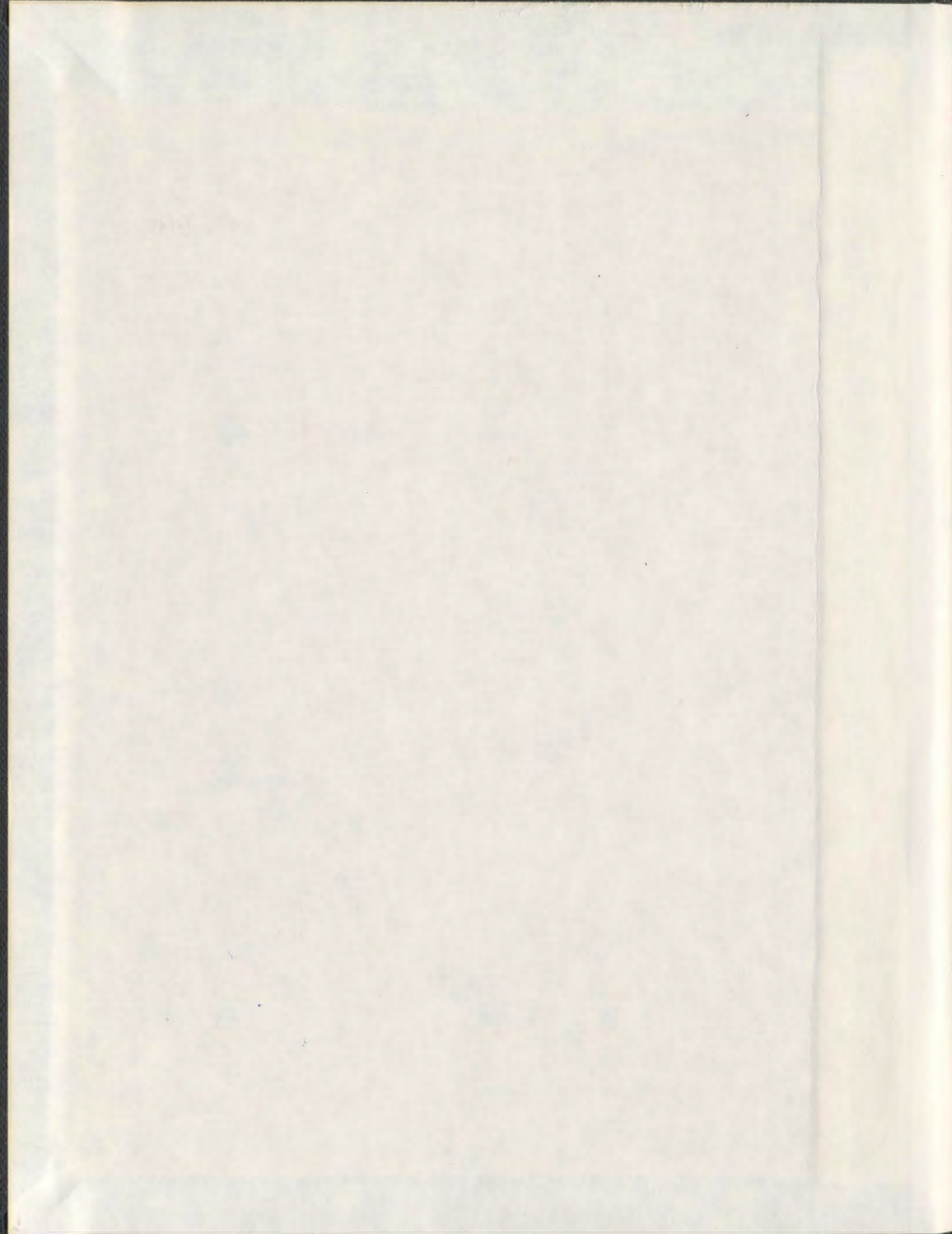


"LEARNING TO LOVE AGAIN":
LOSS, SELF STUDY, PEDAGOGY
AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

KATE BRIDE



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"LEARNING TO LOVE AGAIN": LOSS, SELF STUDY, PEDAGOGY
AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

by

Kate Bride ©

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Supervisory Committee

"Learning to Love Again": Loss, Self Study, Pedagogy and Women's Studies

by

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Abstract

This thesis is about foundational logic that shapes knowledge-making practices, subjectivity, and pedagogy in the disciplines of both education and women's studies. Some of these foundations in education include conceptualizations of the teacher as hero, the student as receptacle for knowledge, and prescriptive, standardized curriculum. In women's studies, some of these foundations include fixed understandings of sisterhood, experience, and the category "woman." These foundations can be problematic because they function to singularize, set meaning, and stabilize knowledge, identity and pedagogy, and, they foreclose the possibility of a deeper and more complex understanding of the self and the other.

With the emergence of postmodern and poststructural theories that recognize knowledge and identity as products of cultural construction, the "truth" of foundations has been, and continues to be, called into question. As such, we are faced with uncertainty about a future that is uncomfortable and disruptive of those foundations that have and continue to orient us in our academic disciplines. I argue that with these disruptions there is an increased need to face the losses that come with the uncertainty and unsettlement of crumbling meta-narratives; in other words, to make loss central to pedagogy. Letting loss orient pedagogy is a practice that attempts to interrogate the effects of projects of schooling on normative knowledge-making practices, the making of subjects and the workings of power. The central problem that I grapple with throughout these chapters, then, is attachment to foundations, how those form who and how we can be, and what it means to face the losses of those foundations.

Through the theoretical lenses of poststructural and psychoanalytic thought, my approach to this thesis is, in part, what I am referring to as a pedagogical self study. While I am inquiring after the ways foundations work in education and in women's studies, I am also exploring and questioning my own attachments to foundations in education (what it means to be a teacher) and in women's studies – where they come from and how they structure my understandings of teaching and learning. The central themes of this thesis will address foundational truths in education and women's studies, attachment, loss, mourning, melancholia and pedagogy.

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Chapter 1

“Learning to Love Again”¹: Loss, Self Study, Pedagogy and Women’s Studies

Once again schooling is about schooling. It wasn’t always this way. Once it was about salvation. Then it was about assimilation. (Grumet, “Where Does the World Go” 47).

Introduction

The prevailing project of education in the contemporary West is marked by an emphasis on the transmission of particular kinds of knowledges, values and ways of thinking deemed essential and proper for the creation of a responsible, knowing, “whole” citizen. On an institutional level, schooling, in large part, has performed like this for decades, functioning to “educate,” focusing on matters of student discipline (and teacher discipline), instruction, and school structure. In our society schooling might be seen as a formula: good education produces good students who learn well through their good behavior.

As Andy Hargreaves points out, systematic schooling has become preoccupied with commanding curriculum uniformity. “In place of compassion and community, schools and teachers have been squeezed into the tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets and... tables of accountability... rather than cultivating... identity and the basic emotion of sympathy” (1). When schools engage in such mainstreaming practices, as Henry Giroux and Roger Simon suggest, they “produce and authorize particular forms of meaning and implement teaching practices consistent with the ideological principles of the dominant society” (1). In such ways, schools teach teachers to prepare students for the world ‘out there,’ to feed them ‘hard facts’ that are perceived to guarantee mastery, reason and certainty.

¹ I take “Learning to Love Again” from Wendy Brown’s 2007 interview.

Of this, Madeleine Grumet says that these "formulae and stories do not capture the world and represent it to us. They point to it. They are an index pointing to its content... projected from human intentionality" ("Where Does the World Go" 47). Categories of meaning within education (teacher as the imparter of knowledge and student as receptacle) apprehend the subject, position them, and create "truths" that become the "right" kind knowledge. In this sense, education is, as Anne Phelan (reminds, "reluctant to abandon the project of social engineering" (3).

If only we can find the right technique, the right modification of classroom organization (small groups, collaborative learning, dialogue), if only we teach according to 'best practices,' if only we have students self-reflect or if only we develop "standards" or conduct the right research, then students will learn what we teach them. ("On Staying Too Close to Home" 3)

Despite imperialism's recent demise (or its morphing into globalized capital?), its educational project lives on – an educational project that conquers the subject, disciplines, teaches right from wrong and good from bad – and it is reasonable, John Willinsky asserts, "to expect that this project would live on, for many of us, as an unconscious aspect of our education" (3).

Critics towards such modes of education point us towards the complexities of teaching and learning. Schools are what Grumet calls "ritual centers," often separated out from the living places where we love and struggle ("Conception, Contradiction, and Curriculum" 162). One of the projects of education is to "claim the child, to teach him or her to master the language, the rules, the games" (Grumet 162). However, as Valerie Walkerdine asserts, we might understand a desire for mastery and control that schooling promotes as "the fear, the necessity of proof against the terror of its other, that is, loss of certainty, control and attempted control of loss" (66). The character of this fear of loss –

of an educational narrative that is rooted in mastery, control, and, offers us certainty and stability – must be interrogated for the ways that it stifles the subject and forecloses who and what we might become through the project of education.

In this spirit, then, this thesis is an examination of the ideological principles - or what I will call foundational logic - that have come to structure many educational projects. Foundations are inherent in all disciplines. In faculties of education, some of these mythic foundations include conceptualizations of the teacher as authoritarian, all-knowing, hero and savior, and the student as the one to be filled with the knowledge of the teacher. These foundations produce knowledge, the ways in which we come to know ourselves, and the ways in which we understand teaching and learning. My experiences in an education degree program and of being an instructor in a department of women's studies for the last five years have brought me to my sets of questions concerning knowledge-making practices, subjectivity, and pedagogy.²

Women's studies is a field that largely sees itself as committed to social justice and transformation. Within the discipline, some of the theoretical foundations include feminist parameters around the category "woman" and the often unexamined place of theories having to do with difference. Many critical educational projects have drawn their inspiration from the emancipatory dreams of women's studies and feminism. But with the emergence of postmodern and poststructural theories that recognize identities as products of cultural construction, it is not enough to expect that we all know what we are talking about when we speak of emancipation, transformation, or "woman." Women's studies - like departments of education - is formed through rigid parameters - what is to be

² I take women's studies as my object because this is where I am located and where I am attached, and most familiar. This is not to say that I regard women's studies as separate from the university more broadly, simply that I am considering the particularity of its foundations.

covered, by whom, for what civic purposes. In this sense, the projects of women's studies and teacher education are related as they are invested in singular stories and set meanings that function to stabilize the field. At issue here, perhaps, is a desire for recognition, power, certainty, continuity and stability, to name a few.

However, the problem of attaching to such foundations, I argue, is that when the truth of what we know is called into question we are faced with uncertainty about the future that is uncomfortable and disruptive of what orients us historically and toward the future. And with these disruptions there is an increased need to face the losses that come with the uncertainty and unsettlement of crumbling narratives, to make loss central to pedagogy (Brown 2007, Rosenberg 2004). Letting loss orient pedagogy is a practice that attempts to grasp and to interrogate the effects of projects of schooling on normative knowledge-making practices, the making of subjects and the workings of power. As Ursula Kelly suggests: "A state of disequilibrium marks loss as a destabilizing, reorienting force. Indirection, like loss, offers an opportunity to reassess and envision differently, to ask pointedly of the implications of... loss and to inquire of pending change its direction and focus" ("Migration and Education" 4). The central problem that I want to grapple with throughout these chapters, then, is attachment to foundations, how those form who and how we can be, and what it means to face the losses of those foundations – which is not a one-time occurrence, but a repeated practice of pedagogical work.

The impetus for this project – the Why? – is because our world is in disarray on many fronts. We are faced with ongoing dehumanization of those considered socially different, unrelenting global conflict and war, environmental devastation. There is

continued focus on individualism and getting ahead and less on community, compassion and love. If education can be a catalyst for change: of ourselves, our communities and the world, what are the components of this kind of education? Where is the place of change and how do we create zones of mutual compassion and love that consider the complex interactions of knowledge-making, subjectivity and pedagogy? One way to think about change is through the foray of education. We need more from education than assimilation, and in this regard, teaching for change is a political imperative. If we can teach ourselves and our students about love and compassion, about hearing the other, attending to the other, then we can do better. And doing better means attending to our attachments to foundations (even if they offer us continuity and stability) and the losses of those foundations.

“Looking at loss as a threshold of possibility” (Kelly, “Migration and Education” 2), this examination focuses on themes of attachment and investment in education broadly, and in women’s studies specifically; on the formation of the subject; on pedagogy; and, on loss, mourning and melancholia. In addition, my approach to this thesis, in part, is what I am calling a pedagogical self study. In this regard, there is a double inquiry going on in this thesis.³ I am asking after how foundations work in education and women’s studies, and, at the same time, and beginning in Chapter 3, I am also asking after my own attachments to foundations in education (what it means to be a teacher) and in women’s studies - where they come from and how they structure my understandings of teaching and learning. The central concerns of this thesis that each chapter will address – foundational truths in education and women’s studies, attachment,

³ Thank you to Sharon Rosenberg for this important insight.

loss, mourning, melancholia and pedagogy – are sketched out here in an introductory manner.

Foundationalism and Attachment in Education and in Women's Studies

Foundations in education are implicated in and closely linked to producing the liberal humanist subject, as Giroux and Simon gesture to above. How could this be otherwise, when contemporary educational culture, as Morgan Gardner and Ursula Kelly suggest,

remains oriented by prescriptive, market-driven, and reductionist ideologies... continuing expansion of standardized curricula and testing, the pressures toward competency-based and outcome-driven measures of teacher and learner accountability, the increasing association of skills-based and content-driven instruction with notions of desired educational efficiency, and the expanded commodification of education through (the often globally-driven pressures for) economic corporate sponsorship. (1)

In this context, Deborah Britzman asks the teacher to reflect upon the circumstances of education as a mass and compulsory experience. She suggests “because teachers were once students in compulsory education, their sense of the teacher's world is strangely established before they begin learning to teach” (“Practice Makes Practice” 1). This premise has tremendous impact on teaching and learning, especially since, as Britzman suggests, we enter teaching with our own school biography, where our own understandings of learning can be deeply connected to how we understand the work of teaching (1). On my first day of teaching I remember thinking that my job was to “claim” the students for my own, to fill them up with the “right” kind of knowledge. As Judith Robertson suggests, “Particular habits in teaching take root precisely because of beginning teachers’ tendency to consolidate previous strategies and fictions from learning” (124). These strategies and fictions in learning have become so naturalized and

institutionalized within educational discourse that they remain largely invisible as a set of guiding rules for “quality” education.

Yet foundations are ubiquitous in education and they work in subtle and nuanced ways. For example, while my experiences of teaching in women’s studies have their own unique sets of questions and concerns regarding foundations of knowledge production, identity, and pedagogy that are particular to the discipline, there is one common theme that links most of my teaching experiences in education and in women’s studies. This theme has to do with students’ insistence (whether overt or implied) on a tidy and unified field of study into which they can sink their teeth. This is a problem across disciplines, especially in areas of study that promote reflective thought processes and critical thinking, and encourage students to deconstruct, to dismantle and re-think attitudes and assumptions about the world. The following illuminates this.

Recently, a colleague in women’s studies recounted to me a story about a student who, after realizing that he had too many electives on his schedule for the term, was going to have to drop her class. He said: “Unfortunately, I cannot afford to take a class just for the sake of learning.” This might be seen as an example of the ways that many students enter a course with the expectation that they will leave with something, some new knowledge, something that will help them “go further,” “progress,” enter the work force. There is little to no expectation on the student’s part that they might be surprised by their encounter with knowledge, that they may learn something surprising about themselves and the world around them. However, this particular student’s response could mean other things: “I have heard that in this course I’ll have to unpack my soul in class and I won’t do that”; “I am not taking a course that makes me question everything I have

learned for the last four years – if it wasn't useful for my future why was I learning it in the first place, and paying for it?" Implicit in these comments is that unlearning and questioning the foundations upon which much of education and women's studies sits has nothing to do with learning whatsoever.

Perhaps this student comment implies several things though - that he expects to leave a course with some new knowledge to make his life better (and part of me says: what is wrong with this?), though why wouldn't he think so, given the exchange of money for grades that is subtly embedded in the system? The comment proclaims how university courses and programs train students to think about education, especially in the professional schools: "I want skills and knowledge I can use to make me look good on paper when applying, and make me good at my job if I get one." "Don't ask me to think too hard in the meantime" is often the subtext. What these expectations signal is a particular way of thinking about learning – that we enter school to be taught, to be filled with knowledge that will put us on the 'right path' to progress. Whether an expectation or a wish, this desire for certainty signals a relationship with learning that is linear and straightforward, where learning is a guarantee of "knowing." And this relationship between learning and knowing forms the very expectations that students bring to the classroom.

As an academic discipline, women's studies faces the same problems that are held up by traditional projects of education. For example, when students enter the women's studies classroom (some reluctantly), most often the expectation is that they will encounter a straightforward, tidy, unified set of ideas based on their own assumptions of the field. One dominant assumption of new women's studies students is that the

introductory course will teach them about women's lives, the ways in which women have been and are oppressed, and that the course will assert a politic of confrontation against men. For example, at the end of a recent term in my introductory women's studies class, I asked students to reflect on their changing understanding of feminism. I ask them this question throughout the term as a way to highlight how discourses about feminism (particularly the negative ones) get constructed and are sustained in culture, and, to open up the possibilities for a more complex understanding of the term. In approximately 45 responses, at least 35 of them were similar to the two student comments below:

Coming into this course, I thought I already had an idea of what was in store. First, I thought this course was going to be a piece of cake. How hard can learning about women be? And I simply thought that feminism meant the rights of women to be equal to men. I pictured many men-hating women who fought strongly for what they deserved.

When I first chose this course, I must admit, I was a little intimidated by the idea of feminism. Whenever I saw women's groups and feminists on television or read about them in newspapers, they always seemed scary to me, almost intimidating. I thought that all feminists were man haters who wore tie-dye and didn't shower for days, protesting society's idea of the perfect woman.

While I am not going to unpack these assumptions of women's studies and feminism here, I offer them as a way to highlight the learning expectations of many students who assume that they will digest a plethora of information about the history and culture of women's oppression and then regurgitate it for evaluation. This foundational understanding of teaching and learning as a one-way transfer of knowledge positions the teacher as expert and asks very little of the student in terms of questioning truth claims that dehumanize.

I want to begin now to sketch out some of the ways that foundations in women's studies have formed over the last four decades. The early 1970s saw the first North

American women's studies courses emerging on university and college campuses, with the institutionalization of women's studies programs and departments following shortly thereafter. At the time there were clear benefits associated with institutionalizing the aims of feminism. The study of women's lives was legitimized by the academy and gender became a lens through which to view the project of education. However, as Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman suggest, "something happens when a movement becomes institutionalized" (37). They assert that feminism found a home within the academy, taking its cues not from "women-led... protests concerning first wave issues around abolitionist anti-suffragist movements as well as second wave concerns around anti-war protests, civil rights, and women's liberation" (38), but from the project of traditional education.

Women's studies uprooted feminism from the political movement and transformed it into an academic discourse in order to legitimize its new disciplinary identity and status... in wanting to become a part of the institution, feminism had to acculturate itself to the academic environment... Thus women's studies, since its inception and in the course of its evolutionary development as an academic discipline, not only invested in but was also founded upon... a modern doctrine of normativity. (Floyd-Thomas and Gillman 38)

This separation into the university could be read as a loss - women's studies as an academic area "founded" on this "loss" - this separation from its "originary" identity and roots. But what ensued (and persists) were difficult and defended debates at the level of the university and women's organizations. Within the university the debate concerned the suspicion that women's studies was "too political" and not scholarly enough to meet the standards of higher education. Women's organizations complained that women's studies was "too theoretical" and "too academic," that the focus on changing women's lives had been compromised. The institutionalization of women's studies created a binary:

women's studies practitioners "know" and feminists participating in the women's movement "do." At the heart of this debate is a cemented and unwavering definition of activism – that activating change is done by the "do'ers," those on the front lines, not by those sitting in their offices putting words to paper. All of this is to suggest that from the start, women's studies was invested in and constructed by an Enlightenment project of education marked by rationality and universalizing through its institutionalization in the university.

Women's studies felt the effects of this "disciplining" into the university as the above example illustrates, but as a field that sees itself as committed to social justice and transformation, many of its founding theories are also implicated in discourse based on rationality, reason and binary thinking. Moreover, and as Vivian Namaste points out, women's studies has, and continues to struggle with integrating theories that emphasize difference.

Historically, one of the most important criticisms of feminist theory and activism is that its framework too often reflects the values and experiences of certain white, Western, middle-class women. As a result, feminists have called for intergrating questions of racial and ethnocultural diversity in their thinking and political action... Unfortunately, many feminists have yet to integrate questions of race and ethnicity into their analyses, despite calls in the field to do so for more than 20 years. (x-xi)

What is at stake in relation to these struggles is a women's studies that re-imposes limits and restrictions on the Other by resisting analysis of its own origins and investments both in and outside of the university. Since culture not only oppresses women but has also created the identity woman, what is needed is a constant exploration of the ways that our own conceptual frameworks/foundations are, as Namaste suggests, "deeply linked to the work of colonialism" (xi). She suggests that we must come to terms with the ways that

feminist understandings of “personhood” and “citizenship” are carved up by specific nationalist and colonialist traditions (xi) and how these concepts have become embedded in the institutional systems from which they emerge. In other words, even before feminist concerns over the oppression of women morphed into women’s studies as an entity within the university, there were always already troubles in terms of the ways that feminism understands itself based on a singular identity politics.

For example, one of the most highly contested debates in women’s studies is over the fraught foundational category “woman.” The category “woman” was feminism’s founding gesture, and, as Robyn Wiegman points out, “a guarantee for knowledge and political movement” (108) for and by women. While feminist politics begins with what Wilchins calls a “rather common-sense notion that there exists a group of people understood as woman whose needs can be politically represented and whose objectives sought through unified action” (“Read My Lips” 81) – a women’s movement - implicit in this notion is “the basic idea that we know who comprises this group since it is their political goals we will articulate” (Wilchins 81). For women’s studies the contestation over the category women as foundational to the discipline has rippling effects, in part, says Wiegman, “because of the field’s distinct function in establishing woman as a legitimate object of study and in fighting for the legibility of ‘her’ epistemological importance in knowledge production more widely” (108). I want to conceptualize something about the production of the category “woman” in women’s studies as I have experienced it with students, as a way to foreground the need for the kind of troubling that I am aiming for in relation to knowledge-making practices, identity categories and pedagogy.

In my teaching experiences I have noticed that students carry with them assumptions about women's studies courses that place women as the only object of study (and a particular kind of woman, at that). I have heard such responses as "Why are we reading James Baldwin in this course? He is not a woman!" "Why do we have to read so much about the construction of masculinity? What does masculinity have to do with women's studies?" "Why do we have to read about trans issues? These are not women's issues." Why would students think otherwise, when various programs and departments across the country advertise women's studies with this: "learn about women and work, women and health, women and...". In other words, women's studies has been instrumental in producing the idea that women's interests can be represented by one single and unified movement based on a fixed notion of "woman." And this representational practice works at multiple levels, through departments and programs in the university, and through other media, including prominent feminist journals in Canada. For example, the text in the latest issue of Inanna Publications Newsletter (May 2009) starts by promoting the very popular *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* with this statement:

For over 30 years, thousands of women have been reading the *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* to make sure they know about all the work that's being done on women's issues, in Canada and around the world. Because you are involved and concerned about women and women's issues, you have seen us grow and expand throughout the years, continuing to broaden our vision and tackle issues which are of real concern to Canadian women.

While you are familiar with our journal, you may not be aware of our growth as a feminist press, committed to publishing the finest feminist writing. We bring new innovative and diverse perspectives with the potential to change and enhance women's lives everywhere, by academics and community workers, by well known feminists and by emerging young women writers.

This journal, *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, has produced countless

issues in which scholars take up a multitude of diverse topics in the realm of feminist scholarship, some invariably contested. Still, the above representation of the journal does not adequately represent the contents of the journal. Instead, the newsletter assumes its readership and their interests on the basis of what is a seemingly fixed notion of "woman."

In teaching I have witnessed student comments that infer a particular kind of woman as object of study in women's studies, comments that confirm students can be tempted by this categorical gate-keeping position, perhaps without even knowing that this is what they are doing. I take these points to a recent online introductory women's studies class where a conversation that started as a critique of the gendering of bodies erupted into a debate about Thomas Beattie, the American transsexual man who, most recently, gave birth to a second baby. One student, with great enthusiasm and passion, started the conversation with this:

I would like to bring up a discussion on this. Am I the only one who finds this completely hypocritical? It's one thing for someone to have a sex change, or to be living a man's life in a woman's body. It's completely their own personal decision and I would never judge anyone for making it but if you're going to be looking like, talking like and acting like a man then BE A MAN. Men don't have babies. He [Beattie] said that when she got her breasts cut off she felt a great sense of freedom. That's great for him but if she is choosing to be a he then accept the consequences. I really don't think it's fair for him to have the best of both worlds. He cuts off his breasts but keeps her ovaries? Very two sided. I think this person needs to make up his or her mind on their sex and stick with one or the other.

I agree that gender is how one feels and sex classifies reproductive organs and I'm not against sex changes. But, I don't think saying that a woman having a baby is simply a social norm. It's a fact of nature not a social norm. I do not judge anyone because I wouldn't appreciate if anyone judged me. All I'm saying is that if this person was 100% happy with being a man, and was determined to be 100% man then they simply wouldn't conceive a child, physically able to or not. I understand that it worked in their favor in this situation but it's just taking advantage. If he's really a man and wants to live his life as a man and wants no part of being a woman he should suck it up and give up the good points of being a

woman along with the bad. If he wants to be taken seriously as a man then he should accept all physical aspects of being a man, not just the ones that work in his favor.

This student asserts a strong view on the subject of who has (and who does not have) 'the right' to birth a child, and her passionate attachment to the subject is clear. I read her words in the first paragraph as she struggles with gendered pronouns – "she" and then "he" and then back to "she." She thinks that she is being analytical, probably because that is how the adults in her world talk all the time and the discourse sounds "adult" to her, and principled and certain, and it is all she has. Her words are overflowing with others' intentions, and she may some day sort them out and decide there are others, or not. She probably does not think that her thinking is problematic; she thinks that she is setting us straight about where men belong and where women belong by deploying the boxes (this is bad, that is good; women should; men should not) which hegemonic societal views, upbringing and fixed identity positions that women's studies promotes, re-enforces. Her essentialist claims in relation to gender signal women's studies deeply conservative, epistemological base. Alas, this is why I teach – to bring new views, to encourage critical interrogation of these issues. However, this student's response is significant in terms of the power of entrenched identity categories in women's studies itself that often go untroubled in the field.

Attaching to Foundations

While women's studies constructs fantasies of meaning and identity, it cannot secure the stability of them. But what is the character of this holding on to fixed and stable categories that women's studies promotes? One way to view the representation of women's studies is through the intense feelings of attachment to particular knowledges

and categories that have structured the field. Wiegman highlights the strength and depth of the attachment that feminism summons in those who invest and organize within its parameters.

From such attachment a great deal has been won, and yet feminism's inability to predict, much less inhabit, its radical future has meant that disappointment, sometimes intense feelings of betrayal, have been both the persistent accompanist to attachment and its persistent detractor... Much of the mood swing in the 1990s has been self-consciously cast as a consequence of academic feminism's lost relation to activist practices, with theoretical know-how having very little understanding of what the *how* could possibly be. The pressure on certain theorists – think here of Judith Butler – to define in practical terms what her work compels feminists *to do* brings the political imperative embedded in the rhetoric of the claim into definitive view. Butler's refusal to render her utopianism in a language that manages the anxiety her work now symptomatically evokes has led to a number of bitter attacks, including those that hold her responsible for bringing feminist politics to a crashing halt. (Wiegman 109).

One explanation for such divisive reactions might be, for some, based on a fear that theory will overtake the need for collective voice and political action, that women's studies will become so entirely "academic" and abstract in its language, that the founding intent – women's liberation – will fall away and disappear. A noticeable dualism is enacted in these words, again, between "knowers" and "doers." And such a dualism creates the space for such affective responses to thrive and continue. On top of this, nostalgia plays a role - a looking back in search of authentic and stable meanings that might recuperate a promise of transformative possibilities in the face of utter disruption. As Stuart Tannock suggests, "The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present" (456). To counter the dualism enacted by "knowers" and "doers" and to disrupt a nostalgic harkening back is to ask questions about the texture of feminist politics and activism. And, to open to a conversation about activism – what it

might be, how we “define” it, are there other ways to think activism that bring together both “academic” and “political action” responses? What is “academic” and what is “political action”?

Without these kinds of conversations and a refusal to address and then rethink foundational categories in the field, Wendy Brown says that women’s studies becomes “politically and theoretically incoherent, and tacitly conservative” (“Politics Out of History” 34). In relation to the category of “woman,” for instance, “it is incoherent because by definition it circumscribes uncircumscribable “women” as an object of study, and it is conservative because it must, finally resist all objections to such circumscription” (Brown 34). While the conflicts in women’s studies programs and departments both locally and globally are at odds with a program that wants to see itself as progressing and moving forward into the future, many of the meta-narratives of modernity that women’s studies takes on, that women’s studies has also called into question and disrupted, continue, as Brown suggests, “to operate politically as if these premises still held, and as if the political-cultural narratives based on them were intact” (“Politics Out of History” 4). Perhaps it is the case that the struggles in women’s studies point to a desire to have aspects of women’s studies and feminism remain fixed and rooted in the past based on past successes in the field, and carried linearly into the future – all of which, of course, provide stability, comfort, a guarantee of identity, and a guarantee of belonging to a certain history of women’s studies.

But, what conflicts does a desire to stay rooted in the past provoke? A commitment to seeing history as linear requires those involved in women’s studies to adhere to the stories of its founders and in institutional histories (Braithwaite et al 36).

For example, the ensuing belief that women's experience is universal erases the complexity of experience and of the always debatable category of "woman." Such simplistic and linear stories suggest that to be the right kind of feminist one must adhere to the rules – the identifications and investments - of the past and carry on in relation. This trajectory of progress oversimplifies different areas of feminist thought and the contests over meaning that characterize feminist debate at all points of its history, and it erases the intersection of multiple power relations that shape experience. For example, by treating white, middle-class female experiences as universal - by attempting to stabilize particular meanings and definitions - feminism excludes and alienates. As Wilchins asserts: "By refusing to analyze its own origins, feminism risks resembling that other universal monolith – patriarchy – that perpetuates its own dominance by asserting its naturalness, erasing whatever doesn't fit, and re-imposing the same" ("Queer Theory/Gender Theory" 126). Through fantasies of easy identification, complex and relational understandings of gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, and more, are erased, as are people dehumanized for not fitting the mold. Let me try and offer a more concrete example below.

While women's studies, like other identity-based movements of the late-twentieth century, played a crucial role in disrupting the universal and rational subject of Enlightenment history, it also resulted in what Dina Georgis and RM Kennedy call a "curious formulation that continues... to haunt political movements today: the idea that embracing group identity expands the possibilities for human plurality to be recognized" (21). The concept of "sisterhood" within feminism stands out here. In the North American women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s, one was (and still is, to some

degree) a “sister” if one not only agreed but also adhered to the political project of feminism. Although a unifying force for the contemporary women’s movement against patriarchy, the cry for sisterhood included only a fraction of women: those who were in positions of power and at the forefront of the women’s movement (white, middle class), thereby fixing the white, middle class woman as the stable and absolute subject of feminism. What is more, sisterhood shuts down the possibility that we might “see the alterity of the individual whose heterogeneity exceeds markers of social difference and whose struggle to go on creating the world becomes truncated by the normative closures of group identity” (Georgis and Kennedy 21). In this regard, addressing the origin stories of women’s studies, its rigidity, exclusions and disavowals, its socially constructed meanings of “woman” and “sisterhood” for example, needs to be the aims of teaching and learning.

I believe that the work of education is to make possible, as Maxine Greene so beautifully articulates, a reaching beyond what is right in front of us “toward what might be, should be, is not yet” (“The Dialectic of Freedom” 21). In this light, what would need to be remembered “as a promise of hope” in women’s studies? I argue for an approach to teaching and learning that considers mourning the loss of certainty and stability as a vital component for change. Judith Butler says that:

One mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation... the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. (“Precarious Life” 21)

To undergo a change and possibly be transformed is in opposition to the foundationalist project of education. The foundational project of women’s studies is stuck, lost, does not

know what it has lost, and is a very dangerous place from which to “insist” on anything. As such, we might see that feelings of loss may not be so much a consequence of the failure of education, rather, loss is a means to “creatively animate” (Luhman 153) the world of education. That is, by mourning the losses of foundationalism it is possible to make another kind of education possible, one in which other kinds of knowledges are imaginable, livable, and desirable. On this basis, I argue for the necessity to attend to the losses that accompany the faltering of truth claims and stable narratives of knowledge and identity to allow for other possibilities.

An Emerging Theory of Loss Ethics

Human loss (of innocence, of ideas, of lovers, of parents, of a home, of hope, of dividends, of weight, of hair, of respect, of self-respect, or of something we did not want in the first place) is not one experience but many. To explore and to talk about facing losses in education and in women’s studies - fantasies of the “expert teacher,” sisterhood, universal experience - in the context of this project is to open to the psychic and social mechanisms through which these losses are engaged. What is gained from this exploration, as I have already suggested, is an attending to the ways that foundations construct knowledge, identity and pedagogy that have the potential to dehumanize. To specifically highlight why I link loss and mourning with teaching and learning in women’s studies, I focus on melancholic attachment as one aspect of engagement with loss that is productive in terms of illuminating the ties that bind us to particular attachments and investments in the field.

In his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” Sigmund Freud begins a meditation on the manner in which the human psyche deals with loss through reflections

on the meaning of mourning and melancholia. He identifies mourning as the natural progression through loss of a loved one, lost ideals, a lost sense of self, a place or object whereby one withdraws libidinal energy from one object in order to allow for healthy attachment to new objects. Mourning is a finite process. Once mourning is complete, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (253). In contrast, melancholia, though sharing many of the surface characteristics of mourning, is identified by Freud as a pathological illness, marked by an inability to recover from the loss, where one is unable to let go of the lost object, preventing healthy attachment to new objects. For Freud, the difference between mourning and melancholia is that in melancholia, the work of working through loss is never done. As Freud suggested, one way to view the affective state of melancholia is to say that it does not allow for an exploration of attachment to ideals, and in women's studies, melancholia can be seen to have a profound impact. While recognizing some of the ideological structures that shape current practices that maintain and reproduce hegemonic values, women's studies as a discipline clings tightly to the originary and foundationalist project. And this clinging can be seen as melancholic. To complicate a reading of the desire to remain rooted in a foundationalist project in women's studies, I turn to Brown's paper "Resisting Left Melancholia," where she draws on Walter Benjamin's understanding of the term left melancholia.

Brown suggests that left melancholia signifies a kind of narcissism with regard to how one sees their "past political attachments and identity that exceeds any contemporary investment in political mobilization, alliance, or transformation" (458). She says that we have come to love our convictions more than we "love the existing world that we presumably seek to alter with these terms or the future that would be aligned with them"

(460). Her discussion here concerns the political left, and like women's studies, is steeped in identity politics. Brown reminds that we are drenched in multiple losses where we have experienced

the loss of a unified analysis and unified movement... in the loss of an inexorable and scientific forward movement of history... We are without a sense of an international, and often even a local, left [feminist] community; we are without conviction about the truth of the social order; we are without a rich moral-political vision to guide and sustain political work. Thus, we suffer with the sense of not only a lost movement but a lost historical moment; not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence but a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits. (460)

Women's studies was founded on a desire to transform the project of education through the lens of gender. In relation to an attachment to a particular vision of social transformation, Brown asks: "Is it not this promise that formed the basis for much of our pleasure in being... [in women's studies], indeed, for our self-love as... [women's studies practitioners] and our fellow feeling toward other... [women's studies colleagues]" (469)? Brown again: "And if this love cannot be given up without demanding a radical transformation in the very foundation of our love, in our very capacity for political love or attachment, are we not doomed to left [women's studies] melancholy, a melancholy that is certain to have effects that are not only sorrowful but self-destructive" (460)?

Freud might say that clinging to stable foundations and refusing risk and the discomfort of upheaval is a refusal to find out what it is that we have lost in ourselves – to find the lost object. This is a very serious problem for women's studies in this historical moment. For Brown, what emerges is a political project (again, substituting women's studies for left):

... that operates without either a deep and radical critique of the status quo or a compelling alternative to the existing order of things. But perhaps even more troubling, it is a... [women's studies] that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a... [women's studies] that is most

at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a... [women's studies] that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing. (463-464)

Following Brown in the context of leftist politics, if women's studies and its practitioners remain unable to pull away from foundational and totalizing discourses in which to turn melancholic attachment into mourning, it will literally render itself "a conservative force in history – one that not only misreads the present but installs traditionalism in the very heart of its praxis, in the place where commitment to risk and upheaval belongs" (462-463). Hence, the need to turn toward the complexities of investment and attachment in women's studies. When it is argued that women's studies must keep the undisrupted category of 'woman' on the table as a place marker for the discipline of women's studies, gender must remain central to "hold on to the integrity of the discipline," we can begin to understand that melancholia gets practitioners and students stuck in their learning, where they/we refuse to let go of our love object.

Contemporary scholars concerned with loss and mourning (Butler 2004; Eng and Kazanjian 2003) have delved deeper into melancholic attachments to loss, to depathologize this stuck place of melancholia, exposing its political and social aspects and possibilities. For instance, furthering Freud's views, Butler suggests that successful mourning need not imply "that one has forgotten another person or that something else has come along to take its place" ("Precarious Life" 21). Likewise, Eng and Kazanjian reread Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholy - rather than read melancholy as a pathologized or unfinished version of mourning, they suggest that the lack of closure and the holding on to the past that characterize melancholy can be a resource for cultural change. Eng and Kazanjian argue for a notion of melancholia which

is hopeful, one which signals an ongoing and open relation with the past (versus a grasping of a fixed past). On these terms, melancholia might be seen as a “continuous engagement with loss and its remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 4).

Melancholia framed by Eng and Kazanjian’s approach, as looking to what remains, can be productive for the future of women’s studies. Struggling with the effects of loss of foundations that were constitutive of subjectivity in the first place might be seen as a sign of opening and working through. As such we might see melancholia as a resource for change. A part of depathologizing melancholic attachment in women’s studies is to open the possibilities for understanding it not as a sickness that needs to be cured, but as felt experience that can be mobilized in a range of directions. And perhaps one direction to take is to ask the question: What is the difference between a foundational project in women’s studies and a non-foundational project in women’s studies? The non-foundational project in women’s studies is interminable and invites opening, contradiction, uncertainty, change, a project for learning and meaning-making. The foundational project of women’s studies is stuck, lost, does not know what it has lost, and is a very dangerous place from which to “insist” on anything.

As much as melancholia can signal an open relationship with the past, I want to try to articulate the contradictions inherent in the literature on melancholia. At once, melancholia is a pathological state (Freud 1917, Brown 2003), yet it can also be seen as a resource for change (Eng and Kazanjian 2003, Kelly 2009). This world that we live in takes every opportunity to convince us that it wants us to be happy people, not to be mired in self pity and despair but to rise above and live and be well. But the way to resist this kind of construction for those subjects who have experienced social injury (for

example, some women and others constituted as socially different) is melancholia. But on Freud's terms, who wants to be stuck? Is mourning not the better solution? Perhaps it is the case that when the melancholic subject recognizes herself and remains so, this recognition is already a movement into mourning. Yet, to view melancholy as an obstacle to learning more about ourselves and our attachments is to foreclose its transformative possibilities. To engage with loss, write Eng and Kazanjian, is to "generate... sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future" (4).

The title of this thesis, *"Learning to Love Again": Loss, Self Study, Pedagogy and Women's Studies*, is inspired by the possibility that Brown activates in her writing here. She goes on:

So that there might be democratic futures, we might have to give up the attachment to one set of meanings or one set of definitions of democratic futures and become open to others. That probably means being willing to suffer an even more radical disorientation than many of us already suffer, an even more radical vertigo than some of us are suffering now. (Brown et al, "Learning to Love Again" 41)

While acknowledging the traumatic possibilities of melancholia, Brown asserts that what we need now is openness to possibility, an openness to seeing the world differently, seeing the future differently, which will involve a daring and uncertain openness. "To think that the only way out of that kind of melancholy and that kind of despair is not by darting towards yet another answer but by opening up to a different reading of the present, a different reading of our attachments and possibilities" (Brown et al 41). This unsettling transformation to which Brown alludes is made possible when we explore our desires and attachments in women's studies as subjects of inquiry.

For example, in the winter semester of 2006 a colleague and I presented some

students in a graduate feminist theory seminar with *Troubling Women's Studies: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities*, the 2004 collection of essays that interrogates the effects of foundationalism on the present and future of women's studies as a discipline. The authors of the book encourage a thinking beyond the stabilizing and problematic stories that women's studies continues to tell about itself ("woman" as foundational to the field, inter/disciplinarity, etc) through a critiquing of attachments and investments in women's studies. After reading the book as a class we asked students to think and write about their attachments and investments in particular narratives of women's studies that they hold dear. One student in our class, reflecting upon her past relationship to the discipline, said:

Women's studies was not just my program or discipline of choice. No, women's studies was something much more to me. It was a little sister who needed to be protected and a mother which I looked to for guidance. Saying that women's studies was unstable was like saying my mother was unstable and I could not handle, nor compute that. I had created women's studies into an entity, almost a person I could relate to. It was someone/something I could love, I could gain strength from, I could shield from nasty misogynists, something I could call home. How could I rip to shreds women's studies when it saved my life? How could I dismantle women's studies when it was a home, and I didn't have a home?

This student's comments must be appreciated and validated in terms of the reasons why she might have attached so strongly (wanting to be saved, looking for guidance, wanting certainty and stability – all elements of a feminist rescue fantasy that women's studies promotes). But, here, we might consider the stuckness that melancholia can incite and what an engagement with what remains might reveal. Take again, this same student who called women's studies her sister, her mother, her best friend. Reflecting upon her investments in the field, she said:

When I dismantle women's studies I dismantle myself. Dismantling women's studies would not allow me concrete theories from which to stand behind or to

stand on top of. I would have to look within myself to further understand and problematize... my opinions and my ideas. It's easy to hide behind theory... It's easy to be naked and have something conceal you.

This particular student was changed by a difficult engagement with loss. Through questioning her own attachments and the loss of women's studies ideals – sisterhood, experience, “woman” – she was destabilized. Recalling Kelly, when one is faced with disruption through the force of loss, reorientation is made possible (“Migration and Education” 4). What is explicit then is the reparative power of mourning, mourning as a disruption and reconstitution of subjectivity, as can be seen in this student's responses.

Loss and Mourning, Teaching and Learning

After having given attention to the importance of facing loss in women's studies as a discipline, I want to shift here from attachment to the discourses that constitute the discipline itself (categorical identity positions and knowledges), to attachment and desire in teaching and learning in women's studies. As already suggested, while melancholia initially framed by Freud suggests that the subject is without self understanding and agency, unable to de-attach and therefore doomed to a life of lostness, it also signifies a holding on to our attachments, a caring for the things that matter to us in the moment. And the vigor with which we attach could be the impetus for looking inward at the character of those attachments. In confronting and coming to terms with investments and attachments in teaching and learning, those desires and attachments can be redirected, even if ever so slightly, and melancholy can turn to mourning. And mourning in this sense becomes an ongoing working through that brings to consciousness what has been lost in order to “cultivate ourselves in a different direction, beyond idealism perhaps and towards an understanding of our own critical subjectivity in all its limitation” (Phelan,

“Melancholia” 2).

But to “cultivate ourselves in a different direction” requires views of teaching and learning that can tolerate its difficulty. Instead of a straightforward and linear path from ignorance to knowledge, teachers need to ask questions about the difficulty of education that students and teachers refuse to be comfortable and to look for stability in learning and teaching. Complex understandings of teaching and learning challenge the idea that “common sense” ways of thinking about the world (for both students and teachers) are “the right ways.” In *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*, Roger Simon refers to pedagogy as “practical, political action” (55). He suggests:

In any discussion of practice, it must not be forgotten that education is implicated in the production, accessibility, and legitimization of the language and images that give our relations with our social and material world a particular intelligibility. This means that educational practice is a power relation that participates in both enabling and constraining what is understood as knowledge and truth. (56)

In this light, Kelly suggests, “what our identities as pedagogues both allow and disavow requires constant scrutiny” (“Schooling Desire” 118). As teachers we must constantly be asking ourselves questions about our investments in relation to particular curriculum, and pedagogical practices, especially since our teaching has the potential to disrupt student’s understandings of themselves and the world they inhabit.

If we are to see learning as a disruption of the ordinary, as Britzman suggests (“Some Observations” 54), our resistances and defences against learning are a necessary beginning. While learning involves the desire for knowledge it also involves resistance to knowledge, and it is often our resistance to uncomfortable ideas, what Shoshana Felman calls “a passion for ignorance” (“Jacques Lacan” 79), that keeps our eyes closed to the

kinds of social conditions that work to advantage some groups while disadvantaging and marginalizing others.

For there to be learning, there must be a conflict in learning. Tolerating conflict (as opposed to ignoring it or... avoiding it), however, is very difficult for both teachers and students, specifically if learning is reduced to technical display, a reduction that is the ordinary mode of thought in higher education. Here I am thinking about the push to be an expert, to view knowledge as a solution, to attempt definitional stability through disciplinary boundaries, and to view ignorance and desire as that which is other to knowledge. (Britzman, "Some Observations" 54)

Britzman offers a view here into how some of the deeply embedded discourses of education (teacher as expert, knowledge as a means to an end, "truth" in disciplines, etc) work to preclude certain kinds of questions and inquiries while validating others. On top of this, we must be compelled to understand learning as something that actually changes something in the self, that as Britzman says, disrupts the ordinary state of things ("common sense" views of the world, essentialist understandings of experience, and so forth). Instead of filling us up with facts and figures, learning as conflict will make strange and unsettle the subject and the foundation to which she attaches, opening possibility for making new meaning.

How we teach, what we learn and how we perceive the world is fundamental for thinking about education as a project for social change. Education is and can be about learning something different, something new, something that disrupts normalcy, a "common sense" view of the world. For Roger Simon, Mario DiPaolantonio and Mark Clamen, learning must not be taken up as being entirely about acquiring previously unknown information – facts and stories about the world. Learning must also include what these authors call "an opening of the present in which identities and identifications, the frames of certitude that ground our understandings of existence, and one's

responsibilities to history are displaced and rethought” (2). In this regard, learning must be an encounter with difference, not an identification with sameness – an encounter with the troubling presence of difference that interferes with the stability of knowledge. In this way education invokes a crisis of truth in students and the ensuing disruption of familiar discourses. An understanding of how one’s subjectivity is constituted is central here (as has already been suggested), for it is where possibility lies - in a disruption of an understanding of the self in relation to others. Framed as such, learning is not seen as a promise of progress but an unraveling, an undoing, an interruption, a crisis – a different kind of moving on, not an adding on. Learning is unpredictable, uncomfortable, stressful, not straightforward, uncertain, and has the potential to de-centre but also re-make us. This re-making will be manifest when students and teachers construct new meaning from confusion, conflict, and loss, and when we treat our emotional responses as a resource for learning.

For example, I encourage students to probe what they think are “givens” or “truths” about feminism and women’s studies. I ask what “kind of woman” students envisage as the object of investigation. Often, when students are encouraged and asked to think about socially constructed categories, they develop a clearer view of the ways in which knowledge is produced and how it can also be deconstructed. For instance, when students define women’s studies as concerned solely with “women’s interests,” I encourage them to examine their “commonsense” categories and definitions for the ways in which difference has been suppressed to serve solidarity of the limited, perhaps polarizing kind. And when students resist and struggle with ideas, I encourage them to attend to the losses that are constituted by the rattling that such question can provoke.

To teach for change is to offer up opportunities whereby students might address social inequities through a reflexive consideration of their own identity and ways of knowing in the context of their local and global surroundings. In this context, teaching must not be seen as another layer of knowledge to apply over the already dominant ideologies of education – teacher as expert, student as receptacle to be filled. Such ideologies need to be critically examined for the ways in which they promote dominant ideologies. Efforts toward teaching for social change involve changing ourselves through a consideration of our attachments to and investments in knowledge so that we can rethink who we are as teachers thereby opening possibilities for ourselves to view our students in complex ways and on different terms (Britzman, “Lost Subjects”).

To do so is to view teaching as a practice of always unraveling the self to reveal attachments and desires that are complex, contextual and mostly always difficult. The teacher who does so offers his/her students an invitation to also participate in the difficult project of education. Those teachers, as Britzman reminds,

are interested in mistakes, the accidents, the detours, and the unintelligibilities of identities. ...they gesture to their own constructedness and frailties, troubling the space between representation and the real, between the wish and the need. They explore the twilight of experience in which every reading of the body is a misreading and every search for self leads to the other. (“Lost Subjects” 60)

This view of teaching will engage a view of learning that encourages and invites students into reflexive questioning about ways of knowing in relation to others.

Overview of Chapters

The chapters in this dissertation address attachment and loss of foundations that construct knowledge-making practices, the making of subjects and pedagogy, and the implications of facing loss on the practice of teaching for change. While each of the

chapters focus on themes of epistemology, subjectivity and pedagogy and are intricately connected to the other, Chapters 4, 5 and the Epilogue draw out one theme slightly more than the others. What ties all of the chapters together is an inquiry into the productivity of loss. In chapter 1, I argue that attachment to foundations that can only partly characterize the fields of education and women's studies signals unmourned losses of foundational "truths." Mourning these foundational losses is significant in terms of learning how to live with and beyond normative discourses in education and women's studies that have had the effect of division and exclusion.

Part of what is initiated by confronting misguided and lost ideals in any project of education is a longing for another kind of educational project, one that takes as its central thematic practices of self realization that highlight our attachments to and investments in foundations. In this regard, loss redirects us toward the project of women's studies, for instance, where we encounter loss through a reckoning with ourselves and our attachments and investments in foundations that construct knowledge, identity and pedagogy. The practice of realization that I am calling for is self study. Through the lenses of poststructural and psychoanalytic theory, Chapter 2 attempts to outline what self study entails (and does not entail) through an exploration and interrogation of foundational notions of autobiography and experience. The last part of the chapter includes a discussion of the psychic dynamics of resistance and its implications for telling one's own story of teaching and learning.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, continues an examination of self study through my own narrative of my history of learning to teach. I ask: How have (are) my views of teaching and learning been shaped by various foundations in education? How have such

foundations influenced how I think about myself as a teacher? What experiences of my own schooling inform the work I do? The use of pedagogical self study as a methodology is based in questioning the self, one's attachments, and a larger examination of identity-based questions that are central to education and women's studies. As such, self study enables scholars to theorize identities, ideas, and systems while also being aware of our own complicity. What I am proposing is self-study as one way to work through loss and attachment, one way to critically confront loss so as to work through it to enable new dreams, new attachments, and new desires in education and women's studies.

Chapter 4, "Teaching, Fantasy and Desire: Me and *Mona Lisa Smile*," problematizes attachment to foundations through a different mode. Through a reading of Mike Newell's 2004 film *Mona Lisa Smile*, I explore the ways that popular culture (films and other cultural productions) both shapes and reflects how many teachers, including myself, learn pedagogy. Through an interrogation of knowledge-making practices of teacher and teacher-student relations and learning that the film highlights for me, I consider what *Mona Lisa Smile* teaches me about my attachments and losses to foundations in women's studies and how it helps me to reflect pedagogically. I have suggested that what enables us to let go of ideals that structure our understandings of teaching and learning is an engagement with loss. In this regard, I reflect on what this film illuminates about loss and mourning, and teaching and learning, since, while attachment to foundations of teaching and learning offer historical continuity and certainty, such attachments prevent and foreclose new understandings to emerge.

Through the modes of self study and a critical reading of my attachment to *Mona Lisa Smile*, I offer a third mode in which to investigate and reflect upon attachment and loss. Chapter 5, “*Troubling Women’s Studies: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities*,” focuses on the 2004 publication *Troubling Women’s Studies: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities*, by Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann, and Sharon Rosenberg, and its pedagogical place in my teaching. The authors, both collectively and individually, respond to the current ‘troubles’ in women’s studies by articulating some new ways of imagining how the field might get “passed on” to an upcoming generation of practitioners and students through questioning some of the theoretical foundations – of epistemology, identity, pedagogy – that structure the field. Broadly, they argue for the need to face the losses that accompany faltering foundations and truth narratives that continue to frame the discipline. As mentioned, in 2005 a colleague and I used *Troubling Women’s Studies* in our graduate feminist theory course, and this chapter highlights student responses to the book with a particular focus on subjectivity. My rationale for making the book central is that when students study *Troubling Women’s Studies*, they often confront their expectations of the discipline which has perhaps been idealized by them. Through questioning not only the power, but also the limitations of foundational narratives in women’s studies, the subject undergoes a loss of attachment (or at least a critical encounter with an attachment that may engender a loss). In this regard, I reflect upon how the work of teaching and learning *Troubling Women’s Studies* produces such losses.

If, as I am concluding, what I and others are witnessing in women’s studies is, in part, a reverence for the foundational, then how does my witnessing of such

entrenchment, for me a disavowal of loss, impact women's studies and my relationship to it? The concluding chapter makes loss central. In it, I take up Sharon Rosenberg's final essay from *Troubling Women's Studies* where she explores feminist dilemmas in memorializing the Montreal massacre as a site of learning more about facing loss in women's studies. I have argued throughout this chapter for the importance of facing the losses that follow a reckoning with our attachments to foundational discourses that produce knowledge, subjectivity and pedagogy. Following Rosenberg, I take as central that the experience of loss can be a site of learning – learning more about the self and one's attachments and investments in the field so as to pursue the work of ethical relationality. I work with this idea to try and frame what I have learned about teaching and learning, and loss and mourning as a practitioner in women's studies. To do so, I examine my own biography of attachment to women's studies, my own repeated and difficult reflection on loss, both what has been done to me and what I have done to others that diminishes possibilities of self worth and ethical relationality. In the final section of the chapter (and by way of one of my own teaching experiences), I think on what happens when students bring their own experiences of loss to the classroom (both conscious and unconscious), and what can and does happen when teachers and students are placed in "loving relation" (O'Quinn and Garrison) to one another, to learn from, and be open to the multiple experiences that loss has to offer.

Chapter 2

Methodology: A Pedagogical Self-Study

While our interpretations surely bear the mark of ourselves, argues Chevigny, "we will distort our subjects proportionally less as we recognize our identification and use them to move beyond it" (374) (Salvio, "The Teacher/Scholar as Melancholic" 21).

Introduction

As teachers we all have socially bound understandings of teaching and learning that shape the kinds of teachers we are, the questions we ask, and the ways we teach. As teachers, we also have an autobiography, and this has an equally, if not more, important part to play in shaping our understanding of teaching and learning. In this dissertation I employ critical autobiographical reflection, or pedagogical self study, as an approach that is oriented to an examination of the complexities of the formation of my self as a teacher. The problem that I see with conventional forms of autobiographic work is that by offering an apparently transparent window through which to view the "authentic self" through telling one's story, it has the potential to foreclose the ways that the self struggles, falters, makes mistakes. A pedagogical self study is different from experiential autobiography in that it endeavors: to look at conflicts in the self in teaching and learning (that one often fails when one teaches), embraces difficulty (that the teacher can hold conflicts in order to learn from them), does not look for resolutions (the good teacher doesn't placate students by making them feel better after they have made a mistake), challenges discourses of the "good" teacher, and, reveals psychic conflicts to the one who engages in self study.

Clar Doyle writes that "critical social research attempts to reveal the socio-historical specificity of knowledge and to shed light on how particular knowledge

reproduces structural relations of inequality and oppression, as well as liberation and transformation" (1-2). Likewise, while pedagogical self study involves an exploration into one's teacher identity specifically, it is concerned with the ways that teachers construct the political, ideological, and emotional positions from which we work, and from which knowledge is produced. A pedagogical self-study places the sociality of the individual at the center, asks one to explore the internal world, to reconstruct one's biography in relation to education. William Pinar suggests that placing the teacher at the center when thinking about change is a political and social imperative: "Political and economic oppression can be traced back to the psychic conditions of those involved . . . It is the self estranged who is estranged from others, and hence who can manipulate and destroy themselves and others" ("Toward a Poor Curriculum" 21). For me, self study has illuminated that one part of my story of wanting to be a teacher is a difficult elaboration of being treated poorly by teachers (I will explore this further, later in chapter 3). I wanted to be the good teacher, to save my students from what I perceived were the "bad" teachers that I experienced in my schooling.

The possibilities for self study in teaching and learning lie in the ways that an exploration of the self can disrupt and open up the possibility for a shift in the self. This shift might be seen as an opening, perhaps an acknowledgement of investments and attachments to versions of teaching and learning that refuse a coherent story of what it means to teach, to be a teacher, and of complexity and multiplicity in teaching identities. Peter Hobbs reminds us that our understanding of self, "our sense of subjectivity, our sense of what it means to be human, is necessarily troubled, as one cannot step outside of oneself or one's time and state with an unquestioning sense of certainty 'I am that'" (8-9).

A pedagogical self-study illuminates the ways that teachers might resist the “I am that” in order to look inward to the psychic conditions of our own/my becoming.

In this chapter I argue that facing the self through self study is the grounds for an ethics of teaching and ethical relations with others. In this thesis I am arguing that ethical relations with others are vital in terms of teaching for change. The ways that we interact with one another are often constituted in culture based on individualism. But ethical relationships exist beyond the subjective everyday interests of individuals and they are not founded on division and exclusion. There is no exact body of knowledge that directs us towards what ethical relations entail, but for me – and in the context of this thesis – ethical relations between beings (and the environment) have to do with love, compassion, awareness and acknowledgement. Ethical relationality is made possible with an interminable unraveling of the self that impels us to consider how and what we can become and to reckon with the stories of others. As Kelly suggests, “Seizing the importance of re-presenting and re-writing ourselves as we reconstruct our visions of world communities entails deconstructing the stories we tell of ourselves and the stories that inform them” (“Schooling Desire” 49). I begin by laying out the theoretical terrain of this project and then, considering some of the literature on autobiography, I highlight what a pedagogical self study entails and how it is different from more conventional forms of autobiographic research.

Theory

This research and thinking is grounded in the language of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis because both have been instrumental in deconstructing notions of the self in contemporary life. Through poststructuralism it is possible to trace the making of the

subject - my becoming a teacher - and the ways that normative discourses in education have structured how I approach the work of teaching. Through psychoanalysis, one is encouraged to remember some of the forgotten and reflect upon the pleasures, pains, losses, desires, ambivalences and inconsistencies of experience. A fundamental element of pedagogical self-study is to explore and come to understandings of both the hidden and obvious relations we make to teaching. Susannah Radstone suggests that

Under the impact of . . . poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, autobiographical criticism has shifted from an understanding of autobiography's history as a *response* to changing ideas about the nature of the self, the way in which the self has been apprehended' [Spenngemann, 1980, pp. 6-7] to an understanding of the part played by language, genre and discourse in the constitution of subjectivity. (202)

Both psychoanalysis and poststructuralism reject totalizing, foundational and essentialist discourse, all of which are keys to working toward an understanding of the complex and multiple self in teaching and learning.

Poststructuralism

One of the appeals of conventional self-study is that it gives the "illusion of the seamless web of experience, at the center of which is the (modernist) self coming into fuller rationality" (Kelly, "Schooling Desire" 51). In engaging self study, it is tempting to fall into telling one's story as a narcissistic representation of the subject's authentic 'me,' especially in the context of a society that calls for rationality, sureness, certainty and authenticity. "Become the real you that you've always wanted to be" or "just be yourself" – the pervasiveness of these phrases are common advice for solving all sorts of problems. Self help texts and magazines, for instance, offer the guarantee of a complete and certain self, an 'authentic' you, completely distinct and separate from the social world, obtainable only by a "shedding of that old you." This insidious discourse assumes that

one has complete autonomy and agency, that one's true identity can be shored by making the right choices about one's life. But central to poststructural theorizing is a deconstruction of a presumed coherent and certain identity.

Identity is a concept that has been around since the Enlightenment and is central to Western modernist thinking. Bronwyn Davies notes that to achieve "full human status" (9), the individual must see themselves as having agency:

as individuals who make choices about what they do, and who accept responsibility for those choices. At the same time those choices must be recognizable as 'rational,' that is, as following the principles of decision making acceptable to the group and inside a range of possibilities understood by the group as possibilities... individual identity is made central to any story that is told, with the discursively constituted nature of the range of choices and the desirability of any particular choice being the unfocused upon background. (9)

Through the lens of poststructural theorizing, desire and discourse are fore-grounded. Poststructural theory helps frame questions relevant to my research because it gives me a language with which to not take identity and representation for granted, but to reflect on socially bound portrayals of teachers and my own stories (schooling stories and otherwise) of the past, and how they shape the present.

Poststructuralism advocates a deconstruction of and a moving on from the notion of identity as tidy, unified and whole. A part of the moving on from identity in this sense is to make use of the concepts of subjectivity and subjectification. Modernist discourse promotes the individual as rational, unitary and not at odds with the self, whereas poststructural thinking sees the individual as constituted by and through discourse.⁴ As such, a person's subjectivity becomes visible via an examination of the discourses and practices through which our subjectivities are constituted (Davies 11). Further, as Davies

⁴ Following Foucault, I understand discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (in Hall 1992 291).

notes, "The discourses and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are inscribed in their bodies and in their conscious and unconscious minds" (11). A poststructural fore-grounding of discourse and desire recognizes the fluidity of experience and the multifaceted nature of the self. Subjectification is the process whereby one actively, although not necessarily consciously, takes up the discourses through which we come to know ourselves as human. What is the self and how does its organization take place? At once, the discourse of the teacher as the care-taker of the next generation, as all knowing, as strong and heroic, speaks me into existence as a teacher at the same time as I am subjected to the might of the discourse. More influential is what Davies calls what is invisible, "the way in which the subject spoken about is spoken into existence as that subject" (14). At issue here is an issue of representation and recognition: I will only be recognized as a teacher if I represent myself as all knowing, strong, heroic. As Davies suggests, the concept of subjectification "shifts an emphasis away from mistaken recognitions (which assumes the possibility of a correct recognition), to multiple possible recognitions" (14). The importance of poststructural theory in this regard is to open up possibilities for shifting and changing notions of the self that challenge rationality and certainty.

Central to my research is the way that poststructural thinking calls into question "common sense" views of the world that have come to be "known" as truth - the teacher is the hero, the compassionate one, in control, the problem solver. Rosenberg suggests that "poststructural theorizing is a particular interrogation and critique of the practices of producing and representing knowledge that are more usually taken for granted and taught

as 'the right way'" ("An Introduction" 39). Poststructural theorizing questions "ideas of knowledge as 'innocent' or outside of the workings of power, questioning rationality as a neutral and defining force of democracy, and questioning the assumed linear relation among knowledge, progress, and change" (41). All of the above are critical questions for the self in relation to teaching and learning, offering insight into how we have come to know about ourselves as teachers and how we might learn something different through the unraveling of linear and stable stories of knowing. I use poststructural theory as a way to challenge hegemonic understandings of the self and of teaching and learning, as a way to disentangle old perceptions in order to make room for new ones.

While poststructural thought questions truth claims, tidy narratives, and stable notions of the self, it also, as Rosenberg suggests, "encourage[s] us, as writers and readers, to live with paradoxes, to endeavor to hold contradictions, and to learn from what we might not otherwise have thought" ("An Introduction" 36). This is important for teaching and learning because if we do not endeavor to live with uncertainty and contradiction, we risk, even if unconsciously, upholding the myths that have become so prevalent in schooling. In other words, a unified and coherent self shuts down the possibility for change and a shift in the self. In an attempt to reflect on the question - How did I come to teaching? - poststructuralism encourages a complex view of the self and demands that we pay attention to the paradoxes and complexities of the work of teaching by calling into question knowledge, subjectivity, and experience.

Psychoanalysis

Ruti says that psychoanalysis is unique among contemporary theories of subjectivity, "because it has an anti-essentialist notion of psychic life while at the same

time... takes seriously the ways inner realities can be experienced as 'real' and 'fixed'" (11). Like poststructuralism, psychoanalysis offers us another kind of language to understand the self, another reading of the self, specifically in relation to the unconscious and its impact. Psychoanalysis reminds us that we live in an external (conscious, social) world and an internal (psychic) world. Since we can never know our unconscious until it addresses us in one form or another (Britzman, "Some Observations") - sneaking up on us, reminding us of, or signaling to us our unresolved past - both the internal and external world can be conflictive. When we bring psychoanalysis to education, we may be presented with the ways that old conflicts in schooling and in the self play themselves out for the teacher. By exploring and reflecting on old conflicts in education, we might interrupt the compulsion to repeat practices of teaching that marginalize.

Central to psychoanalysis in education are the ways that dimensions of internal psychic processes are often not accessible for reflection. However, these dimensions of the unconscious tend to influence all aspects of pedagogical practice and need to be accounted for in teaching. For example, as I stood at the front of the classroom on my first solo day of teaching three years ago, at once imagining I would be the "perfect" teacher and shaking and not being able to address students in the ways I imagined I would, my sense of the conflict between the conscious and unconscious was breathtaking. In elementary and high school, I was a nervous student, afraid to step on others' feet, afraid to contribute to class discussions for fear of saying something ridiculous. In such teaching moments, I am, as Ruti says, "compelled to face the return and repetition of the past, even when this past is less than ideal" (11). Psychoanalysis offers a language that

can reveal psychic attachments, and unearth traces of old versions of the self that remain and impact on the work of teaching and learning.

If it is the case that the subject is structured in and by discursive relations which are institutionalized in culture and through this are legitimized, psychoanalysis alerts us to the need for an account of subjectivity that focuses on how it is structured alongside cultural forces, and that provides an account of the way these forces operate in the individual's experience. Psychoanalysis opens up the question of how our ideas and beliefs, past experiences, almost forgotten joys and pains, and unconscious desires about teaching and learning shape the manifold ways we view the world, and so offers a rich mode of theorizing through to meditate on the relation between theories of teaching and learning and teaching for social justice. The use of psychoanalysis challenges education to develop the conceptual tools to notice its own limits and failings.

And psychoanalysis is, as Felman suggests, theory and practice, "a *conceptual framework* that breaks new ground and yet, at the same time, is an idiosyncratic *clinical event*... a symptomatic narrative, a process of concrete unfolding of particular discoveries and insights evolving from the difficulties of a singular life" ("The Question of Autobiography" 7). I use psychoanalysis in this way, as a collection of ideas that shed light on the self in teaching and learning, but also as a practice, a therapeutic endeavor – or an unfolding, as Felman suggests - to find out who I am in teaching and learning. As Butler suggests,

one of the stated aims of psychoanalysis is to offer the [teacher] the chance to put together a story about herself to recollect the past, to interweave the events or, rather, the wishes of childhood with later events, to try to make sense through narrative means of what this life has been, the impasses it encounters time and again, and what it might yet become. ("Giving An Account" 51)

Learning to construct a narrative is, as Butler says, "a crucial practice, especially when discontinuous bits of experience remain disassociated from one another by virtue of traumatic conditions" (52).

Further, psychoanalysis deals with suffering and psychic pain. Ruti reminds that one of its main objectives is to "liberate the individual from repetitive (and therefore seemingly fixed) behavior" (12). In so doing, psychoanalysis has the potential to highlight the ways that teacher identities can get stuck in the past. For the field of women's studies, psychoanalysis illuminates the level of deep attachment to, for instance, the category women as foundational to the discipline and exposes the struggle that is involved in not letting go of deep attachments for the field. There is also the issue of curiosity at stake. Ruti says that psychoanalysis "caters to those who suspect that they may not be answering the most important of life's questions well enough, or who feel that their attempts to answer these questions have somehow been fundamentally distorted" (12). This is an important point for the use of psychoanalysis in relation to teaching and learning - that one must at least be curious about one's attachments and investments in learning to teach. As such, "psychoanalysis... as a discourse and practice seeks a way of making insight out of the meaning that speech has for the subject who speaks" (Todd 126).

I would like to say that the beauty of making use of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism in educational projects is that both assert a complexity (and sometimes contradictions) of identity, that the self is not made independently, but is constructed in ideological discourse—history, language, culture. Such views rupture and distort a view of the subject as authentic, stable, and all knowing. Yet, I also realize that facing the self

is a task that I would sometimes rather avoid. I sometimes yearn for a stable autobiography, some certainty, versus what comes with multiple and complex selves - feeling out of control and empty in a world that generally asks that I pin myself down. Like poststructural theory, psychoanalysis rejects a coherent self because of the presence of the unconscious. However, psychoanalysis also suggests that we need defense mechanisms against difficult knowledge, bad teachers, and so on. Psychoanalysis draws attention to the role of the unconscious in learning, and highlights, for instance, why it is that some knowledge can be threatening to one's image of oneself and is therefore rejected. Felman's "passion for ignorance" ("Jacques Lacan") is an example of this, an example of the ways that we unconsciously but willingly reject our own implication in oppressing others for the sake of surviving in the world. As such, taking a look at one's subjectivity to re-conceptualize how one thinks about teaching and learning is a project that has to do with loss. When we are deeply invested in our beliefs about the world, about teaching and learning, and when the truth of who we are and what we know is called into question, we are faced with uncertainty about the future that can be uncomfortable and disruptive.

Autobiography: Autobiography as Suspect

A starting place for thinking about autobiographical narrative is to explore the uses of autobiographical inquiry in schooling. The predominant discourse from which schools (in the West) draw is rooted in Cartesian thought, a philosophical tradition that structures much of our understanding of contemporary culture. Kaja Silverman reminds us that Descartes' "I" "assumes itself to be fully conscious and hence fully self-knowing" (128). The Cartesian subject is rational, objective, coherent, authentic, and is a conduit of

knowledge. In Cartesian thought conscious practices create the subject, in order to be a subject, cognition and self-recognition are necessary. The discourse of the rational, knowing and fully aware subject remains well intact in schooling, and extends into the domain of research where the most valued research is measured, 'objective' and distanced from the researcher.

In the context of university research, autobiography may often be seen as soft and unquantifiable because it draws on memories of personal histories and one's feelings and thoughts, which are seen as untrustworthy and unreliable as research tools in relation to the Cartesian subject. As Frigga Haug suggests,

It is commonly argued that the lack of objective validity in subjective experience arises from an individual propensity to twist and turn, reinterpret and falsify, forget and repress events, pursuing what is in fact no more than an ideological construction of individuality, giving oneself an identity for the present to which the contents of the past are subordinated. It is therefore assumed that individuals' accounts of themselves and their analysis of the world are not to be trusted; they are coloured by subjectivity. (40)

Descartes' claim that he had discovered the true essence of human subjectivity is now suspect. Poststructuralism, for instance, denies that the individual is the sole author of her own thoughts. Psychoanalysis advocates that the unconscious has as much to do with the formation of the subject as the conscious self (if not more).

While autobiographic inquiry continues to be seen as a suspicious method of research due to its emotional, subjective approach, this suspicion might be seen in a positive sense as well. For example, Megan Boler writes about the crisis that she has encountered in facing what it means to teach during a time of war. She reflects on her position as a teacher and wonders about what kind of knowledge is "appropriate" in the classroom. "Like the boundaries of public and private which have become increasingly

blurred in the last decades, what counts as 'inside' and 'outside' the appropriate focus of knowledge and education becomes increasingly complex" (Boler 142). To what extent are teachers responsible to pose questions to students that ask them to consider the "outside" world? Boler asks:

Is the classroom a sanctuary from the everyday, where educators and students alike can justify abdicating any direct responsibility for "outside" political events? As an intellectual worker, what responsibility do I have to local, national, or international social and political realities in which my citizenship and institution of affiliation are implicated? (Boler 142)

The very fact that Boler asks such questions signals the extent to which showing "feelings" or emotional responses in the classroom is not encouraged or even permitted - that the rational, logical, contained self would be usurped by the emotional, uncertain self.

Boler did, in fact, ask her students how they felt about the effects of the Gulf War. While she felt that many students were numb to the events - over-sensitized by persistent media images - she observed that some students felt a sense of powerlessness. One student declared:

With this war, I demonstrated in an Anti-war rally for the 1st time in my life. I wrote writings and told everyone that this was wrong. But despite all that the war goes on and on. The politicians do not care at all. I have no power whatsoever to change the course of the Persian Gulf War. I am therefore powerless. Powerless to stop an event I think is unjust. (Boler 143)

This student's response demonstrates what Boler means by powerlessness: "an emotion that is usually silent, and mutates into guilt and denial which gnaw at us; the latter especially are forms of internalized self-hatred, 'internalized oppression' in the contemporary discourse -- the poisonous by-products of powerlessness" (143). While some students displayed the emotion of powerlessness, others were clearly suspicious and

cynical, as this student's response to a cease-fire declaration suggests: "Well, I am so happy about this little news event. But who knows if we can believe it. They have censored everything up until now. How do we know they aren't lying" (Boler 148). Suspicion must not only be seen as a refusal to engage "outside" knowledge in the classroom. Suspicion, Boler suggests, is a marked improvement from the emotion of powerlessness, a "form of resistance to pastoral power" (in Boler 148). "Suspicion indicates mistrust; a sense of previous betrayal; possible rational grounds for disbelief. Unlike other feelings, suspicion is linguistically active: it is also a verb, an activity" (Boler, 148). Suspicion is an active emotion, one that gives students agency to reject and refuse easy answers in education.

The Presence of Autobiographical Inquiry in Academia

Despite the fact that autobiographic inquiry as research method is still somewhat of a novelty, reading and writing autobiographically has taken hold in some disciplines, particularly in feminist thought. On the one hand, much has been made of the role of telling about one's self and one's experiences. Feminism and women's studies has long seen autobiographical writing as important since, as Heald suggests, it challenges men's experience as normative, makes the personal political, and offers some new terms from which to theorize about people's lives. For example, autobiography has functioned to explore gaps or a lack in the representation of women's lives in literary genres and has worked in the reclamation of previously hidden or misrepresented writings of women. In autobiographical accounts one can read any number of narratives that present personal and contextualized accounts of how everyday lives have shaped and are shaped by culture at large. Heald also points out that autobiographical writing has illuminated that

all research and knowledge making is personal, not truth bound. On the other hand, there also continues to circulate (in many disciplines, if not all) much value placed on a notion of the “authentic” and true self in autobiographical literature. But this is not enough. Autobiographical inquiry must go beyond this, to get under the surface. Let me explain.

Central to the writing of autobiography was (and is) an understanding that one’s experiences are “true” and seamless facts of who one professes herself to be, where one relies on personal experience as a source of authority. Kelly suggests that autobiographical writing within the context of education, driven by particular literacy models related to personal growth, has been and continues to be predicated on “the authentic self”:

Within these models, the production and use of auto/biography is infused with the fundamental premises that inform all other aspects of progressive literacy practices: the *authentic* self exists; through reading, the authentic self is *discovered*; through writing the authentic self is *expressed*; writing is a *transparent* window to the nature of the authentic self; and, the authentic self is a *maker* of meaning, a forger of *personal* destiny, empowered through access to the *Word*. (“Schooling Desire” 48)

What is at stake in a notion of the “authentic self” is a progress narrative that values one’s experiences as truth claims that, as Miller asserts, “maintain the status quo and reinscribe already known situations and identities as fixed, immutable... normalized conceptions of what and who are possible” (368). While the autobiographical is valued here as a foundation of knowledge, it is valued in a “Cartesian” way.

Likewise, consider Miller’s example of how the teaching subject can be produced through what I will call Cartesian autobiography:

Many of the currently circulating uses of autobiography in teacher research often assume the possibility of constructing coherent and “true” portraits of whole and fully conscious selves. Or teachers at least are encouraged to work autobiographically in order to “develop” teacher selves who are always capable of

fully conscious and knowledgeable actions and decisions in the classroom. But consider what normalizing conventions of educational research, practice, and identity are reinforced when educators, consciously or unconsciously, insist on autobiography as a means to conceptualize and to work toward definitive and conclusive portraits of "developed," "reflective," and thus "effective" teachers, students, and teacher researchers. (39)

What is at stake in definitive and conclusive understandings of the self and of teaching and learning? Implicit in the search for a "true authentic self" (presuming that this self is rooted in a universal understanding of what it means to teach and what it means to be a student) is that there are genuine and reliable knowledge, pedagogical practices, and research methods that will be available to the teacher upon discovering the "true self."

A case in point: many students at the undergraduate and graduate levels are encouraged to write autobiographically, to "tell their stories" as a way of examining as well as constructing their educational assumptions and practices (Miller 367). What Miller has found is that "admonitions to 'tell your story' often lead to versions of teacher research in which teachers learn about and then implement new pedagogical approaches and curriculum materials without a hitch" (368–369). They include straightforward and singular stories about how - now that one's story has been told - teachers become "fully knowledgeable and enlightened about themselves, their students, and their teaching practices" (Miller 369) through the process of self study. What gets normalized, Miller suggests, is the fixed, linear singular story that the student is encouraged to tell about him/herself (369). Autobiography emerges as an authoritative discourse of reality and identity, a text that appears to tell the truth. But, as Pinar suggests, "problematizing what it means to 'be' a teacher or student or researcher or woman cannot occur by 'telling my story' if that story repeats or reinscribes already normalized identity categories" (42). Repeating (read as a different kind of repeating than in the psychoanalytic sense) and

reinscribing normalizing conventions, forecloses critique of the dynamic, multiple and conflicting identities and experiences of students and teachers.

Experience

As has already been mentioned, understanding experience as evidence of “who one really is” is problematic. On one hand, the notion of experience in feminist theory has been a powerful one for many, an epistemological stance in opposition to white male experience. The emphasis on women’s autobiographies, diaries and oral histories has been on locating the similarity of women’s experiences as a way, in part, to bind together and create solidarity amongst women, to stand against oppressive forces, and to reconceive lost women’s history. On the other hand, while it might be that viewing women’s experiences as evidence of knowledge production may offer thematic continuity, and a coherent and comforting moment, my understanding of autobiography does not depend on shared female experience. What is at risk is that a shared female experience can authorize some identities and not others. The implication for autobiography is that women tell their/our stories and in doing so tell other women’s stories because this is the way that women know and experience themselves/ourselves as women.

Joan Scott points out that using experience as evidence of identity naturalizes discursively produced identities such as Black, lesbian, gay, transgendered, and so forth (782). Such discursively produced differences “take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference” (Scott 777). On top of this, experience as evidence may generalize an entire group’s history as understood to convey some kind of truth about an individual and therefore a group. In

women's studies, presumptions about what it means to be a woman, as told through autobiographic stories of women's lives, often cements those women's writings about their experiences as truth tales that function to stabilize and offer directives for the experiences of all women. Likewise, in education, "the myth that experience makes the teacher, and hence that experience is telling in and of itself, valorizes . . . teaching as the authentic moment in . . . education and the real ground of knowledge production" (Britzman, "Practice Makes Practice" 30). Experience, Scott remarks, has been and continues to be a foundation for "the authentic self," experience as simple fact, true reality (780). But the impact of poststructuralism and postmodern theory have led feminists and others to ask questions about the authority of experience as evidence of knowledge.

Scott argues against accepting the narrated experiences of subjects as foundational truth. She calls for reading autobiography to uncover the processes by which the subject comes to know. In other words, individual experiences are always socially produced. In this sense, "It is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (Scott 779). To view narrated experience as evidence or grounds simply for knowledge of the self is to separate the individual from the social, the personal from the political, and the effects manifest in a certain, irrefutable self. Instead of attempting to figure out who the subject "really" is, it is important to pay attention to the processes through which the subject is becoming. As we narrate our experience, we name it. The implication is that we can change the way we do things for the better, make new knowledge out of old struggles, and offer ourselves a potentially more critical understanding of others through knowledge of the self. In this thesis I endeavor to hold all of these points through my own self study.

Resistance

Along with a critique of experience as truth-claim comes the important work of recognizing resistance to learning in education. Resistance can be seen as an emancipatory concept whereby one refuses normative discourses that marginalize and oppress, and where new knowledges can be made. But resistance, as Pitt suggests, can also work in a different way, “where pedagogical attempts to persuade large groups of people to become active participants in struggles against oppression fail” (47). When this happens, and it inevitably does, semester after semester, it is important to re-think the meaning of resistance in education. From a psychoanalytic perspective,

resistance refers to processes of managing psychic conflict. From this perspective, resistance is a method. While the psychoanalytic story that resistance tells may begin with a resounding “no” in the face of new and difficult knowledge, this “no” conceals a much more ambivalent story of implication in the very knowledge that one is at pains to refuse. (Pitt 48)

Resistance to difficult knowledge – a concept coined by Pitt and Britzman which is meant to “signify both representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individuals’ encounters with them in pedagogy” (379) – must take into account that the subject who is resisting knowledge is undergoing a crisis. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this crisis is a problem of representation when the (conscious) outside meets the (unconscious) inside (Pitt and Britzman 380). Psychoanalysis insists on the role of unconscious processes in our lives, and these processes are no more evident than in acts of resistance.

Both student and teacher engage in unconscious acts of resistance. For instance, from time to time I find myself contradicting my “intellectual” or “outside” perceptions of the work of teaching for social justice. I have caught myself grading student papers based on their complex understanding of the material (which really means that they

understood the material as *I* want them to understand it), versus acknowledging student resistance to particular ideas. It is difficult to make a call on the nature of my student's resistances, but perhaps a starting place is to suggest that their resistances to the counter-hegemonic knowledge that I present them with are "symptomatic of discontinuities in teaching and learning that are not easily reconciled with a theory of learning that assumes the Freirean continuity between the experience of oppression and the experience of learning about oppression" (Pitt 52). My resistance, however, is illuminated in my insistence that students see the world through my eyes. Resisting, after all, is a defense mechanism that works to protect unconscious knowledge from coming into consciousness. I want them to "see" – and perhaps I want them to "see" me, my ways, my "right" ways of thinking about the world. What underscores my resistance is an unconscious turning away from facing the losses that accompany a realization of an attachment to my version of the "good teacher." In this regard, paying attention to feelings of resistance and psychoanalytically inquiring after those feelings has the potential to connect bits of unconscious wishes to behaviors with the hope of transforming the self.

The (im)Possibility of Telling Tales in My Own Voice

Butler asks what is left out when we assume that we can narrate our lives, claim a life for ourselves through narration.

The "mineness" of a life is not necessarily its story form. The "I" who begins to tell its story can tell it only according to recognizable norms of life narration. We might then say: to the extent that the "I" agrees, from the start, to narrate itself through those norms, it agrees to circuit its narration through an externality, and so to disorient itself in the telling through modes of speech that have an impersonal nature. ("Giving An Account" 52)

Here I am reminded of the psychoanalytic demand that we live both external (social and conscious) and internal (psychic and unconscious) worlds, and the importance given to the internal world for self study.

Leaning on one's autobiography as a research tool is far more than a stylistic trend or a way to "tell your story." Teresa Wilson (with Oberg) talks about writing autobiographically as a method of research that entails "telling tales." Telling tales, she says, "while on the one hand synonymous with story... connotes a lie, something made up (Frye 1976; Grumet 1988). The particular connection of 'telling tales' to writing research autobiographically is of challenging and transgressing prohibitions against, or at least deep reservations about, representation" (5). Telling tales challenges conventional representations of the "strong, true authentic self" in autobiographical writing, casts a shadow on the "authentic" self. As Wilson notes,

the "I" rests on fiction, then it is the texture of the writing, with all of its intertextual threads, that disperses the "I" into multiple selves, directions, and possibilities... The "I" can finally move because it is not confined within a modernist, colonial, or parochial framework, but dispersed through words into space filled with multiple voices. This is Greene's (1995) vision of public spaces in education in which we imagine ourselves differently by being open to plurality, or multiple voices and perspectives. (7)

The unstable subject, the "I" that has multiple voices, hinges on telling tales by "bringing memory forward," a notion that Strong-Wilson attributes to Gendlin (1965). "Writing does not merely describe experience but carries it forward through the writing experience: 'to explicate is always a further process of experiencing'" (in Strong-Wilson 132). In other words, one does not just write the self, write the experiences of self as simple translation onto the page. The self is constructed and reconstructed through the

process of writing. In this way, writing is a process of self study, potentially provoking a shift in the self. Intertextuality is central to writing as a process of self study.

How does the teacher make meaning of herself through the structure of a text? Moreover, what does it mean to "represent a self, in writing and in the classroom, when the self is inclined to hide so as not to be vulnerable to shame, scrutiny or humiliation" (Salvio 73)? Meaning is not transferred from the writer to the reader directly, but is mediated through the reader's views of the world. The meaning of a text does not live in the words but in the reader's interpretation. Intertextuality is about making links between texts, but also, as Strong-Wilson suggests, entails looking at the process through which connections are made, in which contexts, which connections are privileged, and with what social implications (105). The focus of intertextuality is the reader:

Readers are not passive recipients of text but through constructing intertextual connections, they actively produce new texts: 'readers transpose texts into other texts, absorb one text into another, and build a mosaic of intersecting texts' (Hartman, 1995, p. 526). By 'bringing memory forward' through identifying their storied (namely, intertextual) formations, teachers can begin to reconfigure their landscapes of learning. (Strong-Wilson 110)

Within my own writing I often notice - and mostly always in hindsight - gaps in my understanding of myself and what it means to teach. For example, I had 2 drafts of this chapter completed before I understood what self study illuminated for me in relation to my story of teaching. I teach because I want to save my students from the mean teacher.⁵ I am inadvertently trying to save myself by saving my students. This is only one ever-shifting part of the story, but the point I want to make is that the struggle to catch up, or

⁵ This is not to say that there is such a character as the "good teacher." Anyone who is confident in what it is like to be a "good teacher" stops in the struggle to understand teaching and learning.

bring memory forward is the result of an unconscious transmission of affect to the page, the transmission which needs to be interpreted.

But interpretation does not guarantee that we will become knowing subjects. In fact, Felman unsettles and disrupts the notion that self knowledge through autobiographic work is even a possibility at all. Referring to the work of reading autobiographically, Felman suggests, "Because as educated women we are all unwittingly possessed by 'the male mind that has been implanted in us,' because as women we can quite easily and surreptitiously read literature as men, we can just as easily 'get personal' with a borrowed voice – and might not even know from whom we borrow that voice" (*The Question of Autobiography* 13). Like Butler, "getting personal," according to Felman, offers no guarantee that "the story we narrate is wholly ours or that it is narrated in our own voice" (13). On top of this, and from a psychoanalytic perspective, speaking in one's own voice is an impossibility due to the absent presence of the unconscious, and in a poststructural sense, because of fractured subjectivity and competing discourses. In this regard, self study is an interminable and unsettling process because we are faced with uncertainty about the self in a world that values the rational, knowing subject. In spite of literature that proposes finding the "authentic self" through the work of autobiography, self study can unhinge and dismantle the self when the researcher takes in for questioning the ways that old wounds show themselves to be present in views of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

"We are made out of stories" (110), Strong-Wilson observes. But we can also remake those stories.

Childhood stories prove especially resilient in shaping teachers' perceptions of self and other. Teachers pass on their infectious enthusiasm with stories they have

imbibed. 'We fail to distinguish the world we received as children from the one we are responsible to create as adults,' Grumet (1991) comments (pp. 79–80). Yet, as 'storied intellectuals,' teachers are responsible for the stories that they implicitly foreground (Wilson, 2003a). When teachers connect stories that have been important to them with counter-stories that they have implicitly excluded, they 'waken' to their landscapes of learning... the potential then exists for teachers becoming open to stories other than their own. (110)

Many teachers and scholars have written about and told stories of their lives in school and reflected on their own struggles in the profession (Kelly 2004; Joyrich 1995; Tompkins 1997; Palmer 1999). But what is the work of learning from, and remaking our stories?

In this chapter I have highlighted what self study entails – it focuses on conflicts in the self in teaching and learning, embraces difficulty, resists resolutions, challenges foundations (teacher as expert), opens us to our own psychic conflicts – through a discussion of its theoretical and methodological characteristics. In the next chapter I bring these insights with me to reflect on the question of what is the work of learning from, and remaking our stories? by offering an analytic narrative of my own history of learning to teach. Pedagogical self-study is important because it offers insight into the ways that a complex relationship between knowledge and subjectivity play out in teaching and learning. The insights I gain from a pedagogical self-study reveal the interminable work of learning to teach, the never ending unraveling of the ways that we come to know about the relationships between our work and ourselves.

Chapter 3

My History of Learning to Teach

Try writing... of something very close to you... A family, silence and secrets, a few spoken words, a death, memory and love. An intimate culture, to be certain. This will take you beyond questions of participant-observation, unstructured data, case size, and interpretation. It will encompass your emotional and spiritual life, your very being.
(Quinney 357)

Introduction

To place myself at the center of a pedagogical self-study is to ask poststructural and psychoanalytically informed questions such as: Why am I a teacher? What experiences of my own schooling inform the work I do? How have (are) my views of teaching and learning been shaped by various ideologies in education? If, as Scott suggests, we are constituted by and through our experiences rather than experience functioning as a simple fact of true and authentic reality, then the knowledge of “who the teacher is,” is elusive and is always and already tied up in complex and competing discourses. Trinh asks how it is that researchers can write autobiographically “without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind? Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or naïve whining about your own condition?” (28). Perhaps these difficulties cannot totally be avoided, but perhaps they can be worked through (through writing one’s story) with consistent and attentive engagement with the *self*. Oberg (with Wilson) suggests, “practices develop over time (through practice) without expectation of perfection. One never culminates a practice; one only practices. One must accept the incremental, fragmented, unpredictable, unordered form associated with practicing this writing” (6), since, I would offer, most of the time there are no clear answers, only more questions.

There are many times when I cannot write, do not want to write, resist writing altogether. In these times, the practice of self study depends on being vulnerable to the self, being open and attentive, as Oberg illustrates below:

The particular practices of engagement that compose the process of [autobiographical] research writing I am describing are opening to the unexpected, holding the intention to articulate an enduring interest, and paying attention. Opening refers to opening to the unexpected with more than the conscious rational mind. The mind's desire for predictability and closure must be suspended, as must tendencies to judge what is happening in terms of criteria made available by conventional discourses of research methods. Holding refers to holding the intention to articulate an enduring interest even when the going gets rough, when the way becomes blocked, when the path gets slippery, when what seemed like a place of arrival turns out to be a cul-de-sac. Paying attention refers to paying attention to everything that happens as if it were related to my enduring interest. (6-7)

While I grasp onto Oberg's words as a guide for the kind of autobiographical writing I want to engage, sometimes resistance prevents one from writing about the self and teaching and learning, and this is where psychoanalysis and poststructuralism depart from one another. From a psychoanalytic perspective, what is being suggested here is that while resistance can create possibilities for agency, it can also foreclose, making the process of self study a murky endeavor by destabilizing the subject, again and again. As Ien Ang suggests, the politics of self study exist not in the formation of a definitive and particular identity, but in the use of self study as a "strategy to open up avenues for new speaking trajectories, the articulation of new lines of theorizing" (544).

Following Oberg and Ang then, this chapter offers an intertwined critical narrative of my history of learning and how it is that I came to teaching. Through the lenses of poststructural and psychoanalytic thought - conceptual tools that deconstruct and call the Cartesian self into question, a self that has been promised the impossible (salvation and hope through the process of education) - a pedagogical self study can be

the catalyst for transformation and effective action. Pedagogical self study can be the impetus for an altering in the self through questioning truth claims, exploring the ways in which our own experiences of schooling play out in our teaching, and recognizing the ways that complex relationships among knowledge, power, and subjectivity play out in teaching and learning.

The Construction of the Fantasy Teacher Through a History of Learning

To engage in self study is to simultaneously disrupt the seemingly straightforward manner in which I came to teaching, the ways that my fantasies of teaching structure how it is that I imagine myself as a teacher, and, to intervene in the discourses that produce regimes of truth about teaching and learning. To talk about fantasies of becoming the “good teacher” - confident, strong, respected, listened to, kind and compassionate, articulate, with a box of solutions for all the difficulties of learning - is to explore where and how I constructed such a notion in the first place. I recall Robertson: “particular habits in teaching take root precisely because of beginning teachers’ tendency to consolidate previous strategies and fictions from learning” (124). My experiences of being schooled have had tremendous impacts on how I have understood (and continue to grapple with) the work of teaching, as I attempt to sort through in the following reflection:

Significant to my early experiences of schooling were the teachers who seemed, at the time, short tempered and uninterested in students’ lives. I was on the receiving end of my own perceptions of such teachers at various times, all the while not really considering that what the student learns may not be what the teacher intended. The felt effects of such teaching, nevertheless, left me unsure of myself, lonely, and rather uninterested. In my own teaching, some of this experience has translated into not being what I perceived as “the mean teacher.” Thus, I work at making caring relationships with students and try to be curious about what each brings to the class in terms of life experiences. I watch for the extra quiet students and wonder what they are thinking about, ask them if they are OK as

they saunter out of class. I share inner thoughts about how particular course materials affect my life in hopes that students might make inner relations as well. This being said, not being "the mean teacher" has also meant overcompensating, projecting onto students what I wanted from the teacher when I was a student in an attempt to meet my own previously held notion of the "good teacher." But here I am caught in a bind. While I project onto students what I wanted from the good teacher, such doggedness prevents an examination of what is on the other side of my insistence of being the good teacher - the haunting experience of the very thing I insist on not being - the mean teacher.

Thus, part of the intellectual work of teachers is working through the complexities of fantasies and feelings of teaching - the fantasies of teaching and the happy ending that we see as we stretch ourselves out in the classroom.

While pedagogical self-study compels us to consider the ways that fantasies structure the work of teaching, such a self study can also help to highlight how teachers are implicated in our desires for and enactments of pedagogy. The desire to see teaching "the way teaching is" has tremendous impact on teaching and learning, highlighting the ways that teacher identity can get stuck in the past, not to mention how this sedimented and fixed teacher identity is a factor that can seriously inhibit change in the profession.

In what follows, I reflect on, and trace some of my own coming to teaching:

My narrative of learning to teach began early in my graduate school life. I never dreamt of becoming a teacher. As a student, I failed eleventh-grade math twice and spent a summer at school making up for lost numbers. I liked gym but did not really like the teacher. She was what I perceived as cold, disinterested, and shamed me in class. I loved my religion teacher - she was larger than life, funny, she played the guitar in class from time to time, she wore white t-shirts and a brown novitiate smock, she hugged us/me, pulling us/me into her round, soft body, and sometimes called us/me "dear" - but did not really like religion. With some teachers there was little attempt to connect what we were learning to our personal lives and interests. When I entered university I encountered some teachers who had a profound influence on me, both through intellectual content and through their own ways of being in relation to me (showing interest and care for the student). While pursuing a master's degree in the fine arts I took a job as a teaching assistant in a first-year fine arts/cultural studies class. By the end of term I had announced to myself and others around me, "I am a teacher." But

what happened in this class that created such a strong and almost immediate response in relation to my desire to teach?

A part of the desire to teach was illuminated by experiences where I saw that I might have a hand in interrupting and transforming students' "common sense" views of understanding the world around them, like some of my university teachers had done for me. As a student myself, I felt alive when I saw a bigger picture or caught an insight. I want students to feel that same aliveness. I saw that when I offered students a forum in which to consider the ways that art can affect change, many of them were curious, some even thrilled to encounter such knowledge. My attachment to a project of transformation began early in my undergraduate studies as I explored the history of art and social change through the lens of Holocaust and trauma studies. I read about subjectivity and the limits of representation, the vagaries of history, and the complexities of memory. I was changed by the books I read and the films I viewed. I began to make connections between cultural production, indifference and discrimination. It made sense to me that I could affect change in students by presenting them with the materials that I was changed by. I wanted to show students what saved me in hopes of saving them.

Teachers often can guide students in a direction that creates a shift in thinking.

However, my experiences as a teaching assistant also point to other unconscious wishes that have snuck up on me since that time through an examination of my current teaching. I have thought about how my initial love of teaching was, and is, also infused with being loved - I want to be loved, as I loved my religion teacher. Through my teaching, I wanted to save students from the wrath of my gym teacher who imposed bodily order on a fat kid in her high school years. But these fantasies of teaching are not a surprise, since, as Peter Maas Taubman suggests, fantasies about loving and being loved "swirl in the psychic life of teachers" (21) as they circulate in public perceptions of teaching and schooling: "The success of films such as . . . *To Sir with Love* (1967) . . . [and] *Stand and Deliver* (1988) . . . where teachers initially face unimaginable students only to triumph in the end through their love of the kids, thus winning those students' love and admiration, attests to the lure of these fantasies" (Taubman, 21). While a pedagogical self study reveals the

strange relationships we have with teachers – the loved ones and the ones we want to love us, the topics loved and the teachers experienced as toxic – it also reveals my own psychic conflicts about being loved and seen, as the following reflection suggests.

But I am also curious about why it is that amongst all of the various avenues into learning more about social change and transformation, I grasped onto the Holocaust. The Holocaust is an iconic representation of trauma, and perhaps it was the case that I needed a “big” trauma to make sense of my own feelings of being left out, on the margins, treated poorly. I needed a profound trauma to rattle my cage, to create a shift in my thinking.

For teachers, to teach “the right curriculum” sustains the belief that our work is important while, at the same time, our fantasies presume a coherent world. By calling into question a notion of the stable subject, poststructuralism illuminates that a desire for coherence and stability forecloses complexity and difference. For the teacher, it is difficult to tolerate uncertainty, especially in an institution such as the university where structure and disciplinarity are valued above all else, where, as Rosenberg suggests, teachers are encouraged and expected to distance ourselves from our research “Where knowledge is associated with progress (knowing more, knowing better), it is difficult indeed to encounter the limits of understanding, to attend to radical disruption, to allow ourselves perhaps to fall regularly if for limited time into disorientation” (Rosenberg 3). Considering the institutionalization of teaching, Britzman’s words - “If one tries to undo one’s own school biography through becoming the teacher one wished for as a child one is likely to meet an old, disappointed version of the self” (“Practice Makes Practice 2”) - ring true for me. These words are fundamental to self study as they guide me to ask questions about what my grandiose fantasies of teaching and learning entail and how these fantasies support both my visions and illusions of the world.

Catching Up

I spent much of my childhood care-taking. I performed the “good daughter” amidst feuding parents; I was the “good sister,” taking care of my brothers. In this regard, I wanted to (and did) imagine school as a refuge, a place where I went looking for attention, guidance, love, compassion. Schooling could be/offered me a place where I might be someone different, where I could be free of family responsibilities. For me, my early family life was the precursor to my fantasies of the perfect, loving, compassionate teacher. I had some compassionate and loving teachers in grade school, and they most certainly have had an impact on my coming to teaching. I remember feeling engaged and connected with some of my teachers. I enjoyed elementary music and gym and art classes (I was good at all three) and I felt some teachers paid attention to my abilities. This contributed to my interest in learning in some areas. If the teacher paid attention, I wanted to learn, no matter what the subject. If the teacher did not pay attention, I felt lonely. But what a psychoanalytic exploration has illuminated is that the earliest and most profound memories that have shaped my grandiose fantasies of the perfect teacher are nestled in my desire to be seen. Maybe the teacher (student) will see me (now)?

What does being seen mean in teaching and learning, or in social justice education? My earlier example - of feeling an attachment to learning, no matter the subject, as long as the teacher “saw me,” showed some interest in who I was - invigorated my desire to learn. Being seen, for me, worked to repair the ways in which I experienced not being seen in my early life. Many teachers go into the classroom under the pressure of curriculum outcomes and prevailing discourses, do not sense, feel, hear or see how their students are doing. Avraham Cohen and Heesoon Bai suggest that “It is precisely

this approach to teaching—that is teaching as information transfer or knowledge transmission—that *kills* students” (3).

When we ignore and neglect the existential being who is the student—who he or she is, their hopes, desires, longing, pain, discomfort, anger—then their eyes become dull with a frozen expression of indifference, submission, or sullen defiance and subversion. The dead feeling teachers get when they walk into classes where students sit with flat and dull expressions is an indication that the spirit is under duress. (Cohen and Bai 3.)

Knowing who students are – and also recognizing the impossibility of this - and what is meaningful to them in the moment, encourages compassion, love, and relationality, because when students/people are seen, we become human, we have a sense of worth and value. And in those times when we perceive ourselves as not being seen, the experience of being seen *before* can sustain us. In other words, exploring our own desires and wants through self study helps to reveal the places and times when being seen is crucial to our well being.

Pedagogical Crisis . . . Again

During my doctoral studies and two years after my first teaching experience, I began to teach an undergraduate course in women’s studies. I had spent considerable time thinking about the kind of teacher I wanted to become as I ventured into a PhD program with my sights on a professional teaching career. At the time, my thinking was focused on the how, what, and who I would teach, rather than on my own evolving subjectivity as a teacher and considerations of complex theories of learning. Upon entering the classroom on the first day of my solo teaching debut, I had a nervous jitter in my voice, a shake in my hands, and a list of things I wanted to cover, which I never addressed. I felt I had failed, that the students had seen me emotional, vulnerable, and not able to command or communicate with a certain kind of confidence. One explanation might be that of the

performance nature of the role of teacher. While I know the role, job, and performance of the student well, and while I had come to some conclusions about what it meant to be the teacher, I had not “performed” the teacher. My shaking hands and speechlessness signaled a terrible discomfort as I walked on unfamiliar ground having not integrated the character or script of my idealized teacher.

Further, my fantasies or idealizations of teaching worked to make up my sense of reality, offered me a stable and coherent sense of self. The shaking, nervous teacher highlights that a pedagogical self-study must include an exploration of the self—disruptions in theories of the self (authentic, all knowing, etc.) to effect change. On top of the performative nature of teaching and learning, what my vulnerabilities signaled, and what poststructuralism helps me see, is that in conventional kinds of schooling there is little room for complexities of experience, ambivalences, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities in the classroom. Instead, teachers are expected to live the “truisms”—teacher as expert, all knowing, in control. But as Kelly reminds us, “the attention to ambiguity, paradox, and difference - more complex and subtle renderings of experience - is liberatory, in itself ” (“Schooling Desire” 51). How so?

Miller says that by encouraging teachers to examine “disjunctures, ruptures, break-ups, and fractures in the ‘normal school’ version of the unified life-subject and her own and others’ educational practices, autobiography [self-study] can function . . . to make theory, practice, and the self unfamiliar” (370). This unfamiliarity might be seen as a disruption in normative structures in education, a plurality of self, a self that does not rely on certainty and sureness of who one is (and is supposed to be) in the world (and in,

of course, teaching). In what follows, I offer two separate reflections that illustrate the productive nature of an engagement with self study in teaching and learning.

The unfamiliar will show itself through a questioning of the teacher as expert problem solver:

In class we view a film called Tongues Untied, by the late Marlon Riggs. The film presents a complex view of gay, black men's identity. When the film is over I get up from a desk in the room to turn off the television. I turn to the students and ask if anyone has any general thoughts on the film that they would like to say before we get to my specific questions. One student in the class who is sitting in the front of the row stands up from her desk and blurts out "they should just go back to the jungle from where they came." I look at this student, stunned that she would make such a comment. There is visible discomfort in the classroom—sighs, rolling eyes, gasps, but no words from any of the other students. I am shocked for a moment - then I begin to pace in front of the class, wondering what to say and do. Surely, the teacher should be able to diffuse this situation, say something that brings revelation to this student? There is silence for what feels like an eternity. I think about asking everyone to leave the classroom. I think about asking that one student to leave the classroom. The student who made the comment is visibly uncomfortable. I make several general comments about the dehumanizing effects of racism and homophobia in relation to the film. The next two classes are a struggle for all, especially the student who made the remarks. This experience leaves me feeling frustrated that I was not able to "fix" the situation, temper it, make it better, resolve it... I am compelled to hold the difficult experience of this class without resolution.

I have used Riggs' powerful film in my women's studies classroom many times and for several reasons. First, the film highlights intersectionality in its attempt to document the negotiation of sexual and racial difference in community. Second, it is interesting in its format and delivery, and, it is about the experiences of gay black men. Showing this film in a women's studies classroom works to offer students a way of thinking about the field that is focused on difference of all kinds.

My investments in showing *Tongues Untied* are multiple, however, every time I put the film into the VCR I get anxious. The film can be read as provocative, using repetitive difficult language and depicting scenes of intimacy between men, and it feels

like a risk to show the film because it can be disruptive for some students. Yet, recalling Britzman, for learning to occur there must be conflict or disruption, an unsettling of normative discourses that shape the subject. And perhaps this is why I show this film – because it does unsettle some students and offers an opening to have a conversation about what students might learn from their uncomfortable feelings in relation. But my anxiety in relation to showing the film also signals a worry related to pushing students to crisis. By taking these kinds of risks, can teachers do harm by creating conditions that might, in this case, provoke more homophobia and more racial hatred?⁶ Another risk for me as the teacher has to do with my own investment in what students will think of me. Will they like me, see me? Will I seem strange to them for having offered this film? Perhaps what I am faced with here is the loss of the foundation, however subtle and nuanced, of my attachment to visibility – that old repetitive story which shows itself from time to time in the classroom and in my curriculum.

The unfamiliar will show itself when I rethink the place of vulnerability in the classroom:

I am teaching a queer theory course and we are reading Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix – Performing Transgender Rage." The article, among other issues, discusses subjectivity and Stryker's own reflections on negotiating dominant discourses as a trans woman. Assuming that students have read the article, I call for initial comments on Stryker's compelling narrative. No one responds, however I take the silence as a mix of unfamiliarity with the topics that the article raises, and, perhaps a struggle to integrate some difficult concepts. I invite questions about concepts and ideas that the article raises. No response. I ask how the article made students feel. Nothing. After a minute of silence I ask if anyone had read the article. 3 (out of 42) students raise their hands. I feel myself straighten up, feel myself getting flushed, and then... I perform my own rage. I am paraphrasing, but I said something to the effect of: "This article is as important as any of the others. It requires us to think about who fits into our normative perceptions of sex and

⁶ I realize here that I cannot talk about students collectively, since all student reactions will vary and have to do with the individual.

gender, and who does not. It asks us to pay attention to the effects of dehumanization. If you are at all confused about these effects, let me tell you about my friend Toby who killed herself because she felt like a freak, a monster, but not in the sense that Stryker invokes "monster." " I went on for a few minutes – clearly emotional and teary - about my friend Toby who killed herself because she was so utterly dehumanized in society (because of her transexuality) that she could not bear life anymore. I stopped. One student made a quiet comment: "I am sorry for your loss, Kate." I apologized to the class for what - at the time - felt like an outburst, and then I asked them to come to the next class having read the article. At the time I felt that I had acted inappropriately, said too much, brought too much of myself to the students, smothered them.

I think it is the case that my own loss – the loss of Toby – found its way into the classroom that day in a way that surprised both the students and myself. While I tend to offer “personal” anecdotes in the classroom as a way to illuminate conceptual and theoretical ideas that we are working with (and I encourage students to do the same), the force of my reaction - anger and sadness - felt overwhelming, and my first turn was to “you acted inappropriately and said “too much.”” Perhaps this rationalization was a coping mechanism to deflect what is often hard to face – the classroom as a rational, logical space where students learn by listening and memorizing what teachers offer with truth and certainty. Perhaps, also, I felt too seen – which is the other side of not feeling seen at all. Reflecting back, my vulnerability in the classroom highlighted for me “the strength of our attachments; the difficulties of divestment; and the vicissitudes of engagement” (U. Kelly, personal communication, April 22, 2007). What is also revealed is that at the core of these ruminations is the issue of ethical encounter. Ethical encounter obliges us to attend to the meanings of what we and others do, act and say. And, by looking at ourselves in pedagogical self-study, we can begin to see that we are, in part, products of social experience and that our views and feelings about education and the world are not independent of existing social, institutional, and historical forces. By

engaging in a pedagogical self-study, we can become more conscious about the discourses and power relations that are formative of the ways that we (and our students) have learned to understand the world.

... and again...

From the fall of 2006 to the summer of 2008 I taught an introductory women's studies course online. Before it was revised, this course included a standardized curriculum, three texts from which the students read weekly, and the expectations and outcomes were clearly articulated. For instance, in much of the course students were asked very direct questions about the texts: "Please give an overview of what this narrative is about." "Compare and contrast the experiences of the three women in the story." While these directions are not bad ones for developing students' writing and synthesizing skills, they asked little from the students in terms of complex, experiential, and critical thinking. Students were positioned as passive learners who were expected to spit back what was already clearly on the table. Conversely, the teacher was implicitly positioned as expert, as pourer of knowledge, certain and sure. I felt like I "managed" this course with its clear objectives, its demand for consistent outcomes, and holding students "accountable." I found it difficult to reflect on my teaching practices in such a course - perhaps because I do not feel I *taught* this course. At the same time, I realize that the "deliver and manage" model of teaching rubs up against my idealized notion of teaching. One element of my notion of teaching for change, and following Britzman, is that for there to be learning, there must be conflict in learning (Some Observations"). Perhaps one of the struggles with the packaged online course is that there is little room for the

ordinary to be disrupted.⁷ Perhaps the packaged course (distance) set alongside the in-class (face-to-face) course highlights the risks of learning – the packaged is less likely to illicit conflict when the mandate of the course is certain, standardized and sure.

In ‘teaching’ this online course I tried to intervene with some of the course material, asking questions and offering different perspectives. Usually students got confused and asked: “why are you not sure of yourself?” They questioned why I was asking them to read an article about a particular issue and then challenging the issue in the same moment. “Why have us read it if you are just going to pull it apart.” Part of these responses may be the venue of the course, an online course that in some senses gives students the go-ahead to be a different kind of student than they are in the classroom (as their questions of me suggest). While I am not making a case for the erasure of online teaching here, I do want to point out the perceived significance and value of certainty and sureness in the classroom perpetuated by myths such as the teacher as expert. There is little room for ambiguities and complexities of practice. I have yet to consider more fully my experiences teaching online, but I have come to realize that the example above raises questions, again, about the nature of teaching and learning and the contexts in which we see our teaching as meaningful, given particular agendas of teaching.

Who I am as a teacher and what structures my understanding of teaching and learning are central questions that guide my pedagogical self-study, but it is impossible to answer these questions fully, since, as Kelly says, “autobiography is always both disclosure and enclosure, both effacement and revelation, both impossible and necessary. These conditions of autobiographical practice must be its pedagogical starting points”

⁷ Thank you to Elizabeth Yeoman for this interesting insight.

("Schooling Desire" 62). Sometimes, I really am not enough, there is not enough of me to fill the space in the classroom that needs filling; I am often afraid; I sometimes have mean and disrespectful thoughts and sometimes I am wrong; I am frustrated; I fail at times; sometimes I don't fail. These are the insights that come from self study, a process and a critical and creative disposition. Self study reveals that there is no final coming to teaching, no moment of arriving at being the "best" or "right kind of teacher."

Again, the possibilities for self-study lie in the ways that an exploration of self can disrupt and open the possibility for a shift in the self. Engaging in self-study can guide teachers away from the desire, as Miller says, to "sum up one's self, one's learning, and the other" (371), as fully knowable and authentic subjects. Pedagogical self-study as an exploration of the (my) self in education

insists that this larger textuality [education] be interrogated for ways in which we read and are (culturally) read to, for the ways in which we have learned to look and the ways in which we are looked at. In other words, auto/biography demands an investigation of our becoming, and our coming to, literacy, to assimilated (and often assimilationist) readings of the textual world and of the word. Such an approach to auto/biography decenters the subject, focusing attention, instead, on how the subject is constituted within a dynamics of power across a wide array of textual and discursive practices. (Kelly, "Schooling Desire" 66).

Through pedagogical self-study, it is possible to begin to see the effects of one's internal life on coming to teaching, and the workings of discourse and power relations on the self and society and, to do something different. In this vien, Kelly suggests that "no less can be demanded of auto/biographical work in education than the ongoing self-reflexivity around pedagogical stories and the stories that are our pedagogies" ("Schooling Desire" 53).

Through pedagogical self-study, teachers might mobilize and realize the interminable work of transformation by uncovering and revealing hidden emotional

investments and discursive structures that organize our concerns for “truth” and stable fixed narratives in education. A pedagogical self-study of this kind invites an

opening of the present in which identities and identifications, the frames of certitude that ground our understandings of existence, and one’s responsibilities to history are displaced and rethought . . . the consequences of such learning extends to reworking notions of community, identity, embodiment, and relationship . . . a hopeful yet risk laden learning that seeks to accomplish a shift of one’s ego boundaries, that displaces engagements with the past and contemporary relations with others out of the inescapably violent and violative confines of the ‘I,’ to our receptivity to others. (Simon, DiPaolantonio, and Clamen 2–3)

Perhaps teaching is more of a practice of self – and critical teacher autobiography as a mode of taking a look at the practice of self - an ongoing exploration into our desires, fears, and idealizations of the field, as we struggle to impart what we know and do not quite know. Perhaps we only really begin to teach when we begin to realize a more conscious self in what Felman calls an “impossible profession” (“Jacques Lanan”). To engage pedagogical self-study is to illuminate how, as Kelly suggests, “knowledge, schooling, and identity are complexly interconnected and how the social practices of education derive from and inevitably return to the landscape of subjectivity” (“Schooling Desire” 56). Poststructuralism and psychoanalysis are tools through which to return to the self in self study. As such, analytic narratives of learning to teach might be seen as works of social justice that inform and perform transformative effects.

Conclusion

“What do we know about education that we did not know before?” (Felman, “Education and Crisis” 1). In this chapter, I have argued that a significant component of teaching for change has to do with an exploration of the self in teaching and learning. In the pursuit of the impossible stable representation of the all knowing, “best-practicing,” “competent” teacher, some forms of autobiography further estrange one from the self and

"serve to limit and to close down rather than to create possibilities for constructing... open and resignifiable selves" (Miller 367). And this is the work of pedagogical self study – that through an encounter with the loss of foundations that construct knowledge, identity and pedagogy, we might construct resignifiable selves, a self that can bear pedagogical crises and can be remade time and again for the sake of envisaging the world anew. To pursue self-study in education might be seen as a hopeful practice, one that can unearth and reveal what structures our/my understandings of teaching and learning, to "work for reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom" (Simon, "A Touch of the Past" 4). If a fundamental component of teaching for change is in the "service of human freedom," what then can a pedagogical self-study mean for understanding the self in relation to others?

To teach for change, Pinar calls for a "a perpetual placement of the attention to one's physical insides to attempt to discover what one's . . . emotional, cognitive - in short, psychic - state is" (4). The result can be a gradual turning inward to understand the ways that knowledge-making practices, subjectivity and the workings of power impact on our lives. To explore our subjectivity through pedagogical self-study is to make room for a complex and uncertain self in education. To do so is a question of ethics, since "desires and manifestations of the unconscious . . . inflect all aspects of human interaction and being" (Miller 369). In this way, an exploration of self might also be seen as opening ethical relations with others. When teachers attend to matters of the unconscious, complexities of self, and what constitutes our coming to know, such encounters, says Simon, "may initiate a dephasing of the terms on which the stories of others settle into one's experience" ("A Touch of the Past" 10), laying open possibilities for teaching that

is grounded in love, compassion, and acknowledgement of the stories that our students bring to us.

Chapter 4

Teaching, Fantasy and Desire: Me and *Mona Lisa Smile*

...teaching is not a brassiere. It is not something designed for gentle uplift and confidence.

(Aoki <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~aoki/Teaching/teaching.htm>)

Introduction

Self study can provoke an illumination and acknowledgment of particular attachments and investments in the work of learning to teach and can reveal the strange relationships we have with teachers – the loved ones and the ones we want to love us, the topics loved and the teachers experienced as toxic. The recognitions of what constructs our understandings of ourselves as teachers is an ethical obligation for teachers, as I have argued in Chapter 3. But what are the stories that play a part in constructing notions of teaching and learning? In this chapter I focus on the ways in which popular culture texts shape thinking about teaching and learning. The ways that education is represented in popular culture offers us an opportunity to examine how our society and our own ideas about schooling are constructed and represented. Films about schooling say all kinds of things about what matters to society in terms of educational ideologies and the expectations that we have of education. But, specifically, what is the relationship between popular fantasies of teaching and learning - fantasies of loving and being loved, as Taubman suggests, “swirl in the psychic life of teachers” (21) as they circulate in public perceptions of teaching and schooling - and the construction of the teacher?

Mike Newell's 2003 production, *Mona Lisa Smile* – a film that I became quite attached to - tells the story of a young feminist art history professor beginning her career in the 1950s, teaching young women to question and challenge the traditional roles to

which they seemed destined. In this chapter I explore the ways that popular culture texts construct notions of teaching and learning, specifically through the fantasy of the teacher as hero, and simultaneously consider my own attachment to *Mona Lisa Smile* as a particular rendition of the teacher as hero fantasy. I ask: How and why do we get attached to particular stories and what is it about the film *Mona Lisa Smile* that I became so attached to? To highlight the importance of the place of loss in working through attachments to teaching and learning, I examine several of the characters in the film and how they grapple (or do not) with their own attachments. Finally, I explore what a reading of *Mona Lisa Smile* offers me in terms of my own attachments and desires in teaching and learning. Self study is one way to work through attachment and loss, and while this chapter contains moments of self study, my main goal is to read the film as an experience of learning pedagogy and learning to reflect pedagogically through an interrogation of knowledge-making practices of teacher and teacher-student relations and learning that the film highlights for me.

Attaching to Stories: The Hero Fantasy

I anticipate that most of us can recall a teacher or teachers who offered generous mentoring and guidance, who taught us how to teach and whose philosophies and approaches continue to steer our own. When I teach I draw on the teachings of those who have guided me: the excitement of engaging with new ideas, the challenge and exhilaration of impassioned intellectual debate, and the patience and humility of those teachers whose integrity and love for their students and their discipline continue to inspire and guide me. But it is not just our own teachers who provide models and examples for new teachers to follow. And teachers who inspire are themselves not

immune to representations of teaching and learning in popular culture. The notion of the teacher as hero is common in popular culture especially in films about schooling and teaching that attest to the power of media representations.

Generally, the hero figure is one that is revered and is held up as a symbol of what is right, just, and good about the world. According to French and Pena,

Heroes exert profound influence on individuals and even entire civilizations. For children, heroes, with their accompanying myths and legends, are part of the material from which their dreams and dramas are derived. Playing out these hero themes is one of the ways in which children come to understand their society and their own role within that society (in Bonneville et al, 1).

The hero is an exemplary citizen, is self-sacrificing and motivates us to become change-makers. As teachers, we need to be aware that through curriculum, students are exposed to a constant repertoire of heroes, both locally and globally: Terry Fox, Gandhi, Mother Theresa, fallen military persons. In the context of teaching for social justice, the stories of these heroes are meant to inspire and motivate and certainly many of them do. However, the stories of such heroes also send the message, as S.J. Child points out, that “if students don't see themselves as being fearless, persistent, and sacrificing, they may assume they are not qualified to take risks and create change. These hero stories can send the wrong message: If you don't have the will to spend 27 years in jail like Nelson Mandela, you can't participate in social change” (3). In other words, the emblematic hero story is deeply prevalent, powerful, and problematic in our society today.

There are a plethora of Hollywood and other iconic representations of teachers in the media, and certainly, as Taubman suggests, they have made their mark in terms of directing the representation of the teacher as hero. Let me focus here on several films that project the teacher as hero to illustrate some of the troubling aspects of this image for

teaching and learning. One of the hallmarks of many films that depict the experiences of teachers is that they tell an uplifting and touching story of the heroic teacher figure who helps kids from tough backgrounds “beat the odds.” In *Stand and Deliver* Jaime Escalante is depicted as a hero who shows a poorly prepared and apparently hopeless bunch of students how to understand math for the first time. The message is that with the touch of a master teacher one can bring unmotivated students from disadvantaged backgrounds to high-level achievement in a short period of time. And this message is compelling - in the back of my mind I wanted to be this kind of teacher myself, to be the hero. But the reality of teaching is far different. As Tom Moore suggests,

when you’re confronted with the reality of teaching not just one class of misunderstood teenagers (the common television and movie conceit) but four or five every day, and dealing with parents, administrators, mentors, grades, attendance records, standardized tests and individual education plans for children with learning disabilities, not to mention multiple daily lesson plans – all without being able to count on the support of your superiors – it becomes harder to measure up to the heroic movie teachers you thought you might be. (2)

In relation to Moore’s comments, it is hard to imagine in our one-size-fits-all education of today – replete with standardized curricula, top-down policy and reform, and “best practice” procedures for instructors – that there would be a great deal of inspiration to become brilliant teachers like Escalante. And, there is a discrepancy between the emblematic hero story and the reality of humans. All of us fail, falter, struggle, and invest in our students and our teaching for reasons that are not purely selfless, nor always clear to us, as self study reveals.

Take *Freedom Writers*, a film that depicts the real life story of Erin Gruwell who gives up a promising law career to take over a class of difficult and antagonistic students in a school where her colleagues think that teaching these kinds of students is a waste of

time. *Freedom Writers* represents teachers “more as missionaries than professionals, eager to give up their lives and comfort for the benefit of others, without need of compensation” (Moore, “Class Distinctions” 1). Like *Stand and Deliver*, the most troubling message that *Freedom Writers* promotes is that schooling and education *need* teacher heroes. The results of the promotion of this myth “trivializes not only the difficulties many real students must overcome, but also the hard-earned skill and tireless effort real teachers must use to help those students succeed” (Moore 2). The representation of teacher-heroes keeps us steeped in the illusion that “real” teaching success comes with serious self-sacrifice and a sometimes unexplainable, dramatic turn-around of students. In addition, identification with the hero narrative forecloses an investigation into one’s teacher identity and redeems teaching as a heroic practice.

Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber offer more with some very interesting insight into the ways that the teacher hero is positioned in Hollywood representations of teaching and learning. Characterized by romanticism, teachers are inscribed in the following way:

Teacher heroes are usually outsiders who are teaching through circumstances rather than through choice.

Teaching is represented as ‘natural’: i.e. you do not need training if you’ve got “the right stuff.”

Teacher heroes are rare, and stand out in contrast to anti-hero teachers.

Teacher heroes liberate students by defying the official school rules and curriculum.

Real learning occurs outside school.

Teachers become heroic through a turning point of sudden enlightenment, divine intervention or the ‘a-ha’ experience.

Teaching is a heroic and solitary act: teachers do not work collectively to reform. Teacher heroes are devoted to their students and are rewarded with their undying love and gratitude in a dramatic scene. (in Moore, 2004 57)

While the teacher hero is meant to represent a revolutionary and emancipatory model of teaching, many films that inscribe teachers in the above ways, Alex Moore suggests, do

little more than assert “a very conservative notion of what schooling is about: not least, the notion that one of its prime functions – perhaps its most important function – is to reproduce ‘model’ citizens who reject violence – or apathy-inducing cultures in favour of ‘civilizing’ middle-class ones” (59). In ways we see this exemplified in *Stand and Deliver*. Escalante’s students are now armed with incredible math skills and pride and confidence, but their learning has been about the individual and the individual’s immediate needs, and they are no more able to critique nor change the social conditions of a system that has always worked against them (Moore, “The Good Teacher” 62).

The portrayal of the teacher as hero - the rare, charismatic, inherently talented, enlightened maverick - is a fundamentally conservative one, because, as Moore says, the teacher is seen as working alone:

the solutions they offer their students to social problems are at the level of individual experience and are dependant on the interrelations of a very small group of people... they suggest a route out of the problem as experienced rather than an attack on the problem itself: we might say, a conservatively *symptomatic* rather than socialistically *causal* reading of and response to the issues. (“The Good Teacher” 62)

The representation of the teacher as hero denies the systemic problems of schooling and suggests that the “good teacher” is one who has an immeasurable amount of time on their hands to attend to the needs and wants of individual students (Moore 62), whereas, in reality, teachers are stretched to navigate a complex set of demands both in their professional and personal lives. And while much of the critical discourse in teacher training suggests that teachers are taught, not made, the emblematic teacher as hero that some films present suggests that hero teachers owe their good teaching to some essential set of personality traits – enlightened, rare, inherently talented, not in need of training. And this representation of the teacher, Moore asserts, “advises other teachers – the mere

mortals – that their own essence is not up to the task and, presumably, never can be, precisely because the essence is that which we are born with – the ‘untouchable,’ immutable core that is ‘us’” (66). Of course, from a poststructural perspective, this view of the essential unified subject is an impossibility.

Nevertheless, for those teachers who do not see themselves as heroes but who ascribe to the portrayal, the effects can be devastating, replete with feelings of not measuring up, little confidence in the work that one does, and failure. In this regard, the importance of self study is illuminated for the ways that it can incite the teacher to explore the social construction of the hero and to consider the troubling expectations that this construction potentially places on the teacher. Yet, while it is clear that the construction of the hero teacher can make trouble for teachers, this does not preclude that we do love to attach to these stories. However, exploring these attachments is vital in terms of teaching for social change.

To explore attachments to films about teaching and learning, which I will try to do in my discussion of *Mona Lisa Smile*, I am informed by Lynne Joyrich. In her piece, titled “Give Me a Girl at an Impressionable Age and She Is Mine for Life: Jean Brodie as Pedagogical Primer” (on the 1969 film *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*), she explores her “love” of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (an adaptation of Muriel Spark’s novel about a teacher, Jean Brodie, who, in her “prime,” surrounds herself with her students, the ones she thinks she can have the most impact on, her “Brodie Set.”). Joyrich wonders why she continues to be “obsessed” with this film. From the outset Joyrich regards the film as a significant teaching tool – she uses it in her own teaching to illustrate how identities are produced in and through the institution of schooling. She reads the film as helping to

“expose the operation of historical and representational codes. Gender as a social and cultural construction; the constitution of sexual difference within a regimented order of exchange; the asymmetrical relations that position men and women within the field of vision” (49). On the one hand, Joyrich makes use of the film as what she calls a “proper educational enterprise,” making meaning of the story of Jean Brodie for students, but there is something more.

One of the things that sparks Joyrich’s interest in the film is her continued identification with Jean Brodie (as an emerging teacher herself), yet also her identification with Sandy, a student who refuses to conform to Brodie’s teachings (a refusal of the “teacher as heroic” fantasy). Of her identifications Joyrich says:

I didn’t simply identify with any one character in the conflict... My affect seemed to operate not only within but across these positions – to be based on the poignancy of the division itself. Furthermore, this very division was plural, split between what was inside and out. For in addition to the drama of annunciation and repetition that defines the relations between Sandy and Jean, when I watch the film I also encounter my own double – my past incarnations as viewer, previous identifications I both repeat and disavow. (47)

The insight is powerful for Joyrich, having to do with what she calls “the very trajectory of recognition, misrecognition, and rerecognition” (47) that she experiences through her engagement with the film. Through her own identifications with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Joyrich explores the “mobility of identifications, and therefore of knowledges, that the film makes possible” (47) for her.

I want to turn now to a discussion of the film *Mona Lisa Smile* and to work through and explore my own attachment to this film as a particular rendition of the hero teacher fantasy. For as Joyrich so poignantly suggests, “the pedagogical significance of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* [and *Mona Lisa Smile*] does not simply lie in what it says

about teaching” (59), but what it illuminates about the history of our selves. First, let me lay out the story that the film tells with some initial analysis of the ways that the story line accelerates some of the troubling foundations in schooling that I have highlighted in chapter 1.

Mona Lisa Smile

On the film’s official web site it states that *Mona Lisa Smile* is: “The story of a woman who challenged the minds of the brightest students in the country to open themselves to a different idea and go on a journey they never imagined.” One way to view this film is to say that it is a story about women (teacher and students alike) struggling to define themselves when White, middle class American women were best seen to be beside their man and in the kitchen, and that to deviate was morally questionable. The main character in the film, Katherine Watson, moves from California to New England to teach art history at Wellesley College in the fall of 1953. Expecting bright and open-minded students, Watson finds a climate of conformity and conservatism on campus that is in line with the mainstream or power elite views of women’s lives in the early 1950s. One of the core courses for students at the college - who are also affectionately know as “Wellesley girls” - is called “Poise and Elocution.” In a scene from the film, the teacher, Miss Abbey, instructs the girls on how to set a proper dinner table, how to manage last minute guests and to turn a meal for four into a meal for eight. In a quiet and serious tone, Miss Abbey says: “A few years from now your sole responsibility will be taking care of your husband and children. You may all be here for an easy A, but the grade that matters the most is the one he gives you, not me.” While I found some amusement (in 2003) in the dated and strange function of etiquette classes,

Abbey's comments to her students illuminate the conservative climate that Watson encounters.

Mona Lisa Smile is also about a teacher's determination to instill feminist and free-thinking beliefs on a campus where such values and ideas were scarce and scorned. The film traces Watson's entry into college teaching life with an initial stunning scene. Watson enters a large lecture hall and is met by a large class of confident young women awaiting her instruction. Watson begins by introducing students to images from their history of art textbook through a series of slides. She projects the first slide and asks if anyone has seen it before. One student answers quickly with the name of the work, its date of completion, and who it was commissioned for. From here, almost every student makes a point to identify every slide of every work of art in this first lecture. Watson asks: "Have any of you taken Art History before?" The class answers with a resounding no. Watson: "How many of you have read the entire text?" All students raise their hands. Watson: "Well, you girls do prepare." One of the students in the class suggests: "Well, if you've nothing else for us we could go to independent study." I highlight this scene for two reasons. First, it speaks to Watson's first and rather horrifying experience of teaching at Wellesley, and offers a sense of the ways that a perception of learning and success amounts to reading, preparing, and memorizing (not unlike the process of setting a dinner table) – education at its most conservative. Second, a power struggle is enacted here between Watson and the "Wellesley girls." In relation to the "Wellesley girls," Watson is the new teacher on the block, one who is seen as rather suspicious, if not subversive, up to this point in the film, one who is not known by the girls except that she is a young woman from California who has progressive politics, which in and of itself, may be seen

to be threatening to the girls and their privilege. Watson is also a former teacher at a "state" university and, for them, is someone who would therefore be outside "serious" intellectual circles.

The school administration at Wellesley is depicted as extremely conformist, resisting modern art and other "subversive" acts. During Watson's first art history class in which all of the students leave for independent study, we see in the background an older man exit from the back of the lecture hall, having just sat in on what has appeared to be a miserable failure of a class. In the next scene we see Watson in the president's office being reprimanded for her lack of discipline with students.

President: Your first class left a lot to be desired, Miss Watson. And I'm curious about the subject of your dissertation. You suggest, "Picasso will do for the 20th century what Michelangelo did for the Renaissance," unquote. So these canvases that they're turning out these days with paint dripped and splotched on them... they're as worthy of our attention as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel? Have you even seen the Sistine Chapel Miss Watson?

Watson replies: "I've never been to Europe," to which the slightly taken aback president replies, "Better discipline next class, Miss Watson," again, furthering class division by positioning Watson as "state"-like and unworldly.

As the film progresses, we see a young progressive teacher at an old conservative institution inspiring students to break out of their conformity and look at the world in new ways. Recovering from her first horrifying lecture experience, Watson tosses the assigned curriculum aside to give the students a lesson in independent thinking. Here we see the beginnings of the good and heroic teacher portrayed, the one who liberates the students by "defying the official school rules and curriculum" (Mitchell and Weber in Moore, 2004, 57). In the end, Watson's "unorthodox" teaching methods and her connections with students are met with an

ultimatum that she either subscribe to past teaching syllabi and disconnect from students, or leave Wellesley. Watson decides to leave after her year at the college, but not before she has transformed students' lives and taught them how to think for themselves.⁸

As I have already suggested, popular cultural texts mark and leave traces on their viewers and readers in terms of constructing images of the self in teaching. What is it about the film *Mona Lisa Smile* that I became so attached to? What did the representation do for me? In the following section I explore these questions: What are the different ways that teachers are figured as “liberating” or “enlightening”? What are the implications and consequences of such representations of teachers? Robertson suggests that “beginning teachers’ engagement with screen images of [idealized versions of teaching] demonstrate discourses of mastery that both reveal and conceal knowledge of the self and others in teaching” (123). If unaccounted for, she says, “fantasy can work to obstruct the thoughtfulness of education” (123). What does my relationship to *Mona Lisa Smile* tell about my fantasies of teaching? How does my attachment to the film speak to my attachment to teaching?

Me and *Mona Lisa Smile*: Fantasy, Desire, and Epistemic Rupture

One evening in the late fall of 2003, I was at home watching television and saw a trailer for *Mona Lisa Smile*. I made an immediate connection with the story that this film would tell from watching the trailer alone. Part of this has to do with the story, but another part had to do with Julia Roberts, the actress who plays Katherine Watson. I have seen all of Julia Roberts’ films, and perhaps I could say that I developed a little crush on

⁸ Recalling Moore, the representation is of a solitary act between Watson and her students that does little to transform the systemic structure of schooling.

her and on the characters that she played – vulnerable yet strong, careful yet a little bit wild, funny and serious, beautiful, and mostly always an outsider. And, perhaps it is also the case that my identification with the qualities of Roberts' characters (which I also imagined Roberts had herself) was an over identification – a desire (and wish) to have those characteristics myself. Days later I went to the theatre and reveled in the story of *Mona Lisa Smile*, delighted by its representation of a young teacher who overcomes adversity to enlighten and guide her students. I felt strong connections between myself and the character of Watson, I wanted to teach like she taught, I wanted to be like her, I wanted to *be* her. I went on to see *Mona Lisa Smile* twice more in the theatre in the coming weeks, and then added a personal copy of the film to my small collection of inspiring stories about teachers. By now, I have watched *Mona Lisa Smile* too many times to count – I have a fascination with this film that is unlike any other film I have encountered. It takes its place in this chapter as an object of my affection, and, as a site of struggle in relation to my fantasies and desires of becoming a teacher.

When I began to think about writing my relationship to the film I revisited *Mona Lisa Smile* to remind myself of the details of the story. But more than that, I love watching this film. One evening not too long ago I lay on my bed with my dog and watched *Mona Lisa Smile* on my laptop. With the volume and picture maximized and armed with the word for word script of the film (which I had carefully hole-punched and placed into a red binder), I played along, picked out my favorite characters and recited their parts with them. I felt like I was right there in the classroom with Watson. I was Watson. I performed Watson:

Watson and Kate:
Sunflowers. Vincent van Gogh.

*He painted what he felt, not what he saw.
 People didn't understand. To them, it seemed childlike and crude.
 It took years for them to recognize his actual technique...
 ...to see the way his brush strokes seemed to make the night sky move.
 Yet, he never sold a painting in his lifetime.
 This is his self-portrait.
 There's no camouflage, no romance.
 Honesty.
 Now, years later, where is he?
 Famous?
 So famous, in fact, that everybody has a reproduction.
 There are post cards...
 We have the calendar.
 With the ability to reproduce art, it is available to the masses.
 No one needs to own a van Gogh original...
 They can paint their own.
 Van Gogh in a box, ladies.
 The newest form of mass-distributed art: Paint by numbers.
 "Now everyone can be van Gogh. It's so easy. Just follow the simple instructions... and in
 minutes, you're on your way to being an artist."
 Van Gogh by numbers?
 Ironic, isn't it? Look at what we have done to the man... who refused to conform his ideals
 to popular taste.
 Who refused to compromise his integrity.
 We have put him in a tiny box and asked you to copy him.
 So the choice is yours, ladies.
 You can conform to what other people expect or you can...
 Joan and Kate: I know, be ourselves.*

I love the energy and enthusiasm in this part of the film, the ways in which Watson encourages her students to look beyond the borders of what is right in front of them and to question and explore the meaning of cultural reproductions. Yet my reading along is also performative.

In introducing the notion of performativity, Butler suggests that all bodies are gendered and that there is no "natural body" that exists before the body is culturally inscribed. In other words, gender is not something one is, rather, we are always "doing" gender versus "being" gender ("Gender Trouble" 25). In Butler's words: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory

frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (25). Butler's concept of performativity can be helpfully read as extending into other realms of life. In the case above I perform the teacher, I do the teacher, reinscribe its constructedness. We are not born to teach, but through "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame," as Butler puts it, we *do* teaching. Performativity suggests that one is not free to choose one's teacher self, rather one is already framed by the regulated "script" of teaching and learning. In this sense, performativity highlights the instability of the subject and ruptures the possibility of a true and authentic self. To illustrate my points above, my attachment to this particular piece of the script in *Mona Lisa Smile* certainly draws on what are held up to be characteristics of "good" teaching: expertise in subject area, challenging, critical thinking, articulate.

Although teaching and learning scripts that popular culture promotes tend to shape how we might 'perform' the teacher, there is also a felt tension between the scripts of teaching to which we aspire and the felt affects of teaching and learning (recalling Gardner and Kelly 2008, Moore 2004). And perhaps this is why I have always loved going to the movies, entering the dark and quiet space of the theatre, settling into the seat and getting lost in a (idealized and scripted) story, escaping for a few hours.⁹ I saw the 1977 release of George Lucas's *Star Wars* in the movie theater ten times when I was a kid: the story of Luke Skywalker who leaves his home planet to join forces with other rebels as they try to save Princess Leia from the evil clutches of Darth Vader. I formed attachments to the heroic, strong, confident characters in movies. It is interesting to read

⁹ And perhaps this desire to escape is one that is rooted in a disavowal of loss. For as Madelon Sprengnether asserts, "For years, I cried, not over my own losses, but at the movies. When bad things happened to me in real life, I didn't react... Yet in the dark and relative safety of the movie theater, I would weep over fictional tragedies, over someone else's tragedy" (2).

the plot line of *Star Wars* against *Mona Lisa Smile* – remarkably, it is the same story. Skywalker saves Princess Leia from the evil Darth Vader; Watson saves (or at least tries to save) her students from being relegated to a life of 1950s domesticity with no other options. Both films enact a rescue fantasy – of the princess in *Star Wars*; the young women in *Mona Lisa Smile*. I so loved this rescue fantasy since. I wanted to be rescued.¹⁰

The rescue fantasy that popular culture promotes is particularly appealing as it has the potential to send the readers/viewers into a space of freedom from their everyday lives, a form of escapism. Janice Radway has studied the relationship between audiences and texts, specifically, women's reading of romance novels. After studying 42 women in the Mid-west United States, all who were engaged in reading romance novels, Radway says:

Romance reading is a strategy with a double purpose. As an activity, it so engages their attention that it enables them to deny their physical presence in an environment associated with responsibilities that are acutely felt and occasionally experienced as too onerous to bear. Reading, in this sense, connotes a free space where they feel liberated from the need to perform duties that they otherwise willingly accept as their own. (224)

For me, *Mona Lisa Smile* might be seen as a film that provokes an escape from the daily routine and life. But Radway also suggests that the reading of romance novels might be seen as an attempt to identify with the heroine (225). Women, taught to be the good wife and mother, the care taker and the nurturer, are propelled into an (active) fantasy space where they might be free to imagine a different life for themselves, a life that is represented in the romance novel as new, exciting, and full of promises. In this way,

¹⁰ I am both appreciative and troubled by the rescue fantasy that popular culture can promote. Troubled because of foundational logic that inhibits new stories to emerge, and appreciative for an escape from the troubles of youth.

readers of the romance novel can feel love, worthiness and emotional gratification (224-225). Romances, Radway says, take the edge off of the dissatisfaction that some women may feel by providing fulfillment of particular wishes (225). A part of my attachment to *Mona Lisa Smile* is rooted in an identification with the hero, Watson, the hero who represents what is good and right in the world. However, through another nuanced form of identification with the hero teacher who rescues her students, following Radway, I can also vicariously feel worthy of love and attention through fantasies of being loved by students. One possible reading of the film is that it functioned as a text through which I searched for emotional satisfaction via identification with the hero, to experience the care that these hero teachers gave to others.

Popular films that promote particular images of the teacher sustain what Leslie Bloom calls “master scripts.” Master scripts are narratives derived from what Bloom calls “masculinist models and norms” (66) that are circulated as truth claims to identity. For example, during my highschool years I had teachers who I was reminded of throughout the film – the strict and “mean” teacher who governed and slapped students desks with a ruler if we were not paying attention; the geeky teacher who students snickered at for her awkward ways; and the teacher, like Watson, who illuminated particular subjects and students lives and who made meaningful connections with students. The “mean teacher” is a “master script” (following Bloom) that is engrained in daily life. The mean teacher silences, does not see students as human beings but as objects of their knowledge. The master script of the mean teacher, or the good teacher, or the geeky teacher, are, as Teresa de Lauretis suggests, “culturally mandated, internally policed and hegemonically poised; they are difficult to reject” (in Bloom 68) and have a profound impact on the ways that

teachers come to understand the work of teaching and learning.

But from where and how did these "master scripts" emerge? One take, as Roy Fisher, Ann Harris and Christine Jarvis see it, is that "Education is a key site through which a modern state exercises power, acting, among other things, as a mechanism of socialization and control for its young people" (21). We see this represented in popular culture texts that present education as a controlling force where the students fall victim to harsh and unreasonable regimes. Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall," Fisher, Harris and Jarvis suggest, "is perhaps the best-known, classic statement... that education does not provide liberation or broaden the mind, but rather is a form of 'thought control'" (172). There are numerous other examples of popular culture texts that represent schooling as a form of social control. "The Logical Song" by Supertramp suggests to the listener that when one begins the schooling process, the beauty and fun of life disappears, the birds stop singing.

...they send me away to teach me how to be sensible,
Logical, responsible, practical.
And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable,
Clinical, intellectual, cynical.

While some cultural productions portray schooling as social control, others, films like *To Sir with Love* and *Stand and Deliver* present specific isolated classrooms (occupied by loved and heroic teachers) as places where difficult youth get a second chance at leading a fulfilling life. *Mona Lisa Smile* departs from these scripts to the extent that the students in the film are represented as some of the most privileged in the country. They do not need saving. But the themes of liberation and the teacher as hero are vividly present.

In *Mona Lisa Smile* Watson's view of education is that it ought to liberate, but the film is fraught with tensions and contradictions in relation to master scripts, pushing

normative ideals and disrupting them at the same time. The most obvious middle-class ideal that the film supports *and* disrupts is that of the woman as good wife and mother. Joan, a straight-A student who wants to apply to Yale law school at the beginning of the film, decides to get married and have babies instead. And this bodes well for her best friend, Betty Warren, who has the same priorities: "We'll be best friends and our husbands will be best friends. And we'll have houses together, and we'll have babies together." Watson challenges and disrupts such a status quo with her feminist ideals, presenting a message of independence and success. In one particular scene we see the student Betty leaving school for two weeks to go on her honeymoon. When she returns, Watson reminds her that students in her class do not get rewarded for getting married. In this way the film challenges the Wellesley girl's traditional pursuit of the day, as does Betty's failed marriage as the film progresses. Watson, in tossing aside the old curriculum for a set of critical questions for students to think about, disrupts the wide-spread view of learning as a promise of progress, linearity and certainty. Yet, in her eagerness to teach her students about life and choice, Watson shows great disappointment when Joan decides not to go to law school but to accompany her husband to Pennsylvania.

The following scene illustrates a moment in which Watson is invited to confront her own prejudices and the implications of Joan's choices:

Watson: There are seven law schools within 30 minutes of Philadelphia. You can study and get dinner on the table by 5:00.

Joan: It's too late.

Watson: No. Some accept late admissions. I was upset at first... when Tommy told me that he got accepted to Penn, I thought: "Her fate is sealed. How can she throw it all away?" I realized you won't have to. You could bake your cake and eat it too.

Joan: We're married. We eloped over the weekend... It was my choice not to go. He would have supported it.

Watson: But you don't have to choose.

Joan: No, I have to.

Watson: *I just want you to understand that you can do both.*

Joan: *Do you think I'll wake up one day and regret not being a lawyer?*

Watson: *Yes, I'm afraid that you will.*

Joan: *Not as much as I'd regret not having a family, not being there to raise them. I know exactly what I'm doing and it doesn't make me any less smart. This must seem terrible to you.*

Watson: *I didn't say that...*

Joan: *Sure you did. You always do. It was my choice not to go... he would have supported it... You stand in class and tell us to look beyond the image, but you don't. To you, a housewife is someone who sold her soul for a center hall colonial. She has no depth, no intellect, no interests. You're the one who said I could do anything I wanted. This is what I want.*

Watson's liberatory pedagogy is rooted in freedom from the modern expectations of femininity and women. While the film does not portray Watson ever having a chance to ponder her reaction to Joan in any serious manner, it is instructive in terms of the importance of self study. Let me explain.

Like Watson, I too felt disappointed that Joan decided to decline admission to law school. A part of my disappointment might be read as my feeling a demand (an unconscious wish relating to my desire to be loved through identification with the "good" or heroic teacher) to be loyal to the teacher - loyal to my fantasy of the teacher as hero, to Watson and her ideals (and perhaps mine) through the fantasy of the good teacher, the one who enlightens and liberates. As Erica McWilliam says of the teacher, "We like being the heros of the progress story, the enlightened ones who, when confronted by a recalcitrant student, know to reach for the evaluation instrument rather than the dunce's hat" (15). But this loyalty to the teacher disavows the conflicts that provoke the reasons why Joan did not go to law school. Clearly she makes a case for her choice, one which seems to be thought out and clear. In addition, Watson's actions and encouragement were meant to save Joan from a life of vacuum cleaners, dishwashers and diapers. I thought to myself: "Too bad Joan decided not to pursue an education and to find something better

for herself.” Here, I also evoke education as freedom, my fantasy of education’s transformative effects, which is intimately tied up with my attachment to the emblematic ‘teacher as hero.’ For how can the teacher be the hero if education does not transform? In addition, I evoke my own feminist rescue fantasy. This scene evokes several questions then: Who is being liberated in the film? Who is the liberator? Watson’s fixed understanding of liberation is called into question. Perhaps at the core of my disappointment with Joan is that I saw liberation as fixed, not fluid.

What is also at stake in my initial reaction to Joan’s decision is my own feminist rescue fantasy – one that both Watson and myself seem to share. However, a critique of this fantasy reveals the foundation logic inherent. Let me explain. When Joan suggests that she might be open to law school Watson stages what I might call a feminist assault on Joan’s desire to get married and have a family, inundating her with lectures and law school applications. Watson’s behavior stems from feminism’s belief in the promises of shared experience based on sex, and social reform of all kinds (through education, child care, health, reproductive technologies, pay equity, etc). Through such beliefs, feminism hoped to transform women in general to become politically astute and active, equal citizens. But, as Penny Russell suggests,

Such aspirations ring hollow at the turn of another century, ones we must inevitably face with anxiety, if not deep foreboding. The ideals of citizenship, empire, and progress those women lived and breathed, and which were inseparable from their feminism, seem in the twentieth century also inseparable from total war, technologies of mass destruction and environmental degradation. (1)

This does not mean that certain forms of feminism have nothing to offer in response to Russell’s concerns, but that the narrow notion of women’s progress as described and enacted in *Mona Lisa Smile* is inadequate.

For instance, in the film Watson constantly reiterates to the "Wellesley girls" that they can "have it all," a career, a family, and supper on the table by 5pm. But as we have seen in the last 5 decades, many women with successful careers are exhausted and frustrated as they try to raise a family at the same time. Or, some of those who do opt to follow successful careers but do not have children may deeply regret this decision. Incidentally, Watson does not "have it all," and her hopefulness for her students might be read as hopefulness for herself, a hopefulness that she, too, can "have it all." The idea that women can "have it all" is problematic to this day. This favored tale of the feminist rescue fantasy plays itself out in the film in Watson's response to Joan that she was "at first disappointed," presuming Joan to not have been reflective of her decision or, simply to have made the right one. A feminist rescue fantasy of progress and movement forward out of the grips of the patriarchy positions Watson, the feminist teacher, as the one who speaks the truth and renders Joan the submissive housewife who has "sold her soul."

The feminist "you can have it all" mantra might be seen as problematic in as much as it constructs an appreciation for a particular kind of modern woman (as Watson does through her teaching) to the exclusion of others. But there are characters in the film that play with the complexities of this dynamic between old and new, traditional and liberated, and these characters were particularly appealing to me for the same reasons that I (over) identified with Roberts. For instance, the character of Amanda Armstrong pushes the boundaries of tradition by offering a promise of sexual freedom. In her mid-forties, Armstrong is the school nurse at Wellesley. She is positioned as a forward-thinking woman (and for that, like Watson, somewhat of a pariah) whose "companion," a woman, recently died. Although her queerness is obvious in the film – "I should have left

[Wellesley] when Josephine died. There's nothing to love here anymore" – it is not a topic for discussion in 1954 Wellesley. But she is positioned as an outsider, subversive and radical when she becomes the object of one of Betty's searing editorials after word gets around that she has been quietly offering students methods of birth control (another form of "saving" to which I identified) on demand.¹¹ Armstrong is forced to go before Wellesley's "decency committee" and is asked to make a public apology for her actions. She outwardly refuses to apologize and instead packs her things and leaves the school. While her values are in line with women's sexual freedom as evidenced by her dissemination of birth control, she also understands the difficulties and tensions inherent in working with administration, colleagues and students who deeply hold on to the traditional values of the time.

What is significant about Armstrong's character is how her presence (and then absence) and actions enable a more complex rendering of the wonderful character of Giselle (another student), as the following scene exemplifies.

Joan: *This isn't what I think it is. Is it?* [what appears to be a dial pack of birth control pills] *Where'd you get it?*

Giselle: *From the school nurse.*

Betty: *It's against the law.*

Giselle: *Oh, honey. It's a girl's best friend.*

Betty: *A certain kind of girl.*

In this scene Giselle's character is at odds with the 'traditional' Wellesley girl. She is sexually free, wild, and non-conformist, and using birth control is one way that she can be all of these things (although birth control also implies promiscuity, deviance, and the possibility of ruining one's life by getting pregnant at a young age and outside of marriage). Giselle is also 'other' in other ways. She is not a woman of privilege like the

¹¹ The Birth Control Pill is highlighted prematurely in the film. It wasn't until 1960 that the Pill was FDA approved and three years later that it was in wide use by over 1 million women in the USA.

other girls – she is Jewish, a big city girl from New York, and her parents are divorced (seen as shameful by the other Wellesley girls) – which makes her position more complex. Of course, sexually free, wild, and non-conformist were not the ideals of 1950s bourgeois women, as Betty so forcefully suggests. She cannot bear Giselle's uncontrollable sexuality, her breaking out and letting go and takes it out on Armstrong:

Betty: (newspaper editorial) *We recently learned that Amanda Armstrong, our nurse, has been distributing contraception to Wellesley girls. This revelation is disturbing to an institution that prides itself on propriety... By providing contraception on demand, our school nurse is little more than a cheerleader for promiscuity.*

What is evident in Betty's newspaper editorial is the moral regulation that she imposes on those who provide and take contraception. We might also read this scene as offering a glimpse into the ways that contraception was symbolic of freedom for women, a feminist sexual fantasy that freed women and sexually liberated them. In other words, birth control as symbolic of freedom also realized the possibilities for sexual desire/pleasure. Sexual encounters required young women in the film to both enjoy *and* be responsible for the "consequences" of sexual relationships. And in the context of young women investing in a future where pregnancy would throw them off that trajectory, the threat of pregnancy may have negated the ability for women to take much pleasure from sex. The availability of contraception perhaps meant more than control - but opened up, in a sense, the possibility for sexual pleasure. We can see this in the various scenes in the film that depict Giselle's sexual encounters. She has many lovers, she is portrayed as sexually free and liberated, and she uses contraception.

The following two scenes further illustrate Giselle's complex positioning in the film. In the first Giselle wanders into the common room at the school late-morning. The other girls are sitting around listening to Connie talk about the date that she had the night

before:

Connie: And, it was perfect, romantic, we stayed up all night, talking.

Joan: [*to Giselle*] You're late, what happened to Sunday brunch?

Giselle: We stayed up all night, too. Not talking.

Connie: The psychoanalyst again.

Giselle: Divine exhaustion.

In the second, the Wellesley girls are in etiquette class and the teacher is instructing them

on how to put together a last-minute meal for 8 that was supposed to be for 4.

Giselle: [*in reference to the husband in etiquette class*] Whatever you do, don't put the boss's wife next to your husband.

Betty: Why not?

Giselle: She's screwing him.

Clearly, Giselle defies the traditions of the time and her attitude sometimes shocks but mostly always puts her at odds with Betty (as seen above), who views Giselle as a promiscuous, bed-hopping, loose and a morally reprehensible character. But Giselle, who plans on a career as a Freudian analyst, is quite in-tune with her behavior (and others around her, including the boss's wife). While all of the girls seem more interested in nabbing a good husband than achieving scholastic and intellectual growth, including Giselle, her sophisticated view of her own behavior alongside the repressed Betty seems to position Giselle as one who is better able to tolerate the difficulties and disappointments that a feminist promise of freedom and liberation promotes.

The character of Betty, the upper-class and newly married student in her final year of college, also highlights the difficulties of attaching deeply to idealized notions of the world (of women's roles, of the place and use of education, etc), but in Betty's case, "having it all" is not a possibility nor a wish. Unlike Joan, Betty believes that her destiny is to get married and have babies, a "role that she was born to fill." Whereas Joan is positioned as making thoughtful and reflective choices about the trajectory of her life

even if they defy the feminist rescue fantasy that Watson's teachings advance, Betty is an upper-class snob with a domineering mother who resists Watson's "subversive teachings" and feminist ideals. She questions the authority (the hero status?) of the teacher and establishes her own by resisting and undermining Watson's teachings. As the editor of the school newspaper, Betty's editorials lambaste Watson for her ways. In her second editorial Betty writes:

Betty: Wellesley girls who are married have become quite adept at balancing their obligations. One hears such comments, as - I'm able to baste the chicken with one hand and outline the paper with the other. While our mothers were called to workforce for Lady Liberty, it is our duty - nay, obligation to reclaim our place in the home, bearing the children that will carry our traditions into the future. One must pause to consider why Miss Katherine Watson, instructor in the art history department has decided to declare war on the holy sacrament of marriage. Her subversive and political teachings encourage our Wellesley girls to reject the roles they were born to fill.

When Betty returns to school mid-semester, after taking two weeks away, she confronts Watson on a comment she makes about Betty having missed multiple classes while away on her honeymoon:

Betty: Don't disregard our traditions just because you're subversive.

Watson: Don't disrespect this class just because you're married.

Betty: Don't disrespect me just because you're not.

Watson: Come to class, do the work, or I'll fail you.

Betty: If you fail me, there will be consequences.

Watson: Are you threatening me?

Betty: I'm educating you.

Watson: That's my job.

Betty and Watson struggle throughout the film, confronting each others' traditional and not-so-traditional views and beliefs and are remarkably similar characters for it, both investing heavily in right and wrong ways of doing and being.

For example, as Betty's anger escalates due to news of her husband having an affair, and from the pressure that Betty's mother puts on her to 'fix' her already broken

relationship, she has a breakdown that illuminates her new-found respect and admiration for Watson's 'subversive' teachings. In her final editorial, and feeling compelled to defend Watson's decision to leave, Betty writes:

Betty: My teacher, Katherine Watson, lived by her own definition and would not compromise that, not even for Wellesley. I dedicate this, my last editorial, to an extraordinary woman, who lived by example and compelled us all to see the world through new eyes. By the time you read this, she'll be sailing to Europe, where I know she'll find new walls to break down, and new ideas to replace them with. I've heard her called a quitter for leaving and aimless wanderer. But not all who wander are aimless, especially those who seek truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, beyond the image. I'll never forget you.

As the film ends, we see Betty and Joan on bicycles chasing the taxi that Watson is riding in, as she presumably departs for Europe. Betty is dumped by her husband and her mother only to be rescued by the hero teacher at the end of the film. The feminist rescue fantasy is enacted - feminism rescues Betty, Watson saves her.

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, the characters of Betty and Joan illuminate something more about Watson's fantasies of teaching. Both women, in their differences, are meaningful, representative characters and it is important that both see Watson away in the end. While Betty defies Watson's teachings (until she is saved), Joan is more open-minded, and though she is contemplating an engagement with her boyfriend Tommy, she is also considering law school. Betty and Joan highlight Watson's own struggle to sort out her identity as a teacher. Being/becoming a teacher was much more than 'helping' students to learn and proceed with their futures. As Watson pulls away from the school grounds in a taxi, tears streaming down her face, her struggles and successes at Wellesley point to some questions about teaching. What about being a teacher fulfills me or gives me some sense of a piece of my identity? Why do I want to teach and what does it mean to me? If teaching can be thought of as a 'helping profession,' what drives any of us to want to

teach, to help? Let us not kid ourselves here - there is something about being a teacher that is more than helping, as self study illuminates. Teaching is also about trying to resolve, undo, and redo. In part, teaching is about resolving something in the self, it is about a practice of self. And perhaps we can imagine that Watson's leaving Wellesley is her own kind of return, a return to the self where she must then reflect on her own investments in what teaching means to her.

Loss and Mona Lisa Melancholy

Calling into question the self in relation to teaching and learning is a difficult process psychically, but also at the level of the institutionalization of education. As chapter 1 illuminates, schooling disciplines knowledge and subjectivity at both the level of the students, and teachers. In reflecting on her own teacher education in the 1970s, Phelan remarks: "I did not engage in public dialogue about education and educational ends; I did not wonder about authority in teaching or the manner in which schools shape and are shaped by social inequities" ("On Staying Too Close to Home" 2). Instead, Phelan was concerned with what she called "monstrous" boys who acted out upon her arrival to the classroom. She wondered how she would cope as she "learned to ask 'good' questions, manage unruly bodies, and appear competent to my supervisors" (2). Not much has changed since the 1970s. There are higher turnovers of teachers, less time to prepare, more paperwork to follow, and the like. As long as we disavow a turn towards the relationship between normative foundations of teaching and learning and how they constitute the self, they (best practices, standards, etc) will persist and a return to the self in teaching and learning remains impossible. But a return to the self, an acknowledgement and working through of the ways in which the teacher has been

structured in education and, our own psychic investments in the project of teaching, is primarily a project of rethinking, letting go, and redoing.

For me, *Mona Lisa Smile* makes clear the relations between loss (loss of a sense of self, loss of the idealized teacher as helper and savior) and teaching and learning by highlighting the intensity with which we attach to particular stories of teaching and learning, and the ensuing need to let go. To think through the relevance of the loss of my idealizations of teaching and learning in relation to *Mona Lisa Smile*, I work with the concept of melancholia as outlined in Chapter 1. While melancholia signals an engagement with loss and its remains, as Eng and Kazanjian suggest, it also points to a refusal to let go. What is highlighted here is the need for a turning toward the complexities of investment and attachment that structure teaching and learning to create the conditions for ethical relations and critical consciousness. In this next section I examine several of the characters in the film and how they grapple with their own melancholic attachments as a way to further explore my own attachments and desires in teaching and learning and to assert the importance of working through loss.

Mona Lisa Smile is steeped in melancholy. The character of Betty is a stunning example of adherence to the mores of the day and a refusal to think otherwise. She is not alone in this, since her control-freak mother is ever persistent in reminding Betty that she must be up-standing, proper, and stately, and to stray is to align oneself with low-class heathens. When Betty finds out that her new husband is cheating on her she shows up at her mother's house looking for support and comfort. Betty's mother turns her around on the elaborate staircase and tells her to go home and fix her relationship and not to tell anyone of the affair. In another scene in which Watson asks students their first

impressions of a slide of *Carcass* by Soutine, Betty, in the same vein as her mother, suggests that it is not art, that it is grotesque. She says that "There are standards, technique, composition, color, even subject" that constitute what we call art. This adherence to the way things "should be" is emblematic of Betty's character throughout most of the film.

However, near the end of the film Betty has a 'letting go' after nearly two hours (the length of the film) of criticizing and condemning her classmates for their relationships and desires. What prompts many of these outbursts are Betty's difficult relationships with her mother and with her new husband. As suggested, Betty's mother is domineering, snobbish, and cares deeply about social class and doing the right thing, and Betty's husband, who only months into the marriage is having an affair with another woman, is portrayed as absent, with little interest in the relationship. In this scene Giselle arrives back to the dorm late after having been with her newest fling. Betty asks Giselle if the man that she is sleeping with pays her for sex:

Betty: At the rate you're going, you could make a fortune. Everyone thinks so. Do you know what they say? They say you're a whore. Once they've all sampled you, they'll toss you aside like a used rag.

Connie: Betty, stop now.

Betty: The men you love don't want you. Your father doesn't want you... It must be torturous running after a man who doesn't care about you...who's in love with someone else, who hates you. He hates you!

(Giselle walks over to Betty and puts her arms around her.)

Betty: (Betty tries to push Giselle off of her) And it hurts! No! Get off me!

Giselle: Quiet!

Betty: Oh, God. He doesn't want me. He doesn't sleep with me. He...

Giselle: I know.

Giselle reacts with unusual restraint and humanity, perhaps because she can see Betty's tortured and repressed state. Her unexpected tenderness prompts Betty to break down – and break through to a new way of thinking. Betty has a massive letting go, a sudden

realization, a kind of drowning in sorrow as she acknowledges that her husband is cheating on her. Yet it is noteworthy that Betty's realization comes in relation to the character of Gizelle.

As already suggested, Giselle is confident, brave, funny, and she is portrayed as sexual and erotic. She seems to be living her life no matter what kind of heartbreak may come her way. She also shows her pain in being rejected by the Italian professor who she dates for a time and appears to be in love with, demonstrates ambivalence towards proper femininity and is indifferent to the ways that she is seen by her fellow Wellesley girls. In fact, Giselle seems not to be a Wellesley girl at all, and perhaps this is why Giselle takes an immediate liking to Watson. Giselle is full of faults for a Wellesley girl but indicates a knowledge of self that seems more insightful. And perhaps this is why Betty collapses in Giselle's arms. Giselle's encounters with her own losses (of love, proper femininity and sexuality) position her to support Betty – an acknowledgement of her own losses allows her to attend to the losses of others. As such, Giselle evokes in Betty what she must let go of in order to move on: being the good student, having the right kind of art education, proper displays of sexuality, and the expectations of the proper Wellesley girl.

Amidst many of the characters in *Mona Lisa Smile* who are grappling with loss, so too is Watson. Watson is faced with the loss of her love relationship; her worthiness as a teacher called into question by students and the administration in a conformist system, and the loss of the expectation that her students will love her and take up her ways of looking at the world. Like Betty - her initial refusal to open herself to other ways of knowing and understanding herself in relation to others - Watson does the same. In response to Betty's editorial in which she suggests that Watson has declared war on the

sanctity of marriage, Watson delivers a lecture that is not in keeping with her lively presence in the classroom. Projecting slides of 1950s images of women standing by their man in front of their new washer and dryer set, Watson says:

Watson: Today you just listen. What will the future scholars see when they study us? A portrait of women today? There you are, ladies. The perfect likeness of a Wellesley graduate. Magna cum laude, doing exactly what she was trained to do. Slide. A Rhodes scholar. I wonder if she recites Chaucer while she presses her husband's shirts? Slide. Now, you physics majors can calculate the mass and volume...of every meat loaf you make. Slide. A girdle to set you free. What does that mean? What does that mean? What does it mean? I give up. You win. The smartest women in the country. I didn't realize that by demanding excellence...I would be challenging... What did it say? What did it say? "The roles you were born to fill." Is that right? The roles you were born to fill? It's my mistake. Class dismissed.

Watson is telling her students, in no uncertain terms, that in order for them to be worthy of her teachings they must do more than marry and have children. She wants them to hold on to education as she sees it, and if they don't, Watson gives up, literally – "I give up. You win." In this scene there is no room for a consideration of student resistance, nor Watson's own resistance to some of her students' rejection of her teachings. Through Watson's melancholic attachment to her views of teaching and learning – rooted in a modernist notion of transformation and progress - it is possible to see how melancholia gets teachers stuck in their teaching, where they/we refuse to let go of our idealizations.¹² And this melancholic state has consequences in the classroom where our unresolved fantasies of what we want for ourselves get transferred to our students, for our expectations of them are not about what we want for them, but what we think we want for ourselves.

Like Watson, the character of Bill Dunbar is an interesting example of the ways

¹² While Watson's teachings (in the end) enable Betty to let go and to move on, as Watson does herself, it is evident at particular points in the film that Watson's refusal to examine her own investments in teaching and the future of her students (what she wants for them), renders her stuck.

that we attach to and tell stories about our lives that we think are the “right” kinds of stories – fantasies of who we want to be and how we want to be seen. A handsome and charming man in his late 30s, the Italian professor at Wellesley sleeps with his students and has a long-term affair with Giselle. However, Dunbar is attracted to Watson and after some time they begin a relationship. Dunbar speaks often (to Watson and his own students) of his experiences fighting in Italy during the war. However, later in the film we learn that he never left the USA during the war and had never been to Europe. When Watson learns of this lie she breaks up with him permanently. Combined with his overly charming self, his sexual escapades with students and tearing around campus in his Alpha Romeo, perhaps his war fantasy is propelled by a need to masculinize himself in the all-girl surroundings of Wellesley. Further, like the heroic teacher, in Dunbar’s war fantasy there is a focus on the individual who returns, saves and liberates. How does one save and liberate from an office chair during the war? The story of combat fighting in Europe is certainly a more heroic story, and it would certainly appeal to his students at Wellseley who are in training to occupy “the roles they were born to fill.” Dunbar’s continual retelling of a war fantasy to students and colleagues likely signals that he is not sure who he is without this heroic story, a melancholic attachment to an idealized version of the self.

Further, we might read Watson’s reaction to Dunbar’s lie – breaking up with him – as an attachment to an idealized version of a new relationship filled with transparency, and perhaps a perceived trust in who the other “really” is. I am not suggesting that lying is a good thing, of course. None of us want to be lied to, but it sometimes happens (and sometimes we lie). What I am trying to index here is the need to work through such difficulties by also considering the other and the other’s struggles and

intentions. For Watson, Dunbar lied and she gave up by breaking up with him – a rather categorical response that, for me, feels similar to the way that she gave up on her students (and herself?). And, Dunbar's response to Watson in the following scene gestures to her array of unexamined attachments. After Dunbar lies to Watson about a past job, she asks why he could not have been honest. He says:

Bill: *You don't make it easy. You're so perfect, you... It's impossible to be honest with you.*

Watson: *For you, it is.*

Bill: *Well, it's not just me, Katherine. Joan failed you too, right?*

Watson: *That's an awful thing to say.*

Bill: *I know, but it's the truth. If you want honesty, I can be real honest. You didn't come to Wellesley to help people find their way. I think you came to help people find your way.*

Dunbar's comments to Watson trouble the image of the perfect teacher and highlight the demands that she places on her students, and her own melancholic character. While Watson is eager to be accepted at Wellesley, she is also unable to work through her idealism in relation to teaching and learning. She counsels students to resist the status quo, to think for themselves, yet she attempts to shape them in ways that reflect her own values and ideas about the world. But perhaps the final scene of the film where Watson pulls away in a taxi is telling in terms of her own recognition that she cannot mold her students in her own image, rather her students must carry on at their own speed and on their own chosen paths.

Considering melancholic attachments, there is something intriguing about Watson's affection for art history. What is the draw to the archival work of art historians? The work is to dig through fragments of the past, to forever search for the missing pieces of an irresolvable past. Michael Holly speculates on the way art historical writing in general is derived from a melancholic attachment to the past through its attempt to enliven historical images. She asks: "Writing about the distant past. Recycling images

from a time long gone, putting them 'on display' yet again. Why do art historians do it? What kinds of intellectual and psychic needs does it satisfy" ("Patterns in the Shadows" 1)? Those of us who write and think about the past might be seen as clinging to the hope that we can recuperate and make meaning out of what has already been lost. And yet, as Freud saw it, one of the characteristics of the melancholic is that he cannot "see clearly what has been lost" (Freud 254).

Holly remarks that the practice of art history is an "essentially sentimental occupation," a quest for lost origins that is steeped in melancholic attachments. Art history as a discipline depends on meaning having disappeared. As Holly remarks:

Something has gotten lost, someone has gone missing, a visual clue remains unseen... the quest for clarity within the shadowy realms of origins, meanings and contexts has long been of compulsive importance. But when all is said and done, when all the loose ends of the story are tied up, something inevitably appears to be left over... The compelling visuality of the work of art resists appropriation by either the cleverness of historical explanations or the eloquence of descriptive language. Something remains; something gets left over... the discipline is constitutionally fated to suffer from a quiet melancholic malaise. The distance between present and past, the gap between words and images, can never be closed. In Freud's phrase, it is melancholy, or unresolved mourning, that keeps the wound open. ("Compelling Visuality" 159)

In this way the project of art history does not help us to let go of the past, rather, such archival work allows us to hold on to an ideal, where the meanings of objects of art history stay static and resist re-interpretation. And in this regard, melancholy is what Holly calls "the constant companion of the historian" ("Patterns in the Shadows" 2). She goes on: "An historical work will always elude the traps of contemporary points of view. That recognition is as much a cause for celebration as it is consolation. If meaning is the ultimate loss, then new meanings must be made" (2-3). And this latter point is of great importance for re-thinking one's own investments and desires in teaching and learning,

that new meanings can and must be made from what remains.

If melancholy is a pursuit of the retrieval and re-animation of meaning forever lost, what are the implications of the title of the film *Mona Lisa Smile*? What is the Mona Lisa smiling about, if she is smiling at all? Many art historians have tried to interpret and explain the possible smile. Giorgio Vasari suggested that the smile was a solution to Leonardo's struggle to define a style in portraiture (in Filipczak 67). Walter Pater wondered whether the artist's intention was to "manifest a femme fatale mentality by creating 'a touch of something sinister'" (in Filipczak 68). For Freud, Mona Lisa's smile as Filipczak suggests, "symbolized the smile that the illegitimate Leonardo remembered on the face of his own birth mother, whom he lost by being raised within his father's household" (68). And for Kurt Eissler, the smile signaled a "fleeting smile on the face of the melancholy Mona Lisa, whose daughter had died five years earlier. By keeping a smile permanently on her face, Leonardo symbolically returned a smile to the face of the mother he himself had lost" (Filipczak 70). Perhaps Leonardo's melancholic state is signaled by the very need and desire to paint a subtle smile on the Mona Lisa, forever animating the presence of his lost mother.

Undoubtedly, Leonardo's Mona Lisa is most famous for her smile, and art historians have offered multiple ways of understanding and searching for meaning in this smile - but it is not what it appears to be. At once mysterious, inviting, and subtle, "original" (if there ever was) meaning cannot be recuperated. And the inexplicable which is the Mona Lisa and her smile is reminiscent of the irrecoverable character of meaning (lost forever) that is melancholy. Similarly, the characters in *Mona Lisa Smile* are not who they appear to be on the outside. Betty says as much when she suggests to her

mother that her relationship with her husband is over: "Mother, nothing is as it seems." Loss of meaning is embedded here. If meaning is lost then we are faced with the task of living in relation to the uncertainty that melancholy animates, and this place of uncertainty can be the accelerant for re-doing and making new meaning of investments and desires in teaching and learning.

My Own Holding On and Letting Go

Watson's melancholic character, her refusal to let go of what has been lost, is evidenced in the film in various ways (as has been mentioned). The film is full of holding ons - Watson's expectation that Joan will apply to law school, that her students will accept her teachings wholesale; Dunbar's war hero fantasy; Betty's refusal to acknowledge the difficulties of the construct of the proper Wellesley girl and the betrayal by her husband. *Mona Lisa Smile* can be read as a film about attachment and loss. What I learned from a reading of my relationship to *Mona Lisa Smile* are the ways that popular culture texts not only reinforce, but shape our views and beliefs about teaching and learning. My identification with Watson – the beautiful, independent, smart teacher – is tied up on a number of levels and has influenced my own perceptions of the work of teaching and learning. Teaching meant offering students particular kinds of knowledge that I was attached to with high expectations that students would take what I offer and be transformed by it. The film highlights that when students learn what we want them to learn, we are reinforced and seen. But, like Watson, my attachments to understanding teaching in this way forecloses the possibility of asking questions about student choice and direction. In addition, such a narcissistic understanding of the self in teaching and learning has the potential to close off the possibilities for more open and attentive

teacher-student relations. Watson highlights this point when she says: "I give up. You win."

In chapter 3, I discussed my coming to teaching and what partially constituted this desire. My unconscious story of coming to teaching includes feelings of melancholy - emptiness, absence and invisibility - and a longing for something I did not know how to recognize or ask for: love. When I was in grade 5, I remember going home for lunch (our family home was a 10 minute walk from school), and just before returning to school, stealing change from my father's desk drawer. On my way back to school I took that change and went to the variety store and bought penny candy. I knew my classmates loved candy and that they would like me if I gave them that candy. Sure enough, my perception was that it worked. This story re-appears for me from time to time, albeit in different formations. And it certainly re-appeared in my teaching. That is, through teaching I could feel visible and loved. Perhaps this is the strongest connection I can make between myself and Watson, watching her character refuse to explore her own desires and the ensuing breakdown suggests the importance of such work. For it is the case that without a working through of these psychic conflicts, one remains attached to old and "disappointed versions of the self."

Further, through an analytic reading of *Mona Lisa Smile*, what has become clear to me are the unconscious connections that I have made between my beloved teachers - my religion teacher, for example - and the identifications that I have made with the characters in the film. My religion teacher (as I have gestured to) was a nun. Larger than life, caring, wonderful, musical, smart - she was all of these things without a man. Both of Watson's relationships in the film end in disaster and she goes off on her own. In all of

her uncontrollable sexuality, Giselle might be read as a temptress, even though she falls in love with the Italian professor. I am not sure that manlessness has anything at all to do with why I connect with and identify with these characters. Perhaps it is more so that like my religion teacher, they were independent, seemingly strong, larger than life, and for me, easy to attach to given my own desire to be all of these things? And this is the problematic that I wish to highlight. When we attach to foundations (as promoted through films like *Mona Lisa Smile*) that inform and sustain our fantasies of teaching and learning without question, those attachments do little to allow for other kinds of understandings and possibilities in teaching and learning. It should be said, though, that what differentiates these characters from my religion teacher is that my religion teacher “saw” me. My connection to her was not a fantasy but a lived, felt, warm, and valuable connection that I carry with me in terms of how I teach.

Conclusion

As I end this chapter I want to reassert that it is facing loss that enables us to let go of our dearly held ideals about teaching and learning – loss of a transformative feminist education, loss of the idea that we can “have it all,” that we can be rescued by feminism, loss of the idea that we can be saved by others or that we can save our students. What can be gained from confronting loss? The title of this thesis, “Learning to Love Again”: Loss, Self Study, Pedagogy and Women’s Studies, is inspired by the possibility that Brown activates in the excerpt below:

So that there might be democratic futures, we might have to give up the attachment to one set of meanings or one set of definitions of democratic futures and become open to others. That probably means being willing to suffer an even more radical disorientation than many of us already suffer, an even more radical vertigo than some of us are suffering now. (Brown et al 41).

What we need now, Brown suggests, is an openness to possibility, an openness to seeing the world differently, seeing the future differently, which will involve a daring and uncertain openness. "I think that the only way out of that kind of melancholy and that kind of despair is not by darting towards yet another answer but by opening up to a different reading of the present, a different reading of our attachments and possibilities" (Brown et al 41).

Recalling Freud, where mourning is a finite process wherein the ego becomes free again, melancholia, a theory of unresolved grief, signals a stuck place where the ego, as Karen Engle suggests, "feeds on loss, and desires nothing other than to incorporate this [lost] object into itself" (61). In the context of teaching, while melancholic attachment to foundations of teaching and learning (for example, the teacher as hero) offer historical continuity and certainty, such attachments prevent and foreclose new understandings to emerge. Perhaps Watson's departure from Wellesley signals a reckoning with, and a letting in of her own attachments and investments in her students and what it means to teach. This unsettling transformation that Brown alludes to is made possible when one is open to facing one's own investments, fantasies and desires, whether in relation to left politics as Brown refers, or, in my own case, attachments to teaching and learning. That is, an interrogation of knowledge-making practices, a reckoning with our attachments to knowledges, and an engagement with the felt effects of loosing hold open the possibilities for more just and democratic futures.

In this chapter I have argued for the importance of an interrogation of knowledge making practices and the ways in which notions of teaching and learning are constituted, in part, by and through popular cultural discourses. Further, and guided by the work of

others, I have suggested that the process that enables us to let go of ideals that structure our understandings of teaching and learning is an engagement with loss. In the following chapter I work with the 2004 publication *Troubling Women's Studies: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities* by Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann, and Sharon Rosenberg. As I have outlined in chapter 1, there is a wide-spread dis-ease regarding foundations in women's studies, however the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which much of women's studies sits are increasingly destabilized and remade to attend to more probing questions about epistemology, the making of subjects, teaching and learning, and loss and mourning. *Troubling Women's Studies* responds to the current 'troubles' in women's studies by articulating some new ways of imagining how the field might get "passed on" to an upcoming generation of practitioners and students through questioning some of the theoretical foundations – epistemology, identity, and pedagogy – that structure the field. Broadly, the authors argue for the need to face the losses that accompany faltering foundations and truth narratives that have so compellingly structured the field of women's studies for over three decades.

Chapter 5

Troubling Women's Studies: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities

... such anxieties and losses cannot be ignored, glossed over or wished away. What comes from facing such losses is not defined... but remains open, complicated and situated for all of us. (Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann, Rosenberg 14-15)

Introduction

Like *Mona Lisa Smile*, my reading of *Troubling Women's Studies* is another mode through which to ask questions about foundationalism, attachment and loss. Both are particularly interesting texts for me because I have had strong attachments to both and have had to (and continue to) work through those attachments and what they flag for me in relation to my own teacher identity. In this chapter I focus specifically on the first 3 essays in *Troubling Women's Studies* by Braithwaite, Heald and Luhmann. A discussion of the fourth essay by Rosenberg will be taken up in the epilogue where its pertinence will be shown. I have chosen to privilege *Troubling Women's Studies* in this chapter for several reasons. First, given the difficulties that face women's studies in this historical moment, the book highlights the need for continued interrogation of and grappling with the effects of foundational logic. Specifically, Braithwaite analyzes autobiographical accounts, what she calls "origin stories," that have laid the bedrock of women's studies in Canada. She calls for a "doubling-back," a reflexive and analytic critique of these origin stories and what they tell us about women's studies now. Without such doubling back, she suggests, there is risk of foreclosing on all of the complexity and multiplicity of/in the discipline. Likewise, critiquing individualism and power relations that often characterize learning in the university setting, Heald calls for the use of autobiography and reflexivity as a way for women's studies to "interrupt" the creation of the liberal-humanist subject

that gets produced when one definitive and fixed history of women's studies is "passed on." There is nothing about autobiography that necessarily interrupts the liberal-humanist subject, but when a critique of knowledge-making practices and pedagogy is enacted through autobiography, our attachments and investments in ways of knowing and teaching become more clear and set the stage for the possibility of ambivalent relations. In this light, Luhmann's essay explores the ambivalent attachments that many teachers and students have to women's studies. She suggests that ambivalence is a way out of a melancholic attachment to a singular and fixed history of women's studies insofar as it can tolerate both "love" for the field and continuous critique.

While a more detailed account of the contents of *Troubling Women's Studies* is offered below, I realized the further importance of this book when, in 2006, a colleague and I used it in its entirety with students in a feminist theory graduate seminar. In addition to offering here some of the substance of the book and what it helps me think through, intertwined are students reactions to *Troubling Women's Studies*. These reactions help me to illuminate my engagement with *Troubling Women's Studies* and what it brings to my teaching as my students and I negotiate the losses that have so disrupted certainty in women's studies. As such, my rationale for making the book central is that when students study *Troubling Women's Studies*, they often confront their expectations of a discipline which has perhaps been idealized by them through their experiences of having had to "know" it in certain ways, and having succeeded at these ways of "knowing." In the process of questioning what they believe to be knowledge, and why, they come to realize that the ideals they have attributed to women's studies – transformation, unity, and sisterhood – are just that, abstractions by which women's

studies defines goals and values. And recognizing not only the power, but also the limitations, of such abstractions can be a loss.

In my experience, however, *Troubling Women's Studies* creates a context for mourning losses of many kinds, and, as I have been proposing throughout this thesis, facing attachment to foundations and acknowledging loss can provide the grounds on which teachers and students remake relations with self and others. When the authors of *Troubling Women's Studies* offer the book as potentially “a discourse for rethinking... social justice” (Braithwaite et al 1), I agree. Using the book with graduate students, in my experience, opens up a conversation, often suppressed in the academy, about loss: how we live with it and talk about it; it provides a critique of knowledge-making practices in women's studies that have become normative; and, especially, it adds content to our understandings of how subjects are made. Women's studies as I conceive it needs to continually revisit its foundational assumptions and make these practices integral to its pedagogies.

Context for Using *Troubling Women's Studies*: Pasts, Presents and Possibilities

Education was never meant to be efficient. It was meant to be difficult, interesting, pleasurable, errant, prodigal in every respect, transgressive, personal, lengthy, demanding, and hospitable—but not efficient. (Solway 5).

In the winter semester of 2006, a colleague and I presented a Master of Women's Studies graduate class in feminist theory with *Troubling Women's Studies*. Students were required to purchase the book at the beginning of the semester and to read it within the first 6 weeks of the course. In the 7th week we conducted a 3-hour seminar in which students presented their responses to the book in written and/or other representational forms. Some wrote academic papers; some included collage, journal entries, video, or

poetry. The reading project was designed to provide students with an opportunity to explore issues of representation, identity, politics, and belonging in women's studies. While students read *Troubling Women's Studies* during the first half of the semester, they were also reading weekly writings that covered themes in feminist cultural studies by authors that are engaged in the project of calling into question ways of knowing and identity categories (e.g. Butler 2004b, Cvetkovick 2003; Radway 1991, Kiss & Tell 1994). This deliberate syllabus structure was meant to offer students some guiding writings by those in feminist thought who led/lead the way in terms of offering critiques of essentialism, knowledge production and subjectivity.

By the third week in the semester my colleague and I began to ask students how their reading of *Troubling Women's Studies* was coming along and how they were experiencing the book thus far. This question was meant to check in with students around their preparation for our week 7 collective exchange, and to hear how they were experiencing the ideas presented. On several occasions responses ranged from "I find it boring," and "I feel like the authors are waving their fingers at me, telling me what to think and what kinds of pedagogies are the 'right' kinds of pedagogies," to "I wish I had read this sooner" and "I really like the ideas that the authors are presenting." These initial comments, particularly the former two, offered some initial insight into what the book brought forward and what resurged for some students in the course of reading – a challenge to authoritative ways of thinking about epistemology, subjectivity and pedagogy. For each student, their own history of learning is at work, reanimating and affecting their responses, responses that are conditioned by each student's history of ways of knowing in women's studies.

A Critique of Knowledge-making Practices

In *Troubling Women's Studies* one major concern that unites the four authors is their worry over how the multiple narratives of women's studies are "currently being written out in a number of feminist theorizings, pedagogies and practices, in favor of singular stories and set meanings" (29). Their aim in *Troubling Women's Studies* is not to produce another singular story of the field; rather, "each of our essays takes as its starting point the understanding that there are many Women's Studies and that attending to how a multiplicity of identities and positionalities continually redefines this project called Women's Studies is one of the strengths of the field" (29). In relation to the question of received tradition, the authors are more concerned with critique than with tradition.

But this troubling poses difficulties for teaching and learning, particularly for students who are in the process of imagining "the field" and find its plurality a challenge - that there is more than one linear and stable way of understanding feminisms and women's studies. Many students find the prospect of multiplicity difficult. One initial response to *Troubling Women's Studies* was: "I don't understand why we have to read this book and pick apart women's studies like this. What's the point? If we are trying to be a legitimate discipline in the Arts then we should behave like one." Of course, the implication is that to belong women's studies and most other arts-based disciplines must present a coherent and unified front to the powers that be. The structure of the university demands it.

Troubling Women's Studies argues an epistemological 'crisis' but also proposes that we analyze its terms and identify its tensions. The authors point out that feminist epistemology is inscribed and sustained by the stories told about the field. How women's

studies has historically been thought and talked about has created the very foundation upon which it sits. Braithwaite locates certain struggles at the centre, focusing on women's autobiography and memoir by exploring the ways that some of these writings reproduce troubling narratives of "the women's movement" and women's studies alike (sisterhood, experience, etc). Braithwaite questions some of the narratives concerning 'where we've been' and 'where we're going,' specifically stories that

set up fixed definitions or meanings: of linear connections between "the women's movement" (which remains largely unexamined as a signifier or referent) and Women's Studies; around relationships between "the"... past/present/future; about "origins" and "origin stories" of and for the present; about ties between the politics of the women's movement... and contemporary Women's Studies. (35)

In the same way, Vivian Namaste draws attention to the narrative method as a determinant of what can be said and is said: "the histories we write are crucial: how we tell a particular story shapes our understanding of the issue. The writing of our history forms our consciousness, and determines the forms of political action in which we engage" (Namaste x). However, it is to the future that Braithwaite directs us, proposing that what is passed on is a retheorizing of what has been argued until now. What is needed is attention to the ways that these writings function, "... how these accounts are accountable, that is, how they both reflect and deflect on not only conceptualizations of feminisms now but also conceivable futures for feminisms and Women's Studies" (102).

Braithwaite identifies some of the struggles that are at the center of the perceived failure of contemporary women's studies. They include questions pertaining to disciplinarity, seemingly stable foundational terms such as sisterhood, experience, activism, empowerment, conflicts over waves of feminism, and the definition and stability of the term 'women' (103-104). One of the things that these struggles point to is

that there is a desire to entrench understandings of women's studies and feminism based in the past and carried linearly into the future. Some reasons for this? Origin stories provide stability, comfort, a guarantee of identity, historical continuity, and a guarantee of belonging. Braithwaite's paper proposes some thoughts on thinking outside of these struggles by interrogating the state of women's studies through her adoption of Ahmed's notion of a "double project" of feminist theorizing to think about the past and present, and the passing on of women's studies.

The project of doubling back ""consists of the non-stop "task of thinking and disputing the very categories with which we seek to contest the categories that are dominant in the worlds we inhabit,... thinking the complexity of 'where' 'we' are, and what we might seek to become"" (in *Troubling Women's Studies* 97). At the core of the doubling back project - constant critical reflection - is the idea that what is being reflected upon is also being passed on. In this regard, and through this doubling back project, "Feminist theorizing will always operate in a double register: it will both contest other ways of understanding the world... as it will contest itself, as a way of interpreting the world" (Ahmed in Braithwaite 97-98). The same stories will continue to perpetuate and disallow new stories to emerge.

Braithwaite goes on to disrupt the notion of origin stories with this: "there have always been multiple narratives and definitions, and that feminism and Women's Studies have always come from many different quarters, with resulting - and often conflicting - issues, approaches and proposed solutions" (99). With this multiplicity in mind, she contends that a commitment to the project of doubling back and getting curious about why certain kinds of stories are told

is obviously not a guarantee of noting all the potential consequences of the narratives being constructed. But an insistence on realizing that self-awareness must be a central part of all feminist theorizings – because that work also produces the field's identity – is at least an attempt to make "us" aware of "our" many (kinds of) investments in those narratives. (108-109)

My own research likewise seeks to identify investments in particular understandings or knowledges which can elide others.

In my investigation of teaching through self study, I aim to double back and reflect on my own history, my subject formation as a feminist teacher. By doing so, I can interrupt and dismantle foundational thinking and "pass on" terms which encourage complicating the debate and expanding its scope - a more nuanced set of terms in which to think through cemented perceptions and idealizations of feminism. However, this is not a seamless task. Early on in the semester when one of the students in our graduate class said that she felt bored by *Troubling Women's Studies*, I went away from class feeling frustrated and, frankly, angry. My first thought was – "How can you not like this book?" And, "Where, in grad school, do you get the idea that like/dislike comments constitute critical engagement with a text" (even though we do ask our students to engage personally and informally as well as analytically)? My own attachment to *Troubling Women's Studies* is evidenced in my response: holding the response "how can you not like this book?" stands to perpetuate a passing on of a particular set of ideas and values that I hold, some dearly, as I continue to unpack my own responses to student comments. By doing so, I am encouraging new questions for myself. For example, I ask: "Why, Kate, such a strong response to this student?" Because the book represents a set of ideas (the "right" ideas?) that I hold dear, that I identify with and am attached to. My response indexes the depth of this attachment. Yet, not questioning my responses and attachments,

Braithwaite argues, is to pass on a privileged and singular account of women's studies, "thus solidifying a particular identity of the field's... future" (109). In this regard, one insight highlighted by self study/doubling back is one's own investments in, and attachments to, the project of education. The teacher that refuses to analyze and reflect upon her own epistemological origins runs the risk of perpetuating her own dominance by asserting the naturalness of the positions she takes in discussion, erasing whatever does not fit and re-imposing the same.

In our collective reading project of *Troubling Women's Studies* I noticed some resistance to the idea of pulling apart and re-theorizing some of the terms that Braithwaite highlights above. For example, the notion of sisterhood has been deconstructed and dismantled by practitioners in women's studies and in feminism for some time, yet the term continues to animate - even if on a subtle register - the field in ways that are troubling. In a conversation about the importance of pay equity for women, one student said that she felt that feminism had "let go of the struggle" for pay equity, that feminists were no longer concerned with such an issue. She found this particularly troubling, likely because her own work was heading in that direction, she was attached, and thus deeply interested in reinvigorating the debate at the social service and governmental level to see women gain equal wages to their male counterparts. By suggesting that feminism had "let go of the struggle" for pay equity, this student not only made her attachments to feminist politics clear, but also alluded to the fact that "we" as feminists should all be concerned and involved in the fight for pay equity. The implication is that we are all, as sisters in the fight, impacted by this, and we ought all to be concerned and active in this particular struggle. Similarly, there was also desire to pin down and settle the meaning of activism.

I remember a conversation between myself and another student about rethinking activism in women's studies. For her, activism was about being on the front lines, "doing the hard work on the ground." When I asked her if she thought that *Troubling Women's Studies* could function to activate change, she mused about the privilege that she felt she had as a graduate student in women's studies – where she could read books and think and write, versus having to "slug it on the streets for women." Further, she seemed to feel some remorse for not being as active in the feminist movement while she has been studying. Perhaps if we had taken the conversation further we may have come to something else, more in-depth theorization about activism and what it does and does not constitute, but I replay this conversation as a way to highlight the very present dichotomization of terms like activism that do little more than cement them in a constant either/or meaning. *Troubling Women's Studies* certainly did provoke some serious questioning about stable definitions and fixed narratives in the field, and it also confirmed for one student some of her worries about the field.

One student response highlights Braithwaite's assertion that singular stories and set meanings function to divide and exclude. For this student, the book addressed not only some of the difficult issues that women studies is currently facing as a discipline (as Braithwaite has outlined above), but also for any graduate student or academic working from any discipline and using feminism as a guiding critique for their work. Recounting a story about whether to apply to graduate studies in history or in women's studies, she said:

The book confirmed for me what I already suspected about Women's Studies. I chose not to apply to the Women's Studies program for reasons explored within the book that drew upon some of my fears of Women's Studies as a discipline. As a feminist historian I want to use feminism as a critique of knowledge production

and identity generally. And I worry that I may not be able to do broad feminist research in women's studies if it is not "woman" centered. One of my friends is in women's studies and she is having this problem right now. They say her work is not "feminist" enough, and I don't really understand what this means. Maybe it's not "women's studies" enough?

This student points to the perceived rigid terms of membership in women's studies, what she sees as a resistance to doubling back and critiquing the foundations upon which women's studies sits. And this apparent resistance within the academy points again to the paradoxical nature of some women's studies and feminist critique itself. That is, women's studies and feminism was founded on critique yet cannot bear critique of itself. For this student,

women's studies ought to be proud of those new scholars who are calling into question the foundations of feminism. We are able to challenge because early feminist critique helped break open this thinking in the academy. This pressure to present a unified front in women's studies is quite a paradox.

What I want to highlight here are the ways that *Troubling Women's Studies* provoked a recognition of the problems of passing on fixed narratives in the field considering that there have always been many women's studies to draw upon. However, what this student does not consider is that in coming to terms with the losses of women's studies, investments and attachments to the field must be worked through (to which I will speak more later), and this is not an instant nor fluid process, but hard, reoccurring and painful.

A Critique of Pedagogy

Troubling Women's Studies is ground-breaking in the way it connects epistemology and pedagogy. For instance, against the backdrop of the assumptions of the academy, often unexamined, about how knowledge is produced and reproduced, Susan Heald takes up what she calls autobiography as a method to teach for social change. She says: "My principal purpose is to explore what it is about the climate and organization of

universities and the current moment in the dominant society that make difficult the kinds of teaching and learning I think are crucial in women's studies" (51). Her contribution makes clear the troubles "outside" women's studies and highlights what the field is up against in relation to the institutional project of the university. The kinds of autobiographic and pedagogical practices that Heald is promoting seem increasingly difficult to carry out in an environment that puts more value on product than process, where increasing class sizes to manage money is common place, and given the "very different life projects of students and faculty" (47). However, women's studies has long seen autobiographical writing as important since, as Heald suggests, it challenges men's experience as normative, acknowledges the personal as political, and proposes new terms from which to theorize about lives lived (moving away from the university project of "high theory") (45). She teaches students to think autobiographically – to write themselves into their work as a way for them to see "how their own lives are produced in and by broader social forces" (34-35). Heald asks students to consider the formation of the subject in and through the social and the construction of themselves in relation to the other.

Heald's pedagogy and the autobiographical writings she uses to support it "ask students to participate in the broader postmodern project of breaking down binary oppositions that are not external to them, but which work in and through them" (48). She points out that this is an extremely difficult project in an environment (the university) where "the need to prove oneself as an adequate version of the liberal-humanist subject is everywhere taught and reinforced" (49). Heald finds that when students are interested in voyeuristically exploring "the Other, which is prevalent in dominant Western ways of

knowing" (53), she encourages them to look at their own privilege and "the practices of superiority" that accompany them as important and necessary areas for study (54). What she is proposing here is that we rethink epistemological views regarding new theories of learning, that "we read and write autobiography to expose the discourses and contradictions in which we are all entangled, in the hope that together we might create new ones" (66). This reorganizing and making new meaning from normative discourses within women's studies accompanied by an attentiveness to reflexivity and curiosity opens space for new ideas to emerge in relation to the interconnected nature of pedagogy, subjectivity and epistemology.

However, exposing the discourses and contradictions that we are all implicated in can be destabilizing, and the destabilization of the subject is the most difficult for women's studies to bear as is seen in some students responses to Heald's essay. There were some students in the class who questioned the use of autobiography/self study as self indulgent and narcissistic and not within the realm of viable and legitimate research that the university supports. And this highlights the power of the received tradition of teaching and learning and research in the university and in women's studies specifically. As I have already suggested, when some women's studies students are faced with confronting their expectations of the discipline – which has perhaps been idealized by them through their experiences of having had to 'know' it in certain ways, and having succeeded at these ways of 'knowing' - this causes a disruption, perhaps even a crisis in ways of knowing and in the self. Although I do not know the various theoretical backgrounds of all these graduate students, I can speculate that their grounding in feminist theories is not (yet) that which asks complex questions about ways of knowing

and identity formation. All this is to say that a critique of power and knowledge is impossible without consideration of self-investment and points to - again - the paradox of some feminisms and women's studies. In other words, without such questioning, how would feminism have become?

There is another matter of pedagogy for me here as well. If I were introducing self study again to graduate students, I would consider posing questions throughout the course that ask students to think and talk about how they think their identities as feminists and students of women's studies were formed and with what results, what they were rewarded for and taught to value, taught to question. For this is self study in action: looking back to reframe for the future rather than presenting the students as either with me or not. What this suggests, and what Heald illuminates, are some of the obstacles in teaching and learning that women's studies and other disciplines interested in social justice and change, face. She suggests that "rather than 'passing on' a set of truths or a particular version of our history, Women's Studies needs to interrupt instead of reproduce the theory of the liberal-humanist subject in which our students and our universities are embedded and which enable the continuation of various forms of oppression" (83). As such, the question of how we might imagine new and creative responses to a one-dimensional view of teaching and learning is forever present.

A Critique of Identity

The fragility of subjectivity is a constant and intertwined theme in *Troubling Women's Studies*, complexly interwoven with issues of epistemology and pedagogy. In her paper "Trying Times for Women's Studies: Lost Pasts, Ambivalent Presents and Predetermined Futures," Susanne Luhmann writes about the ways in which

autobiography and memoir produce particular kinds of histories about women's studies. As she suggests, "These texts do not just represent the field, they produce it" (36), and they produce subjects of and for the field. Luhmann suggests that "The past is constructed from the perspective of a linear notion of history where the present is understood as an effect of the past, and progress requires that both the present and the future move on from the past" (36). Such a view, a commitment to seeing history as linear requires those involved in women's studies to adhere to the "memoirs of its founders and in institutional histories" (36). The message is that to be the right kind of feminist one must adhere to the rules of the past of women's studies and carry on in relation. Many arts disciplines have had this struggle with "progress" so narrowly defined (especially History itself).

Luhmann points out the importance of looking at one's investments in and attachments to women's studies by way of exploring its struggles: "what is not working any longer, at least for some in the field, are the narratives that functioned before to stabilize the field" (153-154). For instance, women's studies parameters around the category "woman," the relations between women's studies and feminism, and so on. Luhmann draws on Butler here to highlight that "a certain loss emerges when established narratives begin to falter, suggesting that narrative functioned once as a way to contain loss" (in Luhmann 153). What Luhmann asks us to consider is that "these foundations were narratively produced in the first place to manage loss, to contain and to produce certain affects and attachments that practitioners hold in relationship to the field" (154). She reminds that Butler's point is to suggest that loss is not new: "what is new is that the narratives once used to keep at bay feelings of loss and... of unsettlement and

uncertainty, don't work any longer; thus, as these narratives crumble, feelings of loss may make themselves felt with a vengeance" (153). And these feelings of loss can leave both student and teacher in a state of disarray.

In our collective reading project one of the students (the one who, three weeks into the term, said that she felt the book was "boring") engaged *Troubling Women's Studies* on the level of both disciplinarity and personal loss. Upon completing the book this student said that *Troubling Women's Studies* instilled in her a terror, a troubling of foundations that she was used to relying on. Reading the book, she said, was like finding out that someone she cared about was a fraud. She felt shocked by her own emotional attachment to the discipline and wondered what she gained by making women's studies into this living entity, as her reflection illustrates:

Women's studies was not just my program or discipline of choice. No, women's studies was something much more to me. It was a little sister who needed to be protected and a mother which I looked to for guidance. A best friend. Saying that women's studies was unstable was like saying my mother was unstable and I could not handle, nor compute that. I had created women's studies into an entity, almost a person, I could relate to. It was someone/something I could love, I could gain strength from, I could shield from nasty misogynists, something I could call home. How could I rip to shreds women's studies when it saved my life? How could I dismantle women's studies when it was a home, and I didn't have a home?

This student's engagement with *Troubling Women's Studies* was particularly instructive for the ways that her responses shifted from "bored" to "terror" to an openness to questioning her own attachments.

We might say that this student had a melancholic disposition in that melancholia as an internalization of and identification with loss can incite strong resistance in the subject, since one's idealized subjectivity is at stake. What she reveals is the strength and power of our attachments to certainty and a received and traditional way of knowing, all

of these a part of the feminist rescue fantasy that women's studies promotes. And here we might consider the stuckness that unresolved grief (melancholia) can incite when we attach so forcefully. The felt effects of unexamined attachment (resistance) can be unifying, but also can lead to aggression. Aggression, Wendy Brown says, "is what emerges in the space of unmourned losses" (2006 31). Further, the fear of losing coherence and stability stops a deeper reflection of what the struggles are and sends us looking for consistency and stability all over again.

This example highlights the ways that we get invested in and attached to our own idealized versions of what is right and true about feminism and women's studies, and the ensuing need to trouble those attachments, as this student makes clear. And, again, what is so very difficult about these attachments? In the context of women's studies it is a separation from the ideals that we hold dear – transformation, certain kinds of political investment and attachment, security, hopes and visions for the future of the field. Idealizing these visions, hopes, and dreams in women's studies, having cherished beliefs called into question, is particularly difficult and may be felt as personal and collective injury. For this reason, we must struggle to understand who we are in relation to faltering foundations. What Luhmann highlights is that we must see loss as central to women's studies pedagogy. Facing the losses that come with a realization of our investments and attachments to a field - that in many respects shape our identity - becomes central in relation to the 'future' of women's studies.

Upon reflection concerning investment in and attachment to ideals, one student gestured towards the need for women's studies as a discipline to deal with some difficult issues about the identities that underlie its knowledge production:

I guess to finish this organized aspect part of my contribution to the talk I just wanted to say people always seem to strive for a black and white viewpoint of the world. And sadly it is often in areas where we really want to make differences and improve lives we get wrapped up in dogmas that do not allow us to really take a look at history. Oppressed histories are often lost because it is people in power who pass them on. But history can not be erased, and there is only so much remodeling that can be done before we merely find ourselves caught up in binds that we are told not to undo for fear of causing major collapse. What I took from this book was the encouragement to try and free myself from these binds. To challenge is not to abandon. It's an attempt to further understand. It's also about learning from our mistakes rather than shamefully hiding from them. As a feminist researcher I feel the need to come to terms with "The Mothers" of Women's Studies as a discipline just as a historian I have to come to terms with "The Great White Men" who helped shape the writing and study of history. I just sometimes wish these labels did not exist at all.

This student highlights what is at stake in the normative institutional shaping of disciplines, but, more, points towards the need to let loss orient our questions of investment and attachment in women's studies. And "*learning from our mistakes instead of shamefully hiding from them*" makes clear the need for a kind of vulnerability that is evoked through a recognition of loss that lets us hear and see more than we might when we work from a place of defensiveness and resistance.

Another Reading of Troubling Women's Studies

In September of 2005 the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Bulletin published a review of *Troubling Women's Studies* by Wendy Robbins, the then chair of the CAUT Women's Committee and co-founder of women's studies at the University of New Brunswick. Robbins has an international reputation for her academic and non-academic work and has won the Allan P. Stuart Award for excellence in teaching. She has served as Director of Research at the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in Ottawa, and she co-founded PAR-L, one of the world's first online feminist discussion lists. I present her review here as a "dominant reading," one

which comes from a widely respected scholar in women's studies, and one along with, but positioned differently than, those of the students in terms of her positioning and history in the field.

I share Robbins' enthusiasm in terms of her focus on the roles of origin stories in women's studies and the ways that, left un-troubled, they put at risk the passing on of a fixed and "official" version of the field. Robbins says:

the book's two central essays, by Braithwaite and by Susanne Luhmann, raise significant questions about the roles of "origin stories" in the construction of any field. They contain wise, cautionary words about any one person's or one group's trying to pass off their story as the "official version." The authors rightly ask: "Whose Women's Studies is being called upon or passed on and where?" (30) And they raise the core issue of whether women's studies is the site of the academic investigation of feminism and/or still the academic arm of the women's movement. (3)

No doubt, these are central and important issues that are at the centre of many discussions in women's studies programs and departments across the country today.

While *Troubling Women's Studies* can be read as an invitation to re-think the future of women's studies based on its emancipatory dreams rooted in foundational logic, Robbins sees the book, generally, as a "missed opportunity." She says:

So why am I not saluting *Troubling Women's Studies* as a long overdue and ground-breaking work? Because it reads like a missed opportunity. The collection is a paean to postmodern theorist Judith Butler and to Robyn Wiegman, who offers a "second opinion" after Susan Gubar's harsh diagnosis of what "ails" feminist criticism. Butler's *Gender Trouble* echoes from cover to cover, drowning out other voices, even though the authors insist that "the fixing of singular narratives and truths is a project which needs to be troubled". (28)

Ironically, the possibility that the authors of this Canadian collection themselves may be contributing to a largely made-in-the-USA "grand narrative" about metaphorical matricide and "unmourned attachment to progress" (185) does not seem to "trouble" them. (2)

Robbins' response to the book in this regard offers insight into the ways that many practitioners in the field feel about the disruption of historical continuity in women's studies and the uncertainty that is associated with being called/calling into question the foundations of the field.

Robbins seems to interpret the authors' call to question the passing on of women's studies as a new discourse that will not live alongside the foundational project of women's studies (even if contradictory and intense), but that will win ground and replace it. If this is the case, then perhaps an anti-foundational project of women's studies that the authors are calling for is a new kind of hegemony. However, this illuminating and troubling of particular stories about women's studies does not necessarily shut down or erase the significance of the work of the past (and present), but brings it into view so as to reflect on how we might mourn foundationalism and think differently about subjectivity and knowledge making practices. As Rosenberg points out, what might come out of facing the losses that foundationalism provokes "is a set of terms on which those of us who find the binding relation to women's studies as an inheritance might establish a relation of continuity and discontinuity - both honoring the past and yet not be tied to it as an origin that holds within its grasp the present and future" (210). It seems to me that the key here is attending to the feelings of undone-ness in the face of contested foundations of the field.

Robbins points out that for her, Heald's essay is disappointing because it "justifies an already well established practice in feminist pedagogy — using autobiographical readings and first-person journal assignments" (2). Yet given the scholarship on critical autobiography and self study, and given my own experience in teaching at the

undergraduate level with some of these techniques, autobiographical readings and first-person journal assignments can sometimes reify the self and one's experiences as true and authentic. Recalling Miller, such practices can and do "maintain the status quo and reinscribe already known situations and identities as fixed, immutable... normalized conceptions of what and who are possible" (368). In this regard, it seems that the always evolving, experimental and emerging literature and narratives about the use of such practices in women's studies pedagogy is always quite worthwhile and needed.

Troubling Women's Studies has clearly angered those of the previous 'waves,' including Robbins, and this 'incitement' is part of the book's power. Of the book, Robbins suggests that it is "documented almost exclusively by reference to American authorities, excellent though their credentials may be, who typically know little about Canada" (1). While it surely is the case that Canadian women's studies programs have particular concerns to grapple with that may differ contextually from those in the United States (institutionally, politically, socially, economically), Robbins enforces an us/them binary that does little to elaborate on how "we" might think differently about women's studies. It seems to me that her review manages the emergence of critique and thinking through investments and attachments to the field, demonstrating the very points that the authors are making in *Troubling Women's Studies*. And this is particularly worthwhile because, like some of my students, she seems to resist embracing *Troubling Women's Studies*, and this resistance might stand as (is impetus for) an endorsement of the kinds of "troubling" that the authors are promoting.

Recalling Britzman for a moment: in order for learning to occur "the ordinary must be disrupted" (1998b 54). If learning, as Felman suggests, has to deal not so much

with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge, then what are we to make of those resistances? I read Robbins' comments as resistance in the psychoanalytic sense. Resistance, Pitt argues, "refers to a process of managing psychic conflict" (48), and in this way, our resistances can protect us from having to think otherwise when we cannot. But they also stand to inhibit a working through. Upfront, resistance may be read as a rejection of new knowledge, but "this 'no' conceals a much more ambivalent story of implication in the very knowledge that one is at pains to refuse" (Pitt 48). Another element of the book's power is that *Troubling Women's Studies* articulates the crisis in women's studies and it pushes and advances the arguments, 'provoking' the crisis (in the form of resistance?) at the same time as it articulates the crisis. In this sense, it might be said that the book engages a pedagogy of provocation, a pedagogy explicitly meant to provoke crisis as a form of learning.¹³

The Possibilities of Ambivalence

The poetic place where knowing and not-knowing might touch and the permission to live there, dwell. To live generously with ambivalence. The gentle waltz; to embrace without awkwardness or embarrassment or the clumsiness of certainty that stumbles us blind to the broken lens. (Rasberry 2)

Some practitioners in women's studies continue to tell stories about the field that signal feelings of loss for what "used to be." Robbins' final words in her book review of *Troubling Women's Studies* highlight the feelings of loss, the deeply felt attachments and investments that are held in women's studies, and speaks to the complex power relations between epistemological certitude and the making of subjects. She writes:

So I am not passing on this book, but I am feeling nostalgic for those days — and they aren't over yet — when women's studies was, not just an "intellectual project," but an embodied dream. Let the theorists theorize, and let the revolution

¹³ Thanks to Ursula Kelly for this interesting insight.

continue. Are my "attachments" showing? Where is my knitting? And the demonstration? (Robbins 3)

Luhmann points out that an easy answer to the conflicts within women's studies (that Robbins alludes to) may be to say that they are a result of the troubles in the field, and "In such an assessment, these tensions and troubles would appear to be a symptom of the field's problems" (152). However, another way to read these conflicts and tensions between the field and its practitioners is, Luhmann says, through ambivalence (152).

In psychoanalytic theory ambivalence is characterized by contradictory feelings (love and hate) towards a single object. These incongruent feelings experienced at the same time can feel confusing and bothersome, and can lead one to try to resolve the uncertainty that ambivalence manifests in the self. In a world that largely values truth claims and certainty, feelings of ambivalence can be felt as a somewhat unwelcome guest. But Luhmann illuminates the possibilities of re-orienting ourselves to the productivity of ambivalence.

Psychoanalytic theory suggests that affective ambivalence is an important dynamic in any attachment. If ambivalence is, therefore, the mark of attachment, then we might see ambivalence as a necessary feature of women's studies' ongoing efforts to consolidate and reinvent itself as all academic fields must do across generations. Given the centrality of ambivalence to attachment, I suggest we make this psychic symptom the site of interest, inquiry and productive reflection, both upon the current state of women's studies and its practitioners. My hope here is that an inquiry into the affective bind between practitioners and the field will help us to understand something about our scholarship, our teaching and ourselves. (Luhmann 152)

If ambivalence is a sign that we are repressing particular desires and wants that constitute our attachments, then ambivalence might be seen as the portal into knowing more about ourselves and the ties that bind us to our beloved ideals. Luhmann says that we must see

ambivalence towards women's studies as a possibility for the field, as a necessity in order to revive itself.

As has already been suggested, ambivalence is made possible when we resist the desire to fix and make certain the difficult feelings that ensue from this affective state. For one of the students in our collective reading project, *Troubling Women's Studies* unsettled and provoked a set of questions that she had not thought about before. One of the initial questions that she asked herself in light of the book was: "How did I become feminist?" This question is of particular importance, since what it seems to be asking, more to the point, is – how is it that I can subscribe to a field or set of unified theories that I no longer find myself relating to? She documented her responses to the book in a space that she called "notes from the margins." She writes:

I panicked today when I almost reached the end of the book. My shock occurred while reading in the hospital cafeteria earlier this afternoon. From my notes in the book's margin:

"Reading all this makes me unsure of whether or not I want to continue in the [women's studies] program. What will it mean to have a MWS? Esp. if the program folds? And what if I don't necessarily want to do research focussing on women or gender? I worry that (some) feminist analysis may be flawed and unaware of various differences in society... where am I? AM I A FEMINIST?"

For this student, the disruptions that the book provokes continued as she questioned the relationship between epistemological foundations of the field and envisioning her own future. From the margins:

I'm currently feeling completely lost in Women's Studies, why am I doing this? Do I agree with feminist research methods as I have been taught? Do I feel comfortable working in "feminist" environments? Generally no - ? - as many seem to put categories of woman/gender first above all other social factors, and the preservation of these social categories of difference seems to work to keep organisations in favour with funding/jobs/resources/etc.

First, I can see the despair in students' eyes and in their work in women's studies. It is

totally disheartening. Dangerous, yes. Over and over and over... the same repetition despite conversations about “troubling.” I also struggle with how to talk about these issues in the face of such determined and cemented obedience to these knowledge regimes. But for this student, clearly, *Troubling Women’s Studies* provoked a crisis in learning by bringing to the surface some difficult questions, and highlights her ambivalence towards the project of women’s studies. In questioning whether or not she wants to continue pursuing a graduate degree in the field, she makes clear that she constructs her visions of the self as inextricably intertwined with women’s studies as a discipline. Further, she points to the ongoing struggles that come with the fixing of narratives that women’s studies upholds by wondering whether she is a feminist in relation to the field.

An ambivalent attachment to knowledge production in women’s studies may help us to see anew our relationship to the past and present in the field. For instance, Luhmann says “One of the central accomplishments of academic feminism and women’s studies is the successful struggle for the subject status of women. The field allows women to be subjects of knowledge and knowledge making; this struggle for subject status is central to the process of subject formation” (152). However, as the author points out, there is serious risk involved in terms of the subjection of women created by what counts as knowledge production within the field. Women’s studies’ origin story is based on a particular kind of woman, after all. Luhmann suggests that an ambivalent attachment to the kinds of knowledge that women’s studies (and other disciplines) produce at any moment might help to keep open a desire to place, cement, and categorize.

One of the students in the collective reading project highlights this very point in relation to her home discipline of history by questioning her own propensity for linearity and “origin stories” with this:

Part of me really wants to be a proper historian and start at the beginning and work my way through... historians are always saying that time matters, that the past informs the future. It's what we like to think marks us as historians. Yet we admit that time is more fluid than we like to think, and with the introduction of postmodernism, we understand that the linear structures we love are not so solid as we like to pretend sometimes.

What this student brings to the fore is, at once, the need to critique knowledge production while also noticing her own attachment to the certainty that is guaranteed in not questioning “origin stories” of any discipline.

I take Luhmann's influencing insights with me to my own research in terms of looking at the ways that ambivalence might re-animate, for both student and teacher alike, the practice and felt effects of teaching. Perhaps ambivalence is a way to not get invested in an origin story politic – the teacher as “hero.” Ambivalence towards teaching will require that the teacher reckon with the all-too-familiar feeling of love and hate along side each other, versus one or the other, a version of learning to love again, and again, and again. During our collective reading project I struggled with student reactions to *Troubling Women's Studies*. Whether the comment from one student suggesting that the book was “boring,” or the other, “I feel like the authors are waving their fingers at me [telling me what to think],” I remember interpreting these remarks as ones that said more about my offering (of the book to students) than about student interpretation on their own terms. “How can you not love my beloved book?” I thought. Certainly, a reaction of the sort signals my attachment to the ideas in the book (as I have already said), but also to how I have thought about the project of teaching itself. As I struggle to come to terms

with not only student responses to new knowledges, but also with my own responses to student resistances to knowledge, the latter feels like the most difficult challenge.

Implicit in my thinking was that if students did not like what I was offering them in terms of curriculum, and if they did not love the ideas that I loved, what kind of teacher was I? For me, this question has to do with something about my own expectations of the “good teacher,” the “hero teacher” who will save me, see me. This perception of the teacher as hero was formulated in my psyche at a young age – a fantasy that I constructed, needed, and unconsciously went looking for. I found her in my religion teacher – the one who hugged me, laughed out loud, was larger than life. I found her in watching Watson in *Mona Lisa Smile*, over and over again - an independent, beautiful, artistic woman – also seemingly larger than life. I did not find the hero teacher in my gym teacher, a woman who I perceived as cold, demanding, and who shamed me in front of other students because I could not do a cartwheel in class. I went looking for the hero teacher with very particular qualities – independence, beauty, presence – all things that I felt that I did not have. When I began teaching I wished to be what I went looking for in my teachers (however unconsciously). As I work to understand myself and what my own history of learning brings to my teaching now, an acknowledgement of attachment and working at understanding those attachments sets the stage for the possibility of ambivalence. Perhaps a touch of ambivalence would have helped Watson work through her student’s perceived indifference to her teachings. An ambivalent attachment to my students’ responses to my beloved ideas lets me be a teacher (perhaps sometimes even beloved) that is not crushed by her student’s responses, even if the books and insights I offer students do not get loved.

Ambivalent attachment to the project of teaching must not be seen as a sign that one no longer cares about teaching. Rather, it may serve as a conscious attending to the complexities of the many ways that the self in teaching plays out. Of these complexities, Phelan suggests that

teaching involves figuring out what we desire, deliberating, trying on, trying out and changing one's mind if necessary. Of course, difficulties emerge as we find our desires interrupted, thwarted, even dismissed, in the context of others' desires – students, teachers, professors, institutional policies and cultural prohibitions. (“Melancholia” 1)

As a new professor in a Faculty of Education in Canada, teaching pre-service teachers, Darren Lund writes about a romanticized teacher education that positions students to think that they are about to embark on a career that is wonderfully rewarding if they just “keep their hearts and minds open” (2). Torn between wanting to be an optimist in his teaching, and feeling like he is doing a disservice to his students by “peddling”... beacons of hope in light of current political developments in our institution, the province and nation” (2), Lund asks: “how might I best continue to fulfill my task in this awkward space without much solid reason for hope myself, committed both to meaningful teaching and research, but unable to commit myself fully to either? (2). Ambivalent attachment is one strategy, and as Luhmann suggests, “may be a strategy of preservation, for it allows one to maintain a love for the field and to be critical at the same time” (187). This “critical at the same time” will require that the teacher reckon with the not-so-familiar feeling of love and hate along side each other. “Ambivalence and ambivalent attachments to the knowledge and fields that produce us as subject and give us social meaning, yet also threaten us with subjection, are ways to hold onto desires and keep demands... at bay” (Luhmann 152). When presented with such difficulties in teaching, an ambivalent

attachment to the field allows me to bear the struggles of this work (as Kelly suggests, that struggle is also a state of ambivalence, "The Place of Reparation" 161), to sit in the uncertainty, and to continually unravel what my reactions and responses to difficulties in teaching mean for me.

For me, the complex nature of the feelings of ambivalence is messy and destabilizing. Such feelings knock me from my certainty, my foundations, and provoke unsettled feelings, most evident in my perceptions of myself as a teacher. As Phelan says, when our desires are thwarted, difficulty emerges. But, a willingness to live with ambivalence can contain these difficulties. For me, ambivalence is productive because while I am able to get excited and wrapped up in my teaching, I am also able to pull back when, for instance, students do not learn what I hope they will learn. An ambivalent attachment to teaching and learning means I can hold the tension of love and hate, bear witness to who students are, what informs their thinking and their resistances, while also trying to move them to another place. I can be in two places at once, and ambivalence permits me to understand the ways in which subjectivity is formed and social meaning is conferred on myself and others. An ambivalent relation to women's studies makes me a more careful scholar as I struggle to come to terms with my own feelings about teaching and learning in women's studies. And these struggles are a commitment to learning about myself and about my attachments to teaching. Perhaps this is the reason why I can 'love' women's studies: an ambivalent attachment to the field itself allows me to be critical without abandoning the project. Ambivalence, an affective response rooted in a recognition that something has been lost, whether the idealization of teaching and

learning, or of women's studies, points to the need for letting loss orient pedagogy in women's studies.

The student in our collective reading project who called women's studies her sister, her mother, her best friend: her final submission for her project consisted of a short video. In it she reflected upon her attachment to women's studies as a discipline.

When I dismantle women's studies I dismantle myself. Dismantling women's studies would not allow me concrete theories from which to stand behind or to stand on top of. I would have to look within myself to further understand and problematize... my opinions and my ideas. It's easy to hide behind theory... It's easy to be naked and have something conceal you.

This particular student was changed by a difficult engagement with loss, with facing what it meant for her to attach so completely to a feminist rescue fantasy. And for her, other losses came to the fore, including losses repressed around a recent illness that she had suffered through, and the death of a former lover. She felt that an engagement with her losses in women's studies profoundly revealed the extent to which she was suffering. Mourning (idealization of the field as mother, sister, best friend, along with other losses) gave this student a sense of freedom that she had not felt before. For this student, her reading of *Troubling Women's Studies* and subsequent reflection on the ideas within, initiated a process that she required to begin healing herself. What she makes explicit here is the reparative power of loss, loss as a disruption *and* reconstitution of subjectivity. I can say the same about myself – grappling with feelings of loss in relation to my attachments and idealizations of teaching and learning lets me weave a more compassionately complex narrative of myself as a teacher, a student, a friend, a daughter, and more.

Conclusion

Troubling Women's Studies is authored by women who have led a change away/in a new and different direction from the epistemological 'mothers' who taught them. Their work is evidence of the struggles that they have endured and they use it courageously to move forward rather than retrench. It is influential for the ways that it pushes the reader to think differently about epistemology, pedagogy and subjectivity in women's studies. Reflecting upon the "passing on" of women's studies through teaching and learning, the authors of *Troubling Women's Studies* illuminate the need for an interrogation of the discourses that are being passed on. In company, an interrogation of the self, as I have discussed in chapter 2, is vital to uncovering what drives me to pass on my particular version of women's studies; what it excludes in the passing on; what attachments I maintain in relation to teaching and to women's studies that structure my pedagogy; and, how my pedagogy aligns with and resists normativity. Further, *Troubling Women's Studies* provokes a way to think differently about the uncertainty that accompanies knowing and not knowing in a setting (the university) where a demand for expertise and certainty are highly valued and legitimized thought normative discourses of teaching and learning.

Troubling Women's Studies has animated my teaching through its demand for reflexivity and curiosity in relation to unsettling foundations and paying attention to the difficulties that come with the feelings of loss that are attached to those foundations. Unquestioned attachment to origin stories forces defensiveness when our identities are called into question and our defenses incite anger and aggression, violence and pain. I know these feelings well in relation to the discipline. To understand one's self and the

world around us is an ethical demand for the teacher and the student, and this is what the book has brought to me as a teacher, and why I bring *Troubling Women's Studies* to students – to incite reflection and self understanding of one's *self* and the positions one takes up in the name of coherent identities. *Troubling Women's Studies* pushes and advances its arguments about knowledge production, pedagogy and subjectivity and has the potential to mobilize a crisis or undoing in the self. This latter one is what makes the book a particularly interesting pedagogical text. It 'provokes' the crisis as it also articulates it. The students' responses demonstrate this. Recalling Britzman again, "for there to be learning, there must be a conflict in learning" ("Some Observations" 54): this is one of the transformative effects of the book – that it provokes learning.

Finally, the book frames the importance of attending to losses in women's studies and teaching and learning: the feminist rescue fantasy (sisterhood, empowerment and experience, that feminists can "have it all") and the loss of that ideal; the loss of a particular kind of feminist education; the loss of an idealized version of the teacher. Turning towards these losses signals a realization that such notions can be limiting, but also is the impetus for re-building women's studies, re-building/re-making the field in an attempt to let go, move through the losses, to mourn and then to re-make meaning, and this is what *Troubling Women's Studies* makes possible.

Epilogue

Loss as a Site of Learning

Introduction

... how can writing [and teaching] be used to direct a drama of discovery in which we engage the ghosts of those buried within us. (Salvio, "The Teacher/Scholar as Melancholic" 20).

Education must create the conditions for students to leave their home places, to travel... within themselves, in search of the forces that constitute them, socially, culturally, and emotionally. Only in these ways will students learn to lose: to understand the meanings of loss, vulnerability, and difference, to grasp their conditions, manifestations and possibilities, and, in so doing, to get some glimpse not only of what has been and may be lost, but what may be gained within themselves... (Kelly, "Learning to Lose" 3)

In an attempt to think about teaching for social change, this thesis (following many of the scholars that I have drawn on throughout) has tried to argue for a view of teaching and learning that acknowledges and then transforms experiences of loss into resources for learning. Such a project is inherently about a question of the nature of attachments (to knowledge, power and desire), the very ones operative in my students. As I have highlighted throughout, self study directs and promotes an unearthing of attachments and investments in teaching and learning, and lets us see more in terms of the connections and relationships between all parts of ourselves. The latter is especially important, since, as Dennis Sumara and Terrance Carson suggest, "who one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does...it suggests that what is thought, what is represented, what is acted upon, are all intertwined aspects of lived experience and, as such, cannot be discussed or interpreted separately" (xvii). By engaging in the work of self study, one's sense of oneself - all the intricate ties and threads that compose the tapestry of who we are - can be rethought and new meaning can be made of our

experiences. And a deeper understanding of the self, our own otherness, lays the groundwork for attending to the other in a more profound way than before. This attending comes about when we mourn losses rooted in truth, authenticity, certainty. Salvio asks: "What can we learn from writing [and teaching] out of positions of mourning... particularly in an academy that degrades scholars who admit to vulnerabilities and to sadness" ("The Teacher/Scholar as Melancholic" 19)?

In the final section of this dissertation, I draw on Sharon Rosenberg's final essay from *Troubling Women's Studies*, "At Women's Studies Edge: Thoughts Toward Remembering a Troubled and Troubling Project of the Modern University." I reserved Rosenberg's piece for the epilogue because she explores feminist dilemmas in memorializing the Montreal massacre as a site of learning more about facing loss in women's studies. Specific to my project, and following Rosenberg, I take as central that the experience of loss *is* a site of learning more about the self and one's attachments and investments in the field. As such, I work with her ideas to try and frame what I have learned about teaching and learning, and loss and mourning as a practitioner in the discipline. Specifically, I examine my own biography of attachment to women's studies, my own repeated and difficult reflections on loss that have the potential to diminish ethical relations between self and other. I end the epilogue (and by way of one of my own teaching experiences) by trying to think about what happens when students bring their own experiences of loss to the classroom (both conscious and unconscious), and what can and does happen when teachers and students are placed in "loving relation" (O'Quinn and Garrison) to one another, to learn from, and be open to the multiple experiences that loss has to offer.

“At Women’s Studies Edge: Thoughts towards Remembering a Troubled and Troubling Project of the Modern University”

In chapter 1, I stated that the work of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between teaching and learning and social change through a consideration of the ways that subjectivity and knowledge-making practices are produced through the institutional structures of schooling and practices of teaching and learning. Moreover, I argued that when the truth of what we “know” (in the context of this dissertation, in the discipline of women’s studies) is called into question, we are faced with uncertainty and disruption in terms of our investments in, and attachments to, foundational truths that orient us historically and toward the future. These disruptions can be felt as a loss, and as such, letting loss orient pedagogy is vital in terms of understanding the effects of the modern project of schooling on the making of subjects, normative knowledge-making practices, and the workings of power. But what does it mean to let loss orient pedagogy? In her essay, Rosenberg explores feminist dilemmas in memorializing the Montreal massacre for insight into how losses might be confronted and grappled with in women’s studies.

Rosenberg begins with the idea that women’s studies as a field is especially vulnerable, with its very foundations being called into question. Some of those foundations include cemented understandings of experience, politics, disciplinarity, sisterhood, and “woman.” When the epistemological foundations of women’s studies are called into question, subjectivity itself is made vulnerable when one is faced with encountering one’s own attachments and investments in and to the field. To face such vulnerabilities “is to encounter losses in relationship to past knowledges, present commitments and future visions of women’s studies” (201-202). Rosenberg takes us through how losses have been encountered in feminist memorialization of the Montreal

massacre as a site of learning about facing loss in women's studies. She proposes that for those of us who have the massacre in our living memory and have a relationship to the importance of remembering the events and their consequences, the sharp pain of December 6, 1989 has likely diminished somewhat (220). She draws on the notion of "passing on" to make a relation to traumatic histories (the Montreal massacre) and how such a trauma is remembered and passed on. "From an interest, however, in what is at stake in passing on troubled histories, turning towards how the memory of the massacre is and is not being borne across generations suggests a different story" (Rosenberg 220). Rosenberg senses that for people who were not alive when the massacre happened, the events and their aftermath are regarded more as a matter of history and have little or nothing to do with them (220-221). She illuminates this point by drawing on her experiences in teaching. When she brings up the massacre in the classroom she finds that, for the most part, students "are not sure how the killings matter, now, to and for them - beyond offering some gesture of pity for the women murdered" (221). To understand why the massacre seems not to matter to students now, Rosenberg looks at the ways that it has been publicly remembered, through what she calls emblemization.

Emblemization is the process whereby one specific act/event stands for a range of other acts that are understood to be constituted on similar terms. Elsewhere Rosenberg (with Simon) has written about emblemization in the context of the massacre:

As a family of resemblances, these acts are assumed to share certain characteristics, and the remembrance of one, hence, gestures to the remembrance of all. When one specific event is chosen on the terms of resemblance, it is chosen to function emblematically. The most dominant feature of the emblemization of the massacre has been to read it as standing for, as symbolic of, mass systemic violence by men against women. (Simon and Rosenberg, "Beyond the Logic" 69)

One of the dilemmas that arises out of emblemization is that losses become attached to one another – one comes to stand for another. As such, it becomes difficult to distinguish what it is that is being commemorated. In addition, and as Rosenberg suggests, “the prevailing strategy for patterning its memory [the Montreal Massacre] is one that subdues under the weight of political interpretation the loss, grief, anguish that many felt at the time” (“*At Women’s Studies Edge*” 223). The result is that the memory being passed on becomes “inseparable from a modernist feminist framing in which mourning is contained as distinct from activism, remembrance from strategic intervention” (223). Rosenberg suggests that while emblemization gave us a way to immediately “make sense” of the killings of fourteen women in 1989 by understanding them as standing in for the problem of men’s violence against women, it also works to conceal and contain loss and grieving by asking us to “make sense” and close down discussions of how we go on after the massacre (223).

To be clear, Rosenberg suggests that a reading of the massacre “as emblematic of violences against women is a strategy that necessitates a seamless symbolic substitutability between ‘(harmed) women’ and thus stumbles over the issue of ‘difference’” (224). This stumbling over difference through emblemization maintains that we regard the murder of “14 young white women at a university... as symbolic of *all acts of violence, by any man, against all women, everywhere in Canada*” (Rosenberg 225). To read the massacre on such terms leaves us “caught in the bindings of identity markers... in which “women” and “men” are ultimately constituted in singular and binary relation” (Rosenberg 225). Rosenberg extends this notion of emblemization of the

Montreal massacre to the category "woman" in women's studies. Just as 14 murdered women have come to stand for the problem of men's violence against women,

... the category of "women" in Women's Studies functions emblematically: that is, to stand in for all women. Just as the women murdered [in Montreal] are also and already inscribed by racialization, age, sexuality, class... so too is the category of women similarly inscribed. (Rosenberg 228)

As has already been offered, "woman" as foundational to women's studies leaves us caught in an identity politic that functions to shut down the possibilities for more radical critiques of difference. What then, after emblemization? Rosenberg introduces the notion of passing on women's studies as a project of collective memory and reminds us that while the notion of collective memory is not without its own troubles, it does offer some important insight.

First, she says, the idea of collective memory "signals formations of memory that are more than individual and autobiographical - but carried in part by these - through which a "collective"... remembers itself and communicates that remembered history to others" (212). Second, this conceptualization of collective memory sets us up to understand memories as "*selective* formations, shaped, in Iwona Irwin-Zarecka's phrasing, by "establishing structures of thinking and feeling" that circumscribed a set of terms and bounded symbolizations through which past events are remembered and living attachments to a past are formed" (212). Third, as Rosenberg points out, "all social formations of memory are understood as contested and struggled over as people work through what is to be remembered, how, by whom, for whom and with what hopes and effects" (212-213). How, then, can these complex understandings of collective memory work to help us understand the passing on of women's studies in this historical moment?

Rosenberg suggests that to imagine the passing on of women's studies as a collective memory project is to "foreground as a matter of ongoing question and contestation how history/ies matter to present-day commitments and concerns; the terms on which women's studies is constituted; how each generation creates a binding relation to a project of this naming..." (213). What follows is a rigorous and deep consideration of how women's studies is and will be remembered, written and taught (213).

A central assumption here is that there is no neutral formation of memory nor a singular history to be passed on; rather, there is a demand to recognize that every remembrance is partial and invested and, on these terms, to attend to ways in which a complex, multidimensional, layered memory formation may be kept alive. (213)

As already suggested, this illuminating and troubling of particular stories about women's studies does not shut down or erase the significance of the work of the past (and present), but brings it into view so as to reflect on how we might think differently about subjectivity and knowledge making practices as the field of women's studies continues to get "passed on." The significance of thinking about the relationship between the idea of collective memory and remembrance and passing on women's studies is that stable stories we tell ourselves about the past and present of the discipline become troubled, unfixed, and open for reworking.

As a method of inquiry into facing loss, Rosenberg draws on the theories of Irit Rogoff's "looking away" and Patti Lather's "getting lost" to encounter and face the demands of loss in women's studies. "Looking away" and "getting lost" introduce "a hesitancy to knowledge, for knowledges 'stumble' rather than purport to build (from) steady ground" (Rosenberg, "At Women's Studies Edge" 210). Rosenberg captures the texture of Rogoff's theory with this:

[In] "looking away" ... [one will] divert their attention from already constituted and stabilized categories of inquiry. As I understand her, Rogoff is not arguing that looking away is an end in and of itself, but that in looking away and finding one's gaze caught elsewhere, there are fleeting and contingent possibilities for reinvigorating [women's studies]. (210)

Rosenberg adds that a looking away also necessitates a turning back to look anew, perhaps this time "with a gaze at least somewhat unhinged from prior stabilities" (210). In concert with "looking away," Lather's "getting lost" adds to Rosenberg's methodological approach. "Getting lost" also suggests a hesitancy to knowledges. As Rosenberg suggests, instead of striving for control, certainty and fixedness, what is compelling is how "getting lost" might "both produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (Lather in Rosenberg 211). "Looking away" and "getting lost" as modes of inquiry create possibilities for questioning identity formation and knowledge-making practices and is impetus for rethinking and recreating the field of women's studies.

My Biography of Attachment to Women's Studies

If, as I am concluding, what I and others are witnessing in women's studies (and education in general) is, in part, a reverence for the foundational, then how does my witnessing of such entrenchment, for me a disavowal of loss, impact women's studies and my relationship to it? Rosenberg's essay has helped me to further grapple with and attend to the losses that I have (and continue to) endeavored to face in women's studies – to make loss a site of learning more about my own investments and attachments to the field and to teaching and learning. On one hand, my reflections thus far are meant to probe and to question what I would term sedimented versions of identity and knowledge-making practices in women's studies that work (sometimes unintentionally) to foreclose

on new ways of thinking that could foster ethical relationality. On the other, I have my own troubled relationship with women's studies. In what follows, and continuing to draw on Rosenberg's essay, I want to try and highlight my relationship with women's studies through a more detailed accounting of my own biography of attachment to the field.

But first, as I begin this section, I want to say something about exposure, about writing, in words and on paper, some of the stories of my own attachment to women's studies. In the previous chapters I have relayed some "intimate" information about my story of schooling, my coming to teaching, my relations with others, and for me, all of these threads are important elements that make up who I am as a teacher. And I do not hesitate to "tell" what I think I might know about myself and what I have learned, so far. But, as in autobiography, in the face of the modernist university, these kinds of tellings are suspect. Following David Eggers,

We feel that to reveal embarrassing or private things... we have given someone something, that... we identify our secrets, our past and their blotches, with our identity, that revealing our habits or losses or deeds somehow makes one less of oneself. But it's just the opposite, more is more is more—more bleeding, more giving... Have it. Take it from me. Do with it what you will. Make it useful. This is like making electricity from dirt; it is almost too good to be believed, that we can make beauty from this stuff. (188-189)

But/and, my tellings about teaching and learning are made possible through an engagement with loss, that by turning towards what has been lost, I can make new meaning of life thus far, for myself and for others. However, to talk about my own attachments to teaching and learning in women's studies seems more difficult as my recent reflection here indicates:

As I write this I feel tentative, like I am about to lay out my struggles and difficulties in and with the field, just to test them, since I might want and need to take them back because what I am about to say is not what my difficulties are. And I suppose this is an indication that I am still struggling with the complexities

of my own attachments to women's studies – it is still writing me as I try to write it. Working through loss is a process, and I am fully immersed. And, how I feel about my attachments and investments in and to the field change from moment to moment these days. Perhaps because I am about to finish my dissertation and I wonder if what I have written will place me differently in relation to women's studies, especially at my home university. When I finish will I still be accepted, wanted, seen? This final question – “when I finish will I still be accepted, wanted, seen?” – is an attachment to an old formation and an old anxiety that I continue to grapple with. And my sense is that by writing about belonging and being seen I face these old formations – differently every time. To not grapple with and write these attachments into existence – to bring them to the fore - is to leave them dormant, untouched, frozen and static.

More Troubling: Then and Now

Since 2003 (when I started teaching in women's studies) much has changed in the department where I work. We went from a program to a Department of Women's Studies, from offering a minor and a MSW in women's studies to now offering a major, and we have gone from a half- appointment in women's studies shared with sociology to appointing two new faculty. Before departmental status, women's studies had a coordinator only; now we have a Head of Department. Those who coordinated the program came from disciplines in Arts, e.g. Folklore and English, and other faculties, e.g. Education.¹⁴ From being a program, women's studies became a department, a legitimate department within the Faculty of Arts. This change in status requires a more hierarchical system of governance, in line with the Collective Agreement, and it puts women's studies in competition with 14 other departments, mostly much larger, for resources. While as a department, it is better placed than before to make a case for resources, it has to behave like a department, and its head, part of the administration now, has a different

¹⁴ As a program, the decision-making body was the Women's Studies Council, a trans-University, trans-disciplinary group with elected committees. As members of MUNFA (the bargaining unit), the coordinators of women's studies did some of the work of heads of departments, e.g. staffing courses and serving ex officio on all committees, but unlike heads, were the promoters of Council's or the Executive's decisions, did not recommend to the Dean appointments or promotions, and were not grievable. In other words, the politics of governance affect things all the way and can't be ignored.

relationship with the Dean than coordinators had. What I am suggesting is that in an attempt to build women's studies as a legitimized department within the Faculty of Arts, there is also a process of domestication within women's studies, mobilizing the unifying narratives to build "a department."¹⁵ And with this domestication, I perceive a turn away from the kinds of questioning that characterize a non-foundational project in women's studies.

When women's studies was a program, offering a minor and a MWS, I recall roundtable discussions about the entry-level course, taught largely by non-regular faculty like me, in which we enjoyed academic freedom in constructing and implementing the course within a framework of general agreement about its goals (and the regulations of the University). We still do, but with departmental status, Women's Studies is claiming and delineating its own "knowledge base" - discourse that is both understandable in an institutional context and yet, as *Troubling Women's Studies* suggests, has the effect of reinforcing foundational ways of thinking. For me, the foundational assumptions are clearest in discussions of pedagogy and an increased emphasis on standardizing (through evaluative methods) the required introductory course for undergraduates. The rationale is that when there are 3 or 4 sections of this course being offered in the same semester, women's studies should/must present itself as being unified in terms of what students learn and the way that they learn it. As a case in point, my own syllabi for the introductory course in women's studies has emerged as a site of struggle in relation to a new departmental desire to mandate a final exam in all introductory courses. I have never held a final exam in my introductory course. Rather, students are required to write a final

¹⁵ In addition, and perhaps pertinent in terms of another kind of "disciplining" in women's studies is that programs and departments across the country are hiring PhD's in women's studies - a new phenomenon in the "field" in Canada where PhD graduates are now just beginning to graduate.

paper. It is a pedagogical decision on my part that reflects a desire for students to have the opportunity to richly and thoughtfully engage with the ideas of the course over an extended period of time (although a final paper does not guarantee that all students will take up the opportunity). In my experience, final exams tend to promote a view of learning as a regurgitation of material versus thoughtful engagement. Yet many educational projects across the disciplines argue that a final exam is worthwhile (and required) since, in part, it presents a unified front (from one section of the same course to the other) and teaches students to "think on their feet."

To me, "thinking on their feet" is an odd objective for a final, standardized exam in a course where students have learned by writing informal response papers, creating interpretive collages, or free-writing entries that wrestle with concepts and the language that constructs them. The pedagogy of the final exam as standard and objective risks positioning the student, as Bill Readings suggests "as a consumer without memory, a gaping mouth, as it were, rather than as the subject of a narrative of self-realization" (143). I want to encourage students to view issues from a number of perspectives, especially those they have not encountered or imagined before. I want students to encounter and grapple with new terms, something that cannot be rushed. Yet, as I write this, and following Rosenberg, I am also enacting a dualism, a "then and now."

Let me explain. This past spring, I met with two women's studies colleagues (and friends) out of town to present papers at a conference. Since I was living close to the conference venue at the time, my two friends came to stay with me. On the first evening that we were together we had a lovely dinner and some interesting and passionate conversations about women's studies. We talked about foundationalism in the discipline

– “woman” as fixed category; disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity; what constitutes a “good” introduction to women’s studies; and, some chat about pedagogy. The three of us work in the same department of women’s studies, my friends both having recently graduated with their PhD’s in women’s studies and both having just completed their first year of teaching. As the conversation ensued, I felt myself saying things like: “before you two were here we had...”: “we had much more freedom with the intro course before we became a department,” and, “we weren’t required to have a final exam then.” These comments stand out to me and prompt me to these reflections as examples of attachment to a particular and idealized version of women’s studies that I held – my comments stand as an example of a disavowal of what has been lost. Looking back, my comments have to do with the emergence of an old anxiety (but present still) marked by the perception of not being seen (now - in relation to a women’s studies that I *knew* before) in the department as it is (now), manifest in my statements that sets up a dichotomy of then and now. Second, I can speak of women’s studies as a program, before, when we enjoyed “academic freedom” with little hierarchical governance¹⁶ “against” the new department where foundational narratives seem to be in need of mobilization in order to appear legitimate. The former is a nostalgic harkening back that does little to animate the “future” of women’s studies, caught as it is in the dichotomy of past/present. As Rosenberg remarks,

to remember the difficulties but forget the enthusiasm and energy... is to neglect not only a vital aspect of the history of Women’s Studies, it is also to obscure for present and future generations of feminist scholars what I think is key – not simply to tell others of that energy, but to create collective memory projects that support each to find ways to animate that history, make it alive for themselves,

¹⁶ And, as a program there were no women’s studies PhD’s – rather, instructors came from a wide range of other disciplines in the university.

form their own relation of meaning and significance. ("At Women's Studies Edge" 217).

What is at stake in my own nostalgic storytelling of women's studies *before* is that it patterns a particular kind of memory of the field (Rosenberg 217) that disregards the conflicts and struggles that have always been a part of women's studies. In this regard, and as Rosenberg suggests, "it is imperative to read these recollections for the pedagogy of that patterning, for the complicated and messy memory of the institutionalization of Women's Studies" (217).

Reflections on a Feminist Rescue Fantasy

One of the current debates in women's studies now, beyond our particular department, has to do with what an introductory course in the discipline should contain. While there is a great deal of merit in proposing that students have a broad and thorough introduction to the field, what constitutes this introduction is particularly important (Karpinski 2007). Implicit in discussions of what an introductory course should be there is the risk of standardized curriculum. The authors of *Troubling Women's Studies* have suggested, there are many women's studies and many feminisms. But the desire to attain disciplinary/departmental status in the modern university propels a desire for mastery and certainty. The difficulty with a standardized curriculum is that it stands to reflect ways of thinking about the field that may promote a "passing on" of women's studies that does little to interrogate the foundational project. And this "passing on" through standardized curriculum has to do, in part, with resistance to acknowledging the losses that come with the faltering foundations of the field.

I, like most others, have to contend with the academic frustrations that any department or faculty experiences. However, these resistances are difficult to bear. I

understand that, institutionally, administrators of women's studies departments across the country must argue for disciplinary status in order to be recognized as a discipline because of resource allocation. However, one of the narratives that women's studies has told about itself, over and over, is that it is interdisciplinary. Disciplinarity seems to be a question of how knowledge is produced and organized within the university. To call oneself a discipline also means being disciplined to some extent in terms of the kinds of questions that can be asked, the methods used (Braithwaite 2004; Heald 2004) - the knowledge base of the discipline is sometimes pre-determined and pre-set. And what does all this mean for an introductory course in women's studies? Within this structure there is a repression of multiple kinds of epistemologies, pedagogies and identities. I have found it difficult to witness this kind of entrenchment in women's studies, and I have questioned whether women's studies is a 'good place' for me. Yet through all the questioning, I keep going back, wanting to stay.

Practically, staying in women's studies now is about economic survival, but what else propels my desire to stay? On one hand, staying and pursuing a career in women's studies reveals my ongoing belief in and continued hope that the ways I teach make a difference to some and disrupts the foundational project of the field. Following Floyd-Thomas and Gillam, I seek "to offer [through teaching] a paradigm for disciplinary transformation that is at once practical and feasible within women's studies programs" (46). And I 'love' teaching in women's studies, I love the students, my colleagues, but that love is sometimes challenged by the foundational aspects of the field. However, and on the other hand, there is something deeper at work for me, that in hindsight - and, as the following reflection highlights - helps me to see the power of facing loss as a site of

learning.

(September 2008): After five years of teaching sessionally and contractually in women's studies, my experiences, like many of my doctoral peers across the country, see little loyalty when it comes time for new hiring. We are told that we matter, that we have been instrumental in energizing and building programs and departments through service and curriculum, yet we are thanked and shown the door. This view of work in the context of the university is foundational, a capitalist view of labour relations.

When I wrote the above paragraph over one year ago I was feeling the disappointment of having not been short-listed for a position in "my" department. My expectation was that since I had been there teaching and had been involved in program development and service, I would be shown some loyalty in terms of, at the very least, competing for the job. While I realize that foundations are not simply conceptual and intellectual, but also institutional, that this happened in women's studies feels to be more of a blow, perhaps because of the "we're all in this together" mantra. But what does it mean to let go of this? Looking back to this time, I must ask myself: from where would the expectation for such loyalty - 'to be taken care of' - come from? It seems to me that I employed my own version of a feminist rescue fantasy - an old version of 'the good mother' of women's studies based on foundational categories of the field that I am aiming to trouble (sisterhood, community, experience, identity). But such a fantasy must be examined, for, as Rosenberg suggests, "what is faced is not only a humbling of modernist feminist explanation, but also a demand that the foundational categories of modernist Women's Studies... be deeply rethought as the basis for theorizing, remembrance and action" ("At Women's Studies Edge" 230). One year later, and after ruminating on the meanings of my affective response, it is the loss of the feminist rescue fantasy and the foundational

structure of the university that must be faced in order to work through, mourn, and make new meaning of my experiences.

Pedagogy, Loss and Ethical Relationality

How might students and teachers take account of the traumas differently brought into school lives? What would it mean to create the conditions upon which these traumas might be witnessed as a part of the daily, ongoing work of feminist pedagogy?
(Rosenberg, "Intersecting Memories" 126)

Thus far I have tried to illuminate how both my conscious and unconscious efforts to face attachments and investments has helped me to make new meaning of my experiences of loss in teaching and learning in women's studies. But what of the experiences of loss that are animated in the classroom with our students and ourselves? As I have outlined in chapter 1, the project of education risks manufacturing students in its own image, pushing conformity, unity and standardized citizens. If this is the case, then there is little room for students to bring the difficulties of their own lives into the space of education. O'Quinn and Garrison point out that this linear, restricted dynamic in education does nothing to encourage any kind of openness:

Rather than harmonizing meaning, this relation sets up false divides based on either/or interpretations. Instead of considering the needs, desires, and expressions of others, it insists on confronting them with demands for conformity. It touts an anti-democratic authority and control as means of love and care. (52)

If facing and experiencing loss requires some kind of love, care, vulnerability and openness, then how do we create these conditions in the classroom? The work of teaching is dynamic, complex, impulsive, unpredictable, not always logical, often intuitive and sometimes difficult to interpret and describe (Cole and Knowles 63). What can and does happen when teachers and students are placed in "loving relation" (O'Quinn and

Garrison) to one another, to learn from, and be open to the multiple experiences that loss has to offer.

Several years ago while teaching an introduction to women's studies course, I was faced with an unusually difficult experience with a student. In the course we had spent several sessions reading about body politics – the commodification of the body (Coward 2006); bodies in space and place (Rawlins 2008); and, fatness (Ayuso 2001). In the latter set of readings around fatness, some of the students in class conflated fatness with health, which is not unusual. Some of the comments included “everyone knows that there are serious risks that come with being too large,” and, “as long as you eat well and exercise, and as long as you are happy with yourself, then you can be whatever size you want to be.” My strategy around comments of this sort is not necessarily to dispute them, but to try and highlight how such comments are inherently fatphobic in the context of the course, one that focuses on the social construction of difference. Lisa Ayuso's essay “I Look Fat In This!” cultivates the contemporary meanings of sizism and encourages the reader to think about the traumas that ensue in relation to fatphobia. The first student comment that I noted above was one that conflated fatness and illness, insistent on the belief based on her kinesiology background of what she called “common sense.”

At the end of one of our classes, after I had returned a short writing assignment where students were required to comment on the contents of Ayuso's article, this particular student came to see me. She wondered why I had given her a 2/5 on her assignment. I told her that I had written extensive comments on her paper and that her grade reflected her lack of engagement with the article. She said that she didn't really focus on the article because she “already knows a lot about the subject,” and ultimately,

she found my grading unfair. I told her that if she wanted to rewrite the one-page reflection, this time considering the article, I would re-read it. At this point she stepped back to read my comments as other students milled about and eventually left the classroom. She stayed behind, and then approached me and said that she would like to re-write. Before she left the room she put her hand on my shoulder and, with tears in her eyes, told me that she was worried about me, about my health (I'm fat), and wondered if I might be hiding behind the teachings of Ayuso and others so as to not have to "deal" with my own body size. In that moment I was struck, stuck, and numb. I had no idea what to say to her. She removed her hand from my shoulder immediately, perhaps my expression the impetus, and apologized, worrying that she had said "too much." Within a few seconds I told her that if she wanted me to re-read her paper she would have to consider the article much more closely and bring it to me in my office.

Two days later this student showed up in my office with a freshly minted paper, this time 4 pages longer than the required length. I asked her about the length right away and she said that she needed the extra space to sort out her ideas in relation to the article and our previous engagement two days prior. I said that I would read the paper and send her an email over the weekend. While it is not usual (although it does happen from time to time) for me to negotiate with students to this extent, offering re-writes and weekend co-correspondence, something about this student's in-class insistence and resistance made me turn back to look, again, at what she might be telling me *about herself*. Perhaps my feelings were more intuitive than perceptive (and, I cannot discount my own investments in the issue at hand), but when she left my office I began to read the paper. It started:

"I grew up in... a small community of less than 1000 people. I lived with my grandmother who lived next door to my parents and my two brothers. My

grandmother was fat. She was so fat that she couldn't move around. I think this is why I lived with her, to help her with stuff. I did all the dishes, I cooked, I cleaned, everything. Everybody talked about her. When I went to school I got teased because of her. Have you seen the movie "What's Eating Gilbert Grape"? That was me. I was Gilbert. I hated my grandmother for being so fat and for making my life so awful."

In class the following week, this student sheepishly came to see me after class. I gave her the paper and thanked her for being so upfront and for more thoroughly examining the article in relation to the issues we were taking up in the course. She began to cry – sobbing uncontrollably. She said she didn't understand why she was so upset ("I have no idea what is wrong with me"), but she said that she was glad to have an opportunity to re-write. Then she jolted towards me, wrapping her arms around my neck like she was desperate to be hugged. All I could say in that moment - and I remember it so very clearly – was, "you will be ok." We both walked out of the room together in silence, her breathing quickly after having cried so hard, me holding my breath hoping that I could hold myself together until I got into my car.

What did this encounter teach me? What did this student teach me? I did, and still think about this experience as one of my most profound in teaching. Within several days of this experience I wrote the following:

It seems to me that [this student] thought that she was casting her rod into a shallow pool, but given the opportunity, that pool was much deeper than she or I thought. I am sure that she had no conscious intention of going where she did, but she did... she's been dragging her big fat grandma around for a long, long time. And perhaps her kinesiology background tells something (move move move – something her grandmother couldn't do – this kid did the moving for the grandmother). And perhaps her writing and her program of choice has something to do with a desire to heal her relationship with her grandmother and her own body?

Perhaps the traumatic experience of childhood re-visited this student that day. And what strikes me is that since trauma is experienced as delayed and can have a surprising impact when it resurfaces (Caruth 1995), these kinds of student reactions to knowledge demand that we listen differently and, that each difference is an ethical imperative in teaching and learning. To not do so, to not listen for possible expressions of loss that students bring to us (whether a conscious reaching out or a repressed reaction) can further result in “numbing or depression, which in turn leads to shutting down of their capacity to care, to connect, and to love” (Kessler 138).

While the denial of loss may be a necessary form of protection at times, even a healthy defense mechanism when “too much” feeling feels dangerous, ongoing, unacknowledged loss, as Kelly says, “helps maintain the illusion that loss is neither real nor as severe as it might seem. Such disavowal inhibits forward thinking and new creations, for it dulls apprehension and inhibits our best efforts to respond, to challenge, to sustain, and to change” (“Learning to Lose” 2). To care for and love ourselves and our students like we all really matter is to let loss be a part of pedagogy, of student-teacher relations in ways that can tolerate the vicissitudes of loss. In recognizing my own attachment to being seen and loved - because I am so familiar with this attachment and grapple with it - I saw something of this in my student. And this is what I mean by ethical relationality. The work of the teacher, then, is to grapple with our attachments, and in so doing, this mode of attentiveness can be offered back to our students. Because, as Judith Butler so eloquently states, in grief, “Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something... One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the

face of the other” (“Precarious Life” 19). What my engagement with this student highlighted for me was that while the experience of loss is painful and difficult - in fact, it can be excruciating - it is also productive because it can disrupt, unsettle, and be the catalyst for new knowledges about the self and others.

How might foundations stop/obscure these kinds of encounters and learnings? Foundations mandate that the answer be “correct” and demands certainty, truth, and loyalty to one set of ideas. Foundations in teaching – as can be seen in my reflection on the packaged, online course – do little to disrupt, or, recalling Britzman (“Some Observations”), evoke crisis in the self. Foundations mask and gloss loss, as Butler (in Luhmann) suggests. Instead of grappling with the losses of attachment to foundations, we look for formulas and best practices to rationalize our foundations. Foundations silence critical voices and shut down the possibility for questions and debate. My main concern is that foundations foreclose the possibility of a deeper and more complex understanding of the self and the other. That is, without such understanding (of self and other) the ethical possibilities between subjects are diminished. The world is quickly changing and with each day we are continually faced with the reality of social, cultural, political, economic and environmental conflict. The problems that we face in this world – globally and locally – require from us more complex and sensitive points of view. In this regard, critiquing foundations – letting our “truth claims” fall apart - and attending to the losses that trail can be a catalyst for renewal and new meaning can be made from what remains.

Ending and Beginning Again

Rosenberg suggests that letting our stories unfix themselves is productive:

It seems to me that if we were to better tolerate what comes in the wake of an approach in which meanings slide, we might allow for a productive opening into

current troubles in Women's Studies regarding foundational texts, for example: where the focus might productively shift from dichotomized arguments for their inherent necessity *or* inherent limitation to a deliberation about how to keep open the question of how specific texts might live on for each generation of students in women's studies. ("At Women's Studies Edge" 227)

Following Rosenberg, then, each of us might create our own narrative about our relationship to women's studies. But these narratives must never become static and imbued with certainty. Certainly this is not straightforward work (as Rosenberg implies) and may be felt with resistance, ambivalence, uncertainty and pain. But as Salvio suggests, the "feeling of falling to pieces are key features of challenging occasions throughout our lives. When we... write from this position of loss, the symbols we draw on reproduce the vulnerability and fragility that loss brings about" ("The Teacher/Scholar as Melancholic" 22). And, an openness to re-working and negotiating the stories we tell ourselves (and that constitute our subjectivity) is a central component to teaching for change.

When Jean was done, she knew how careful she had to be. Not to erase, but to wash away. (Anne Michaels 336)

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