ken, 2008), Crenshaw's (1991) analogy of traffic through an intersection has become a dominant conceptualization of how individuals' experiences are "frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (p. 1243), along with other oppressions. Yet, some (e.g., Baca Zinn et al., 2000; Ken, 2007, 2008), with whom I align, argue that the intersection is a limited conceptual image and instead theorize alternatives. This chapter advances the metaphor of a constellation to the intersectionality literature. More than a theoretical manuscript, this chapter illustrates this conceptualization with findings from a qualitative study of female student veterans (Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis, & Anderson, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intersectionality originally emerged to destabilize categories of identity, for example, exposing how the category of "women" excludes "others" within that category (McCall, 2005). For instance, research on student veterans, in its efforts to describe their transition to college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), has treated *veteran* as a one-dimensional category. This "elision of difference" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242) opened the door for recent studies on women veterans (Burns Phillips, 2010; Iverson et al., 2013), but they too risk describing women as a monolithic group. An intersectional analysis provides "an antidote to this erasure" (Cole, 2009, p. 172).

An intersectional approach also illuminates how individual experiences reflect macrolevel inequalities and "how power and power relations are maintained and reproduced" (Hankivsky et al., 2010, p. 3). This tenet is perhaps most widely used as a theoretical approach for analyzing relations among different forms of oppression (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Yet, for all the power of using the analogy of traffic through an intersection to "disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244, n9), attention to "particular location" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243) has led to a dominance of orthogonality in intersectional research: disproportionate attention has given to the intersection an image that implies linearity and stability.

Contemporary intersectionality theorists assert, instead, that social processes such as social interaction, context, and social-structural factors inform and create fluid, negotiated, social identities (Bowleg, 2013; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Warner, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). Further, several scholars have sought to establish alternatives to the metaphor of the traffic intersection to illuminate how "systems of inequality create qualitatively distinct experiences" (Warner & Shields, 2013, p. 804). For instance, Ken (2008) posited the metaphor of sugar: "[T]he production, use, experience, and digestion of sugar as a way…to focus on the structural and individual forces at work in their continual and mutual constitution" (p. 154). Baca Zinn et al. (2000) used the metaphor of a prism to explain how "gender is organized and experienced differently when refracted through the prism of sexual, racial/ethnic, social class, physical abilities, age, and national citizenship differences" (p. 1). I align with those who suggest we must further complicate what is meant by intersectionality to illuminate how social location changes the nature of experience (Bowleg, 2013; Singh, 2013).

CONSTELLATION OF IDENTITIES

Diamond and Butterworth (2008) called for a closer analysis of the processes and intersections "between different identities and social locations [that] give rise to altogether novel forms of subjective experience"; they add that these dynamic

interactions yield "constellations of identity" (p. 367). While they were using a "turn of phrase," I advance *constellation* as a metaphor for thinking about the dilemma of identities as stable *and* fluid, as relational and in process, and for illustrating "how *all* subjective experiences of selfhood are continually transformed, reenacted, and renegotiated as a function of shifting landscapes of social context" (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 375).

A constellation is a pattern formed by prominent stars within proximity to one another. The stars that comprise a particular constellation have varying degrees of brightness or magnitude. The brightest stars are considered of the first magnitude, while the faintest stars are of the sixth magnitude (the limit of human visual perception, without the aid of a telescope; Comins & Kaufmann, 2003). Identity is much like a constellation. One's sense of self or self-awareness is formed through the *apparent magnitude* of particular dimensions of one's identity. For instance, being a Woman, and a mother, is of the first magnitude in my constellation; yet, being White and heterosexual are also stars within my constellation; and my religion, age, and able-bodiedness are fainter stars in my constellation. Notably, the rules for classifying the magnitude of stars can be as subjective as my preceding description of self (American Association of Variable Star Observers, 2013).

Any constellation is an arbitrary formation of stars as perceived by the stargazer. Our modern constellations, 88 of them, were officially designated by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) in the early 20th century (Comins & Kaufmann, 2003). However, it is important to note that before the IAU comprised an official list, anyone could (and anyone still can) arrange and group stars, in much the same way one might stare at clouds and see shapes. Further, stargazing is temporally, culturally, and geographically constituted, meaning that a different night sky is visible in the northern hemisphere than in the southern hemisphere, and different cultural stories exist for the same constellation. For instance, the Ursa Major constellation is likely associated by many U.S. readers with stories of a big bear; however, Chinese astronomers call this constellation the "Jade Balance of Fate," and an Arab myth associates this star pattern with a coffin and mourners (NF/Observatory, n.d.). Identity, too, is both socially constructed and personally defined and "embedded within specific contextual, interpersonal, and developmental circumstances" (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 369).

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF FEMALE STUDENT VETERANS

This section illustrates this conceptualization with data from a qualitative study of female student veterans (Iverson et al., 2013). The data used in this intersectional analysis were from "responsive interviewing" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) with 12 women

from two public research universities. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed independently, and then, in an effort to see how to subsume the "particulars into the general" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 245), emerging patterns and themes were visually mapped. Findings from this analysis revealed that participants were grappling with identity shifts while in the military and in college. Participants were walking a gender tightrope as soldiers and women, and then in college, as undergraduate students (for more on study design and findings, see Iverson et al., 2013).

The 12 participants included women from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard, with most (5) from the Army. [Of note, the term *veteran* is used to represent the very broad category of individuals who are serving and/or have previously served in the U.S. military.] Their length of service ranged from 2 to 38 years; half had served in the Iraq/Afghan wars, and one-third was still active military at the time of the interview. The women ranged in ages from mid-20s to mid-50s. Their racial composition was nine White and three African American participants. Most (9 of the 12) spoke of being married, divorced, or engaged in heterosexual relationships (the other 3 identified as single), and 7 of the 12 referred to having children.

Four women are featured here—Constance, Cathy, Anne, and Latesha—as a strategy to illuminate participants' "subjectivities, and their experiences" (Holley & Colyar, 2009, p. 685). Evident in their stories is the *apparent magnitude* of particular dimensions of identity, which is mapped in respective constellations.

Constance

Constance married her high school sweetheart at the age of 18. She completed her associate's degree while her husband enlisted in the military. Then she enlisted in the Army, only to have a training accident 6 months later, leaving her with a shattered hip, broken pelvis, and a medical discharge. She was told by the Army that she couldn't have children, but after two miscarriages and deep sadness, she gave birth to one son. Shortly thereafter, her husband was deployed again and she got divorced. She then completed her undergraduate degree and began working for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), teaching in Germany. She then transferred to the western United States, completed her master's degree, and started a new position with the DoD, teaching in a medical school. The high cost of living, including limited and expensive day care, led Constance to request a transfer to a new position: "They started the in-processing for the job and then…everything froze." With her relocation to the southeastern United States in motion, she applied for and was accepted to a PhD program. She stated that, for all the changes she has experienced, "the biggest transition…, hands down, was actually when [she] came to [her current university]."

Constance described many points in her constellation of identity (see Figure 1). Her status as an adult student is the brightest point in her identity right now. She

noted that her age, coupled with being a single parent from a working-class background, has left her with "no one else to identify with" in college. She reflected that this was different while she was obtaining her master's degree, an executive cohort program in which all 13 adult professionals started and finished the program together in 18 months. Now, she observes, at 29 years old, and as a mom, that she doesn't identify with the undergrads. "It's also socio-economically very different.... I don't really fit in."

Her working-class (even low-income) background has magnitude now, while at college, but it has been prominent at other points in her life, such as when she qualified for WIC (Women Infant and Children) assistance in both Germany and while living in the western United States. Her disability is part of her identity, but it is less prominent today than it was when she was in the military, trying to have a child. Of note, her status as a veteran is nearly inconsequential, and her race (White) is noted in Figure 12.1, but it is the faintest star.
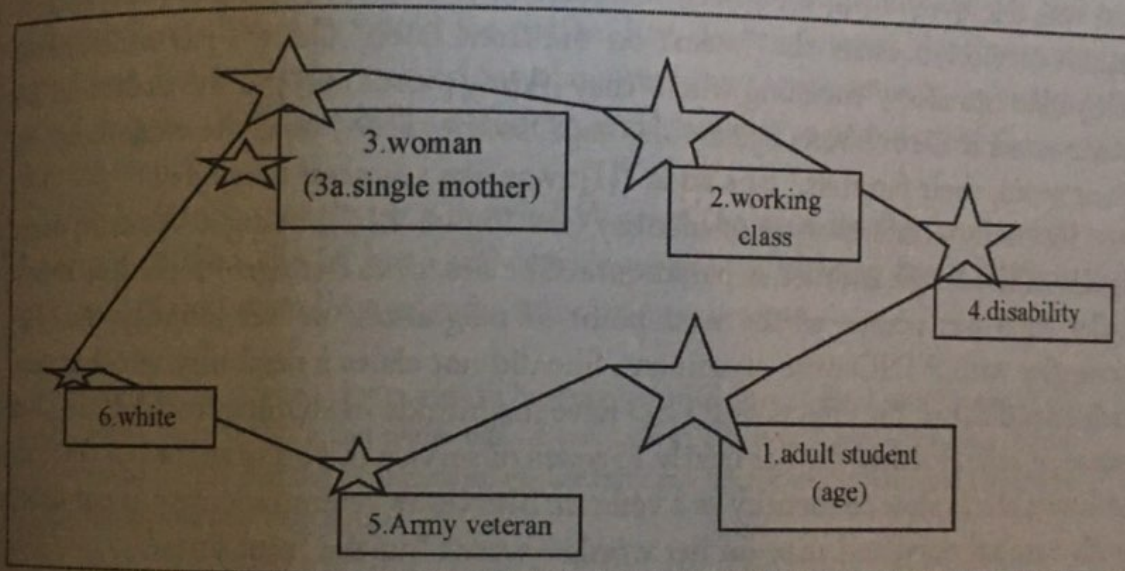

Fig 12.1. Constance's constellation.

Cathy

Cathy, an African American Woman, joined the Air Force in 1996. She had been attending college but dropped out because "I couldn't get money for college... [and] I wasn't sure about my major." In need of "something to do with [her] life," she joined the military: active duty Air Force for 4½ years, followed by active Reserves for 2½ years. Then after discharge, and seven years as a flight attendant, she reenlisted, this time with the Army. It was during this service duty that her daughter was born, and she was deployed to Afghanistan for 10 months when her daughter was 9 months old. As a single mother, her daughter was in the care of Cathy's mother, who herself was a single mom.