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It depends on what you mean by community:

Community building among undergraduate students within the Women Studies Department at the University of Washington

Community. A word of many connotations—a word overused until its meanings are so diffuse as to be almost useless. Yet the images it evokes, the deep longings and memories it can stir, represent something that human beings have created and recreated since time immemorial, out of our profound need for connection among ourselves and with Mother Earth (1993, p.1)

-Helen Forsey

This project is dedicated to: Professor Luana Ross, for modeling the kind of learner/educator that I aspire to be. Tamara Myers, for showing the department what a radical feminist looks like, and Cricket Keating for power sharing and planting the seeds of hope in my education and feminist journey. And last but not least, to the students, for the courage to challenge the “isms” that limit the capacity for the most people to access the most freedom.



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INTRODUCTION

Upon entering the Women Studies Department at the University of Washington in the winter of 2001, I anticipated a different way of experiencing higher education. Guided and inspired by feminist educators such as bell hooks, I too entered feminist classrooms for the same reasons she claims other women studies students do. Hooks writes, “Because they continue to believe that there, more than in any other place in the academy, they will have an opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom” (1994, p. 15). It was not until the spring of 2002, however, that I began experiencing an education that reflected freedom in a classroom setting. In a Critical Pedagogies of Race, Class and Gender (WOM 490) class lead by Cricket Keating I got a glimpse into the academic life that I wanted to encounter again in my educational career. Finally, inside the walls of a bureaucratic giant like the University of Washington, I was introduced to educators such as Myles Horton, Dian Marino and Paulo Freire who focused on pedagogical practices inside of the classroom, in coalition work and in workshop settings. One distinct difference between this class and all of the others I’d experienced within the Women Studies Department was a connection between the ideas and values that were being taught and the *way* they were being taught. It was that class that inspired my further involvement with students in the department, including two coordinated independent study groups with fellow undergraduate students and Tamara Myers, the advisor of the department: one focused on feminist methodologies and the other focused on feminist pedagogies.

The feminist pedagogies group was formed due to previous student involvement in curriculum changes, which included the creation of a new majors seminar class,

Women Studies Community in Colloquia (WOM 299). This class was to be led collaboratively by the advisor and, as the students who proposed the changes envisioned it, undergraduate students and alumni as well. In the spring quarter of 2003, the class came to fruition and successfully marked what was thought to be the beginning of more explicit involvement of undergraduate students within the department. Upon the dismissal of the department advisor, Tamara Myers, there were power struggles over what the class officially was, or more so, who was in sole charge of it. Due to the fact that undergraduate involvement was not explicitly stated in the written documentation of the class, the advisor was not obligated to include undergraduates in the organization and facilitation of the class. In the winter quarter of 2004, the class began for a second time. However, miscommunication and mixed messages from the department made it appear as if the department desired no undergraduate participation at all. Even though the new advisor, Kristina Knoll, supported student involvement, a general sense of disempowerment between me and the other peer facilitators was evident. It is unclear what the future of Women Studies Community in Colloquia will be, but I suspect that with the graduation of the last students who were involved in the process of creating and facilitating the class, undergraduates will not have the knowledge of previous student involvement, and therefore lack the desire to push for more explicit student involvement.

Engaged pedagogy, as hooks describes, is a passionate, progressive and holistically rooted educational philosophy that necessarily encourages critical awareness, engagement and active participation, and I hungered for it. With such high expectations of my new educational experiences, my thoughts on what this gathering of teachers and learners would look like changed as well. Not only did I crave more democratic

classrooms, I also desired a heightened level of awareness and participation with classmates that extended past one quarter. I wanted to feel a part of a community of critical learners who challenged and supported one another.

However, after taking class after class, I realized that I knew few and recognized even fewer people that I could identify as Women Studies majors. Even though there were only around ninety majors in the department, it was difficult to know who they were without repeating “Hi, I’m a Women Studies major, are you?” over and again. I felt that the lack of what I identified as community was rooted in the absence of a common space for students to gather, and the seemingly unconcerned and overextended faculty and graduate students. Furthermore, the absence of our previous advisor, who was a major intermediary in connecting students in the past made the situation more palpable this year. I felt that it was necessary to address what I perceived to be a lack of “community” within the department. I put the term community in quotations, because, despite it being a popular expression to describe those who share an area of study or philosophy in common, it is a vague word that lacks a single definition and subsequent means for students to sustain it over time, with or without the aid of an advisor within the department.

According to Peggy L. Chinn (2001), “Communities are defined by the values, concerns, or purposes that the individuals within them share” (p. 26). Chinn goes on to describe the personal interactions that can lead to more explicit purposes and challenges for group members. Additionally, first-hand interactions that occur due to the diversity of opinions and personalities that naturally occur within a group can help to form cohesiveness within it. In effect, it is that cohesiveness and ability to identify what brings

the group together that *creates* a community, regardless of the number of members. In addition, I believe that even in groupings of people who are seemingly disconnected or seem to lack any explicit purposes or means of communication, can be constituted as a community—as dysfunctional as it may seem. Throughout my conversations that I've had with undergraduates in the Women Studies Department, I've found that students often describe community in idealistic ways and then compare how the department is the opposite of those positive descriptions. I wish to focus on the positive and negative aspects of community, not just the ideal visions that people might have about it. My goal for setting out on this research endeavor is to reach a better understanding of what the undergraduate students in my department would like their community to look like. Additionally, I wish to uncover what possible barriers they may encounter in attempting to reach their goals around strengthening their community.

I realize that I embrace ideas and values about community that others may not. Just as feminism is diverse and lived in a plethora of ways by feminists, I believe that peoples' conceptions regarding community can be just as diverse. Returning to bell hooks (1994), I agree with her understanding of feminist education as she notes, "Feminist education for critical consciousness is rooted in the assumption that knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside the classroom" (p. 194). I would like to see more connections emerge not only between the feminist values that are espoused within the walls of our Women Studies classrooms and what the students bring into their personal lives, but also between our values and how we flesh them out *as* a department. However, I set out on this journey knowing that I carry my own privileges as a white, middle-class, American,

heterosexual woman. Also, I realize that I have my own set of assumptions about how the Women Studies department should operate around the issue of community and how it should look. I recognize that all of the attributes, experiences and assumptions that I bring to the table can effect my perception of issues that the department faces, as well as the ultimate outcome of this project.

I will be examining previous research and literature based on different communities, using, to a certain degree, my own experience/participant observation within the department and interviews with a variety of Women Studies students from the University of Washington. I hope to reveal what is important to my own community, regardless of how differing those beliefs of community might be. I believe that a reflection process is necessary to foster a greater understanding of student-to-student relations.

Ideally, the end product of my research will add to the building of community and undergraduate-faculty/undergraduate-graduate student communication. Furthermore, this specific study of a small number of undergraduate students may add to the increasing body of knowledge about Women Studies programs and the challenges they face. Above all, I am ultimately accountable to the undergraduate students that I am interviewing and the information that they have given me to interpret and to reflect it back to the department. Inspired by so many students that have passed through the department before me, and Tamara Myers, the previous advisor, I hope to become a part of the community in a more accountable and active way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern Feminism in a 'Post-Feminist' World

The term feminism is a contested and deceiving description of those that identify as such due to the fact that feminism covers such a rich array of politics, applications, beliefs and values. Furthermore, the ideologies that come from those differences interact and overlap with those politics, applications, beliefs and values. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) point out, "For every generalization that one can make about feminism, it is possible to find 'feminists' who do not fit, or who do not want to fit" (p. 5). At the close of the 19th century, "feminism" in the Western world generally pointed to advocating for women's rights. Campaigns in both the United Kingdom and the United States centered on issues like health, sexuality, political representation, and so forth; but all women did not necessarily agree upon those agendas. Likewise, the agendas that Western feminists championed did not focus on all women. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland, by the end of the 20th century more generalized theories emerged that viewed relations between women and men as political, and therefore, feminist actions were seen as being on behalf of all women (p.5). Just as there is no one theory of power, there is no one type of feminist. Stereotypes of a perceived consensus amongst feminists, beliefs of a general disdain for men and an essentialist view regarding what it means to be a "woman" still persist. In addition, just as misconceptions of feminist modes of thought and action continue to be produced, differences and disagreements between strategies of how this category of 'woman' can be emancipated vary as well. As Ramazanoglu and

Holland (2002, p. 7) point out, however, we can look to key characteristics of tensions within Western feminism being:

1. Feminism is diverse and lacking a political core, therefore no concrete goals or definitions can be specifically decided upon.
2. Feminism out of necessity is exclusionary; therefore, to define feminism implies that which is *not* feminist. A creation of an ‘other’ occurs, leaving no specific group with the sole authority on the position of ‘women’.
3. Feminism implies a unified, socially gendered subject position.
4. Feminism implies common interests among women. Without the aim to find commonalities across different experiences of power and social conditions, the rationale for feminism becomes inoperative.
5. Feminism is linked to a notion of gender relations that are oppressive; therefore it implies a reason for the emancipation from those roles across social divisions that exist.

In addressing the multiplicity of “postfeminisms” and their embracing of the diversity of women’s different experiences, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) also take on the issue of the ways researchers and feminists alike take the concept of difference into account. They state:

Radical resistance (from either researcher or researched) lies in identifying power and injustice in relationships of difference. It is questioning these relationships and how they are experienced that encourages campaigns for democracy and civil rights, religious and cultural freedom, gay rights, disability rights, indigenous people’s rights, and other strategic expressions of identity politics. Putting resistance into practice depends of identifying the relation in the institutionalization of power (p. 110).

By looking at the issues that “feminists” face, the notion of community within the context of a feminist and academic setting becomes more complex and varied throughout time and between groups. Therefore, I will begin to look at the multiplicity of ideas

around concepts of school as community and then put that in the context of the department.

Researchers have expanded the ways we think about community within schools. In order to bring about positive reform in schools regarding academic merit and moving toward creating equal opportunities for all of their students, they believe that there needs to be a shift in the way we fundamentally look at schools. Specifically, we should focus on schools not as organizations, but rather as communities (Shields, 2000). This shift in focus is necessary primarily because not all groups, related or not, can be identified as official organizations. Organizations are held together through exterior structures of control that creates a system of hierarchies and pre-formed role expectations of its members. People, who are most often socially organized, on the other hand, are better able to create communities. Within communities values and goals are discussed, rather than decided upon by people outside of the group itself. Furthermore, obligations, commitment to a common cause and relationships are formed by choice, as opposed to force externally (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Sergiovanni (1994) applies the theory developed by the German sociologist, Ferdinand Tonnies, *gemeinschaft* (literally translated as “community”) to schools as communities. Three areas of *gemeinschaft* that Tonnies developed are: kinship, place and *gemeinschaft* of the mind. More specifically, Sergiovanni looks at “*gemeinschaft* of the mind” as essential to developing and sustaining community within schools. Through this “community of the mind,” relationships come from a collective understanding of group goals/values and how they should be embodied, as opposed to a contract from outside of the group. Sergiovanni focuses on community in a manner that leaves what differences

arise between group members such as race, class, sexuality, ability, and gender to the imagination.

Shields (2000) suggests that looking at schools through the theory of *gemeinschaft* presents an overly simplistic, idyllic and homogenous understanding of community. Moreover, it would behoove us to look at schools as environments where rich, complicated and heterogeneous communities are negotiated. Shields (2000) writes,

A school community founded on difference would be one in which the common centre (sic) would not be taken as a given but would be co-constructed from the negotiation of disparate beliefs and values as participants learn to respect, and to listen to, each other. In this concept, bonds among members are not assumed, but forged, and boundaries are not imposed but negotiated (p. 276).

As an alternative to thinking about community within schools as communities that exist simply because of common areas of study or the philosophy of the school, it may be more advantageous to look at “schools as communities of difference” (Shields). By difference, they mean social class, race, gender and ability. According to Shields, it is through such negotiation and forming of common values by acknowledging differences that group members are able to voluntarily choose whom they affiliate with, instead of separating because of differences in race, gender, ability and social class that are being ignored.

Avitabile and Martell (1998) note that community is created to elicit social change; community also brings group members together through the development of specific issues or goals. However, they warn community organizers about sacrificing the accessibility of the group in order for self-definition to be achieved. For example, the college women’s group that they worked with resisted discussion surrounding cultural, sexual and racial diversity; thereby excluding many women students of color from participating.

Furthering the discussion on addressing diversity, hooks (2003) focuses on white peers who claim to desire unlearning white supremacy, but fail to “see” their non-white peers around them. She states, “White supremacy is easily reinscribed when individuals describe communities of students and faculty as ‘all white’ rather than affirming diversity, even if it’s evident only by the presence of a few individuals” (p. 37). By focusing on the language and behavior with which people conduct themselves and pushing for more inclusive language, hooks stresses the need to avoid negating the importance of the presence of diversity on a college campus and in community organizations.

Orner (1997) questions how complicated and often contradictory characteristics of identity can be recognized without creating a false sense of unity. In other words, how can a space be created that is “safe” without costing individual community members acknowledgement of differences between them? Orner employs the ideas of Mary Gentile, and suggests that difference be put on the forefront of group discussion and that the group should strive for a “multiple perspective.” This perspective involves each individual member acknowledging the “Other” in themselves and ways that they are marginalized, while simultaneously recognizing the “Other” in everyone else. I would add that, while this concept of looking at the “Other” in all of us looks good in theory, it is difficult to imagine just how this would work in a community that is focusing on their differences. Furthermore, Orner stresses the importance of accepting “responsibility for our implication in actual historical social relations” (p. 86), thus not denying one’s own positionality and experiences.

Maier and Tetreault (1994) further articulate the importance of taking into account the positionality of community members. They write that each person has a position that is defined by specific experiences such as gender, race, class, and other positions of social importance (p. 22). According to Maier and Tetreault, positionality is an extremely significant factor that not only influences the generation of knowledge, but also reveals power relationships that exist between people.

Shor (1996) offers up an analysis of community within academic institutions by explaining how power differentials often dictate student behavior within classrooms. By detailing his experiences as a professor at a community college, he weaves a story of power sharing and the resistance from students that he faced. With regard to the positions that students are often in at an academic level, Shor states, “Students are constructing the subordinate self at the same time that they are resisting and undermining it, while believing that their ‘real selves,’ ‘real lives,’ are somewhere else, not contaminated or controlled by this dominating process” (p. 17). The setting Shor describes is in the classroom where students are led to resist and engage with the teacher due to the unequal position that they are placed in. In searching for ways to power-share Shor writes, “My best course of action has so far been to use my authority to organize a transformation of authority, step by step,” and furthermore adds, “[t]he power that uses power to share and transform power is the power I am seeking” (p. 20). It is from the unequal power relations that Shor developed the term “Siberian Syndrome” to describe the defensiveness that students have towards teachers who are positioned as supposed objective vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge; furthermore, it erases the students’

position as full human beings in the classroom that have their own histories and cultures (p. 13).

In addition to the issues that students face in an academic setting, Marino (1997) also points out issues that educators face. For example, Marino writes,

There is always a tension between talking about something, demonstrating it, and integrating and illustrating it in the classroom, when certain dynamics are happening, and doing participatory research in a community setting. People are not an organized community in a university. They may come to like each other more or less, or create their own smaller social units, in a way sort of similar to what happens in an outside community, but the teaching and the experience are not quite the same as working within a Native community, for instance, or a social movement organizing around a particular set of issues. There is a more grounded and complex quality to the community work than you find in a course in participatory research. And I think sometimes we deny the context that the course is fitting into, the kind of complications and tensions that exist, and want to reproduce an ideal situation (p. 121-122).

Additionally, Marino points to those inside of the university as having internalized the belief that “education is neutral”, and the lack of skills that people in academia have to talk about relationships of power. This silence around big issues like addressing power within the university leave the system of power intact, and denying that this position of neutrality is a political position that reinforces power relations. She states, “It is *maintaining* political position: it keeps power relations exactly the way they are” (p. 125). However, Marino also expresses how difficult it is to change our positions within a university and to locate our own positions within it.

Shields (2000) appears to have a more accessible analysis of the ways that difference among students can be used to voluntarily shape a community and its values. By looking at the department as a community of difference, we can begin to address how our diversity can be intentionally used to challenge existing values, strengthen relationships among students and perhaps change the way we think about community.

Adding to Shields' layout for the creation of a community that focuses on the possibility of schools being organized as communities of difference, Peggy Chin adds that, "[b]uilding communities for the future calls for a shift that values cohesiveness and diversity" (p. 26). Bringing these values to life creates an environment of solidarity. With the knowledge and acknowledgement that people will naturally disagree with one another, communities can actively work to dismantle that which has the power to divide them such as: stereotypes, resentments and prejudices.

In addition to the examination of class, race, ability and gender differences within the department, it is important to add age and sexuality, as those two factors were not recognized in most of the literature on community building that I found. In the name of expediency and short duration of my project, I will focus on race, age and sexuality as categories of analysis.

METHODS

A Participatory Research Approach

The key reason that I chose to employ a participatory research model for this project is due to the fact that the main focus of participatory research is power. In addition, as Maguire (1987) points out, "The objectives of participatory research include the transformation of power structures and relationships as well as the empowerment of oppressed people. Transformation not only requires a critical understanding of current and historical social realities, but it is also a vision of what a just and loving society should be" (p.32). Participatory research focuses not only on describing and interpreting

social realities, it also focuses on (radically) changing them. It was this approach that actually led me to want to research issues within the department because it stressed working *with* rather than *for* oppressed peoples, and I felt that a research project that focuses on undergraduates in my community would bring me further from falsehood.

Key Phases of Participatory Research (Maguire, 1987, p.42-43)

1. Organization of the project & knowledge of the working area:

Initially, the researcher is to gather data and analyze information that exists about the problems that people face and the location of research. The project typically focuses on oppressed or exploited groups of people, and the researcher must begin to establish relationships with those people. The key is for the research problem to come from the community itself. While I don't necessarily feel comfortable calling my research participants "oppressed" by the department, I do feel that it was a ready-made community that I was a part of previous to this research endeavor, thus making it difficult, but not impossible, for me to exploit my subjects in the same way that someone from outside of the community could.

2. Definition of generating problematics:

This phase focuses on the process that brings the researcher and the participants to an understanding of what the key problems are as posed by the community itself.

Furthermore, "problem-posing" is a dialogue that continues throughout the research process. This is a particularly important aspect of the process, as I was inspired to research the department due to ongoing discussions among students about issues within the community.

3. Objectivization and Problematization:

Maguire stresses that this phase can be assisted by “collective educational activities” where the subjects are able to critically analyze the issues that they are concerned with. It is in this phase that the subjects can begin to further engage with the project by developing their own understanding of larger sources of those issues. Maguire states, "The third phase attempts to link participants' individual interpretations of problems to the broader context, including the structural conditions of social reality" (p. 42).

4. Researching social reality and analyzing collected information:

Through identifying themes that come out of the problems, the researcher and participants develop their own theories around the problems, as well as the solutions with which they develop.

5. Definition of Action Projects:

In the last phase, once problems are collaboratively identified, participants and researchers collectively decide on actions that can be taken in order to address issues in the community. It is in this phase where the process and the products of the research done can have a direct benefit on those involved in the project (p. 43).

Throughout each phase, however, Maguire notes that participants' participation in the project should get increasingly more involved, which is obviously a challenge for me time-wise. In essence, I am aware that my project is located more in phases one, two and three at this time. If this was an extended project that could span over the course of many years, participant involvement could be greatly increased.

Research Questions

Due to the fact that I am dependent on my research subjects to give me accurate information, I refined my research questions to the best of my ability so that I would be able to articulate the thinking behind the questions in the event that the subject did not understand my initial phrasing. I also carefully worded my interview questions as I realize that they not only relate to the theories that I present around community, but also the ultimate answers/data that I gather.

The main questions that emerged from the literature and guided my interviews with undergraduate students (see Appendix III for interview questions) were:

1. How is 'community' defined or understood by undergraduate Women Studies students within academia in general and within the context of the Women Studies Department?
2. How can community be developed and/or facilitated within an academic setting? What barriers work against it?
3. What role does addressing the diversity within the department play in strengthening/building community?
4. What roles can undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni and faculty take in creating/building community?

I felt like these questions best addressed the information that surfaced regarding communities, specifically within an academic setting.

Sample

My research project was to determine the degree of importance that the undergraduate students at the University of Washington place on community within the department, if at all. Furthermore, I wanted find out how these students define and

understand community, what barriers they might face around achieving their community building goals, and how all members of the department can help to build community. I interviewed nine current and past students (having graduated no more than five years previous to the time of the study) from the department. I have chosen to focus on current undergraduate students and alumni because I feel that an initial assessment phase is necessary to come to a better understanding of undergraduate departmental needs before the department can be assessed as a whole.

Sample Selection

Subjects were recruited from within the University of Washington Women Studies Department. I approached potential subjects by email (see Appendix I) during the winter quarter of 2004 to set up a personal meeting where I could meet with the subjects in order to explain the purpose of my research. In order to contact possible alumni study participants, I also reached them via the email over the Women Studies listserv. If this method of recruitment did not draw an ethnically and racially diverse group of research participants, I intended to continue to look for a more diverse interview pool until I found them. All nine of my research subjects represent the total number of people who responded to my initial email. Therefore, it's possible that by virtue of their interest in my research project, we can assume a certain degree of interest in community that others might not have in the department. The information that I collected is not intended to represent the Women Studies Department as a whole, but rather a case study on a select group of undergraduate students and the issues that they face, concerns they have regarding the department, and suggestions for improving community relations

within the department. Furthermore, the goal of an equitable representation of students extended to all categories of difference that I have outlined such as sexual orientation, race and ethnicity.

The Individual Interview Process

In order to determine the relevance of community building issues that the students in the department face, I chose to conduct interviews as my method of data gathering. As Maguire (1987) points out, “Within the context of participatory research, dialogue encourages people to look at the ‘whys’ of their lives. Why do problems exist? What causes these problems? Participatory research assumes that reality and history are human-created, thus knowable” (p. 141). I also chose to conduct interviews because it was the most efficient way of gathering a great deal of data. Furthermore, conducting interviews as a means to do preliminary research on the department would ideally launch into more group-centered activities. For example, focus groups and more creative gatherings to develop ideas and identify key issues could potentially follow in a future research project.

Procedures

Initial contact with potential subjects was via email. I then scheduled a time to meet with the subjects in order to fill out the consent forms (see Appendix II) and conduct the interview. Contingent on whether all of the participants were comfortable being audiotaped, the interviews were audio taped in private, locked study rooms in Odegaard Undergraduate Library at the University of Washington, and were later transcribed. Although I did not anticipate major adverse effects or discomfort stemming

from the interviews that I conducted, I gave subjects contact information to the Human Subjects Division on the University of Washington campus and to the Women Studies Department in case they had concerns or questions following the interviews.

I was the only person with access to the audiotaped interviews and transcribed them in private. Once the transcripts were completed and analyzed, I destroyed them at the end of this project (June 2004). Interview audiotapes and transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet in a secure location, until the transcription process was complete, and were then destroyed. I was the only one with access to the interview material. No identifying names were linked to the tapes or transcriptions.

Subjects

I approached the potential subjects via email during the winter quarter of 2004 to set up personal meeting times in order to explain the purpose of my research and ask for their consent to an interview that would take from an hour to an hour and a half. I contacted nine students, current and past (having graduated no more than five years prior to the time of the study), between 21 and 43 years of age.

INTERPRETATIONS

As I stated in my recruitment section, because my goal was to have the most diversely dense subject pool, I organized information according to the ethnicity, race, age range and sexuality of the subjects. However, having a complex grouping system will be unnecessary due to the small number of subjects (9). Following the Freirean “problem-posing” approach that Maguire (1987, p. 144) outlines, I reviewed the interviews that I

conducted in order to determine if generative themes emerged. I expected that the elements of most importance within the transcripts would be the themes of responses to interview questions, however, the subjects brought me to broader ways of approaching issues within the department and the information that they offered often coincided with each other's ideas. Furthermore, participants offered up many suggestions for fostering community.

Demographics

I interviewed a total of nine women; five undergraduates and four alumni. Their ages ranged from 21-43 years of age. Below I offer more specific profiles of each participant, which includes: age, sexual orientation, year graduated, race and ethnicity. Major themes are outlined and supported by the participant's own words. Please note that the names used are pseudonyms. I will not be using any religious, classroom/event markers that occurred within the department, or specific schools that people are now affiliated with as to ensure the confidentiality of each participant. In addition, the responses to demographic questions are according to how each participant identified *themselves*. My decision to not fit participant responses into uniform categories is for ethical reasons and to privilege them as human beings with unique self-identifications.

“Steve”

Age: 23 Year Graduated: 2004 Race/Ethnicity: White/Caucasian
Sexual Orientation: Queer

“Jane”

Age: 31 Year Graduated: 1999 Race/Ethnicity: Indo-Pacific-Islander-American
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual

“Elise”

Age: 43 Year Graduated: 2004 Race/Ethnicity: White
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual

“Gretchen”

Age: 26 Year Graduated: 2004 Race/Ethnicity: White
Sexual Orientation: No Answer

“Betty”

Age: 22 Year Graduated: 2004 Race/Ethnicity: White
Sexual Orientation: No Answer

“Katinka”

Age: 23 Year Graduated: 2003 Race/Ethnicity: Other/African
American/Caucasian/Cherokee Sexual Orientation: Queer/Odd/Strange

“Isis”

Age: 23 Year Graduated: 2002 Race/Ethnicity: White Girl
Sexual Orientation: Queer/Dyke

“Elena”

Age: 28 Year Graduated: 2003 Race/Ethnicity: Hispanic
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual

“Felicia”

Age: 21 Year Graduated: 2004 Race/Ethnicity: American/Eastern European/Human
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual

Patterns That Emerged From the Interviews

The students had very similar conceptions of what the make-up of a community generally looks like. However, a lack of a general meeting space in the department (aside from the departmental computer lab), and a lack of time that they have to commit, were issues that undergraduates, graduates, and faculty seem to face, given the pressures of academia and bureaucratic-related power relations. Divisions between undergraduate students were also a common focus; hierarchical relationships between faculty, graduate students and undergraduates were also mentioned. Students continually spoke of the desired role of alumni and the grueling individualistic nature of the thesis process.

Furthermore, and most significantly, students who had very specific ideas about how community could best be facilitated often cited their direct experiences with communities outside of the department. A general sense of the important role of addressing difference within our department was also an area of overlap.

Defining Community

When defining community, some students that I interviewed shared general qualifications such as: a grouping of people that share a common space, values, beliefs, friendships and so on. Additionally, some students felt that community is a means to give and get emotional and academic support; it is a space to develop relationships based on trust and the general belief that views/feelings can be expressed with one another. Moreover, some students felt that in a community there is also a certain level of engagement and dialogue—especially within an academic community. Regardless of how much importance students placed on the recognition of differences between community members, many participants heavily focused on finding commonalities in order to facilitate community.

Much like what Chinn (2001) describes as the qualifying marks of community, students that I interviewed focused on what I perceived to be an *ideally* functioning community. Cohesiveness and the desire for the diversity of the department to flourish and be vocal were all qualities within the community that they desired. However, the general conception was that the department was not meeting their definitions of a community, however idealistic they were. Variations occurred, on the other hand, when

students began citing reasons as to *why* the department was in this predicament and how the problems could be overcome.

Personal Experiences and Reflections on Community of Participants

When defining community, all but one of the participants continually mentioned the role that other community experiences had on their perceptions of what community should be. These communities ranged from graduate schools, other departments within our university, communities that they grew up in or currently live in, different schools while studying abroad and religious communities. All of them had an important impact on either their personal or academic lives.

In talking about the difference between *Felicia's* experiences in our department and her religious/cultural upbringing, she mentioned that the concept of “safety” in her cultural community differed greatly in comparison with Women Studies. For example, she stated that in the department, “safety” is achieved by explicitly having conversations about creating a “safe space” and the avoidance of offending people and their opinions. However, in her culture, while they didn't explicitly discuss “safety”, she always felt that it was safe to have a differing opinion and to express that opinion. She remarked, “I don't know if that's the presence of community that created that safety or whether it's just a cultural difference.”

Steve repeatedly compared her experiences in the Comparative History of Ideas Department (CHID) in relation to her Women Studies experience. She explained that she somehow got onto the CHID listserv and quickly noticed differences between CHID and the Women Studies department: “Their conference room has couches in it and they have

a coffee maker and a T.V...they have potlucks regularly and there are big events/ they invite me to all of their gatherings and they have dinner at their professor's houses. Like Kari Tupper does a lot of CHID dinners, not Women Studies dinners, CHID dinners.”

Many of the participants highlighted times when they felt heard, and the importance that people in their other communities place on allowing for multiple voices to be heard. It is here that I must begin to ask what is perhaps preventing the department from modeling the kind of ideal communities that participants reflected on.

Perceived Barriers to Community Building

“I feel like I’m not feminist/radical/postmodern enough...”

Similar to what Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) discuss, the multiple feminisms and experiences that women face is reflected in a common discussion/frustration among those that I interviewed and other students. The desire for students to avoid essentialist tendencies, and the feeling that some participants expressed as being “not feminist enough” arose repeatedly. The reasons for these barriers, as *Jane* suggested are,

[b]ecause it's [Women Studies] so interdisciplinary...literally there's no party line, overtly. Because Women Studies historically is still a young discipline, there's a lot of people who feel like they have to prove themselves...that Women Studies is real, that it's really an academic discipline, that it's rigorous, it's not easy. So there is a lot of defensiveness that comes along with being in Women Studies.

Furthermore, *Felicia* points to the lack of emphasis on what Women Studies undergraduates (or feminists in general) have in common. She felt that over-generalizing and universalizing have become a big fear for feminists. For example, she described it as “It's [like it's] the worst thing you can do, and I've talked with some girls in the

department and they've talked about how they have no desire, [that] they even fear...it makes them uncomfortable to even talk about finding commonalities amongst feminists.”

Invisible Administrators and Closed Doors

For some students, concerns arose regarding the lack of faculty involvement in undergraduate student's academic lives. Emphasis was placed on the common lack of acknowledgement from professors, and frequently not even being able to identify who they are. Time and again I heard accounts that many research subjects didn't even know who Judy Howard, the Chair of the Women Studies Department was; in addition, there was a general mystery and sense of resistance from faculty members and staff in the main office. Citing the physical structure and the overall feel of the department, *Katinka* mentioned, “A closed door can say so much, I'm not saying that everyone has to have their doors open all the time...they have a lot of stuff going on and they're very busy; but just knowing that you can go and talk to somebody if you're having a problem or if you have a question or you want some words of wisdom, that that option is available.”

Shor (1996) describes the physical reality of the rooms in which he taught his community college courses and the barriers his students faced: “Classroom furniture helps discipline students into a status quo of inequality. The socialization into inequality is an environmental outcome of the look, sound, and feel of the place as well as a pedagogical outcome of an uncritical, anti-dialogic curriculum which silences discussions of class, among other central issues” (p.11). Speaking to issues that Shor brings up, *Elise* points out the “tones” that she feels departments have, and the ability to gain a sense of whether they are helpful and welcoming to students or not. She stated, “There's

definitely a hierarchy there, there's like the invisible administrators who decide everything that happens and then there's students who are trying to find out what we're supposed to do. It does not feel unified.”

In almost all of the interviews, on the other hand, Professor Shirley Yee was mentioned as having an important impact on the atmosphere of the department. A reason cited for this by students is her gesture of an open door at all times. Students also pointed to Professor Yee's general approachability in and outside of the department. As a result of literally and figuratively 'shut doors', students like *Elena* stated, “Undergraduate work is undervalued. Shirley Yee is the only one who has an open door policy.” The participants often mentioned a common acknowledgement of the workload and stresses that faculty members face, however.

Creating Buy-In and Earning vs. Buying a Degree

Looking back on community in the context of Sergiovanni's (1994) further development of “*gemeinschaft of the mind*”, or community of the mind, he focuses on relationships that are formed through a shared understanding of group values or goals as a marker of community. It is important to note that, within the context of the department, many students that I interviewed felt that there were barriers to getting to that common knowledge and acceptance of shared goals, because of a lack of seeing the purpose of coming together and determining what those shared values or goals are. Chinn (2001) points out that once a group of people defines what their purpose for gathering is, values and beliefs related to that purpose would naturally be revealed.

Elise pointed to the need for openness to having your views and perceptions of others challenged to truly build community. She explained, “I don’t think that can work unless you have a higher purpose in mind, you have to have a really good reason for coming together. Because it’s uncomfortable to be challenged and it’s uncomfortable to accept other people who are different from you.” Furthering the idea of having a need for a higher purpose so that people will get together, *Felicia* mentioned the importance of “buy-in”, or interest, in the formation of a community. She explained, “The more environment that’s created for people to get to know each other and just form human friendships and bonds—that just creates more buy-in for people to feel like there’s a community, and they’re going to want things to go smoothly...to make everyone feel comfortable and feel accepted.”

According to *Steve*, another result to having a sense of community and “earning a degree” from a university is the friendships that come from it. She explains, “You can either earn a degree or you can buy a degree, and when you feel like you’re buying your degree, then you just take classes and you don’t actually build on it.” That building, *Steve* adds, “Facilitates a sort of comradery that can be carried with you throughout the rest of your life”.

Other participants like *Isis* talked about the importance of classroom dynamics, and the subsequent effect it has on student involvement. She expanded with, “A student who goes to class and actually feels like they’re being heard...they’re way more likely to show up to a meeting that’s posted on ewomen [the Women Studies listserv].” Furthermore, *Betty* explained that having a sense of ownership of education is essential to creating community. Students addressing hierarchies that occur in and outside of the

classroom with professors, she thought, would shed light on reasons that people might be reluctant to speak up and participate. She added, “On an undergraduate level, it’s definitely helpful to have a community to talk about things with and to get that support, and there’s also people going through what you’re going through and pointing you in directions you wouldn’t otherwise find on your own.”

The role of an advisor

Many participants identified that the advisor in the department is in a unique position as mediator between undergraduates and faculty. Also, because the advisor position is primarily opened up to Women Studies graduate students, the advisor offers a connection between graduate students and undergraduates as well.

Throughout the interviews, students continually mentioned experiences with the previous advisor, Tamara Myers, whose position was terminated in the spring of 2003. When discussing the general feeling that *Elise* got from the department, she said, “I don’t think it’s the radical space that I would like it to be, you know, we read about this radicalism in Women Studies, but I do not see it in our department. I might meet an individual student...like Tamara [Myers], she is the embodiment of feminist radicalism. I just like that in leaders and professors and they can be something to aspire to, and I’m not getting that kind of inspiration from our department.” Another student, *Katinka*, felt that Tamara Myers’ welcoming and positive attitude made a big impression on her entering the department. She explained, “Tamara [Myers] was great, and I only got to know her for a brief time and she’s an example of a great advisor...when I met with her I

was like, wow, this could be great! I get a really good positive vibe from her, and she's just genuinely interested in where your head is at—in what you're doing.”

The advising position was also cited as being important because it's a way to promote Women Studies to interested students, because the advisor is the first person that people meet when entering into the department. In the eyes of *Gretchen*, “The advising position promotes community.” Furthermore, *Steve* mentioned that the advisor is often the only clearly identified member of the department that the students feel connected to. She states, “I think that was probably one of the big things about Tamara [Myers] leaving, is that we all felt like the carpet had been taken out from under us—because we all knew Tamara [Myers].” *Steve* also felt that Tamara was one of the only people that she knew in the department for many years.

While many students saw the position of the advisor as a community builder, one participant, *Betty*, mentioned a tension in the department after the dismissal of Tamara Myers. She stated, “I've noticed that this year, there seemed to be a lot of assumptions going around about the way people felt about the decision making in the department.” *Betty* also mentioned a general sense of defensiveness that the department had about the new advisor, Kristina Knoll's position. She explained, “Stuff like that is not effective community building because there were hurt feelings and not a space to address it, and then I think that the students felt hurt, too, by the faculty.” *Betty* also pointed to how she sees the advisor as an advocate for the students, and the protectiveness that the department had around the new advisor's position made it almost impossible for students to voice their concerns and issues with the transition.

Regardless of the issues that other students have faced with the transition from Tamara Myers to Kristina Knoll, the new advisor, students like *Gretchen* felt like Kristina Knoll offers an informal and welcoming space. Moreover, with the advisor's role of organizing the Women Studies Community in Colloquia class, she felt like it would further community-building opportunities. Overall, the advising position was seen as important by many of the participants.

Diversity in the department

The role of addressing the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the individuals that make up the department, especially given the interdisciplinary nature of our department, was also an important issue that the participants acknowledged. If we look at Orner's (1997) views on addressing diversity, it is clear that it's important to look at the "Other" that is marginalized within us and in other people. In addition, Shields (2001) points out that differences between individuals should be seen as beneficial to creating a community that is gathered around the differences that each person brings to the table. However, how can this be fleshed out in a university setting?

Marino (1997) advocates a focus on difference, but also "connectedness". She writes,

Because if you advocate difference for the sake of difference you fall into the category of rugged individualist. To me being different in a creative way means that you're willing to connect your difference with other people's differences. That can be a paradoxical connection—that people would want to be clear about their different positions, where their differences are located, and also have a wish to figure things out collaboratively, collectively (p. 46).

Briefly outlining the power that diversity brings to the group, Chinn (2001) writes, "The power of diversity encourages creativity, values alternative views, and encourages

flexibility. The expression of dissenting views is expected and encouraged” (p. 16). In addition, all points of view would ideally be integrated into decision-making.

Not one participant felt that there were any drawbacks to talking about diversity and valuing it within the department; in fact it was almost laughable to consider *not* having diverse opinions in the department heard. Students like *Felicia* mentioned ways to acknowledge the diversity in the department. For example, she states, “Again, a way to embrace diversity is to acknowledge what all of those differences have in common, what’s the goal? What’s the common vision, and then making sure that that common vision is not imposing on what the differences are.” Moreover, students like *Jane* mentioned the benefits that diversity brings to the department. She stated, “You want this infinite diversity so that you can grow and think about things that you wouldn’t have thought about.” However, there were times where she felt that her desire for diverse opinions and people was not reflected by students in the department. In trying to explain her lack of connecting to other students in the department, *Jane* wondered, “Is this a race thing? Is it because I’m brown and everybody else is white, is that why nobody talks to me?” She also mentioned that school is a place where we’re being trained certain skills and that community based learning is an important aspect of Women Studies.

Furthermore, because community is a big part of feminist theory and what many people will be doing in their careers, it’s important to start modeling those behaviors that celebrate diverse opinions and experiences. It’s important, however, to not hold some positions higher than others. *Elena* warned, “There is an issue of people thinking that gender always comes first and ignoring other factors like race or sexuality.” She also mentions that we need to be careful how we talk about people that are different than us.

For example, *Elena* said, “Women of color are often talked about in relation to oppression”; thus ignoring that not everyone lives within Western feminist rules and different ways that women can have power. *Elena* also stated that talking and communicating is extremely important if we want to understand each other. She explains, “I’m not the last word on [Hispanic people], and I’m open to talking about it. But don’t risk thinking that it applies to everyone. People really have to avoid that, because you can’t put race and gender on a list like abortion issues, or ‘women’s issues’.”

Undergraduates, faculty, graduate students and alumni as resources

When addressing the role that undergraduates within the department can take in facilitating community, many participants felt that undergraduates are capable of offering tremendous resources to each other. As *Betty* explained, “It doesn’t seem like a lot of the undergraduates are aware of the possibility to establish a community, or establish themselves in the community.” She also stressed the needs for students to recognize that they ultimately have the ownership over their education, she stated, “That this is my life and this is what I want to take from this experience and this is what I have to offer this experience. It’s the reciprocity that is there, but people don’t take advantage of it because there’s not a lot of room for it.” *Isis* also offered up advice to students discouraged by situations in the department with, “Just keep talking, we just have to keep speaking up, it’s because of speaking up that we got what we got. And it’s because of speaking up that we are where we are. Had we not, we wouldn’t have had Tamara for another year, had we not we wouldn’t have had 299 [Women Studies Community and Colloquia], we wouldn’t have the curriculum changes that we did have.”

In terms of graduate students, almost all of the participants stated that they didn't even know who most of the graduate students were, unless they took a class that was taught by them. Many participants saw graduate students as possible advocates or mediators between undergraduates and faculty members. Furthermore, aside from alumni, the students saw graduate students as being able to understand *both* the positions that undergraduates and faculty members are in.

Faculty members were also seen as excellent resources for students in the department. *Elise* imagined, "What would happen if we gave the department more money and professors had more time to spend with students? It emphasizes individuality, the individual focus, not the community." She also mentioned her desire to have a nurturing relationship with faculty members. Going back to the power of an open door, *Katinka* explains that she desires not just the physical presence of faculty members, but also, she stated, "[t]he full mental capacity to give you advice or steer you in the right direction or just to listen." There seemed to be a general disappointment from the participants over not being able to fully utilize faculty resources.

Resources that alumni could potentially offer, many participants felt that staying connected to the department would be beneficial to everyone, but they didn't know how. *Katinka*, an alumni, felt that, "Alumni even reaching people just joining the Women Studies department or going through the thesis process, and having them be there. Just having a relationship with someone that is on the outside, I think that's pretty important." However, *Isis* explained the difficulty of keeping students in the department once they've graduated by stating, "Why should the alumni care about a department that didn't care about them at the time?"

Unexpected surprises that surfaced from the interviews

I didn't expect students to continually make a case for reasons that faculty/student relations are in the shape that they're in. I didn't expect so much sympathy. When I spoke to another undergraduate about this issue, she asked, "Do you think it's because they're women?", pointing out a passive-aggressive tendency for women to, when being critical, still focus on positive or understanding aspects of the issue. Also, I did not expect *Jane's* answer regarding barriers to community building to be because of students and a general "cliquey" feel to the department. While I agree this can be true even today, she felt like student interactions was her biggest barrier to community, while in her eyes the faculty/student relations were just fine in 1999. A majority of the students that I interviewed who are still in the department, however, felt that student-faculty relationships were more strained than student-student relationships.

Suggestions from participants

Participant responses to my request for ways that people in the department could help facilitate community varied greatly. Responses ranged anywhere from the need of having informal gathering spaces, to opening lines of communication and cooperation and commitment to community, to multiple listservs (department sponsored, and non-department sponsored) to increase dialogue. Potlucks, field trips, or having a space for undergraduates within the department to gather at all were also important issues. In addition, many students thought it was important for the faculty to play a role in sponsoring departmental events where everyone: faculty, undergraduates, graduate

students and alumni can gather. Increasing the opportunities for students to gather for the purpose of getting to know each other, rather than explicitly “community building” activities, was also continually brought up by students.

Included with the suggestions that students made, *Steve* mentioned the need for students to support each other, as well as student panels, for example, panels where students of color can gather and discuss issues in the department. In addition, this panel could make suggestions to the department about the way classes are taught with regard to certain issues that are brought up around race and difference; and ideally the department would welcome such suggestions and activities that students take on.

Also, many students wanted the thesis process to be addressed by the department and possibly changed to better meet students’ needs. *Elise*, for example stated, “The experience within the department is antithetical to what we’re being taught, especially regarding the thesis process.” Experiences differed as to whether students felt like they became better acquainted with other students through the thesis process. *Gretchen* also felt that, due to the fact that it’s one of the opportunities for students to be in a class with Women Studies students; time should therefore be carved out so that graduation planning and other issues can be discussed freely.

However, when trying to offer suggestions for the department, *Isis* stated, “The question is huge. How do you move people to act? It’s hard to talk about changes being implemented when what really needs to change is attitude and willingness to do it.” She also stated that, “It’d be one thing if space was actually our problem, and [there were] all of these people that really wanted community but space was a problem...all these people

that really wanted community would get it done.” In short, it is as simple and complicated as physical space and the commitment to community to her.

The most detailed responses to laying out how community can be facilitated came from *Isis* and *Felicia*. According to *Isis*, everyone *deliberately* creating it can best facilitate community. Each student, faculty member and staff member has to know what community means to the department and where each person is positioned in relation to that definition of community. It needs to be organic and from the inside out, where questions are asked, and people feel heard. Creating community beyond a stated commitment to community building requires an action plan with opportunities for each group to have a part in that, i.e., students could organize retreats and teachers could leave doors open to students. Then, having constant talks about the goals of the department collectively will ideally create a self-sustaining community—even as students move in and out of the department.

According to *Felicia*, in order to create a more inclusive community requires sacrificing homogeneity and harder work to create a sense of community. Commonalities would more likely be found within academic interests and politics, as opposed to similar backgrounds. There also needs to be a focus on group values such as the desire to focus on women’s issues and what that necessarily implies. Furthermore, finding a common cause or goal and getting to know group members can help create buy-in to the group.

Regardless of the different approaches, each student focused on the need to create common goals, the need to know the group members, and the commitment to facilitating that community. The need for spaces to gather, more time to commit to community, and

more opportunities to get to know fellow community members were all listed as important aspects of community to students. However, creating a community that will last, as seen by *Isis* and *Felicia*, takes more of a philosophical understanding of community in order for it to survive.

Addressing Power within the university

It became clear to me that I couldn't approach the topic of community without addressing the hierarchical relationships among members of the department, as well as power differentials within the university as a whole. Even though it seemed odd to me that I should have to address these issues in relation to the department, it became increasingly problematic to risk overlooking it. For example, Maguire (1987) addresses that even though a group may advocate for certain sectors of the oppressed they may, "[h]ave little actual commitment to power sharing, community-based participation, or democratic organizational structures and procedures" (p. 46). Furthering ideas about what bureaucratic institutions can do to the people inside of them, Horton (1998) writes, "One of the lessons I've learned about bureaucracies is that although they are not made up of evil people, they can do something bad to good people" (p. 146).

Isis also identified problems with a small number of students trying to facilitate community. She explains, "Some well-intentioned people who want to get community started have a lot to say, but you can't top-down a community-building project...it needs to come from the inside and that means all the way inside, so that the diverse interests and goals that exist naturally inside any community gets naturally exposed."

Suggestions for Future research

At the conclusion of a yearlong research project that could span years, I realize that I am unable to get the breadth of knowledge that feminist discourse on community, specifically women's communities, has to offer. If I could backtrack and add to the literature review, I would have focused more on the issues that Women Studies Departments face in large research institutions nation-wide. Furthermore, I would have also looked more critically into conceptions of women's communities and the uniqueness of a gender-focused education on a more theoretical level. My lack of experience researching and analyzing data outside of literature reviews is also a limitation to my research findings. As I got more and more immersed in the data that I collected from all nine of my incredibly thoughtful subjects, I realized that I would never be able to do justice to all of their ideas. This is a testament to the need for more communication and a space for a multiplicity of voices in our department. Again, I would love to see more department-centered research happen in Women Studies. Furthermore, Marino (1997) suggests, "We need languages of resistance, but we also need to imagine change, we need languages of transformation. If we cannot even conceive of non-manipulative communication, or non-exploitative relationships, we sabotage ourselves from changing things, we may feel discouraged from complaining. When discontent is not expressed, it can easily be claimed not to exist"(pg. 128). If a language of resistance were thought to be possible in the department by undergraduates, I believe that more students would begin to imagine how changes can be implemented—and where they fit into those changes.

CONCLUSION

When I first started this project I felt isolated, discouraged and in need of affirmation for how I felt about my experiences within the department. Just by merely *talking* with as few as nine women from the department, I felt a sense of community that was just waiting to happen. Yes, periodically students come together in solidarity over certain issues or organize around projects or events, but I longed for something more meaningful and self-sustaining. The existence of student voice within a Western academic framework is extremely important to my education. My conversations with students suggested a need for open lines of communication, for participation and nurturing within academia. Marino cites the role that women can assume of an “ethic of power”, which can create a powerful location for social movements and mobilization. However, there is a power that is created that, as Marino adds, “Is not necessarily what those in power always want to happen” (128).

How is it that so many students that I interviewed felt like their experiences were so antithetical to what they were being taught and what they aspired to be? Such limits on educational growth must be further examined. Imagining a different department takes questioning, speaking up, and as Marino describes, “collective dreaming”. This “collective dreaming” is a space where each student and teacher is free to dream of how changes can happen within the department; as well as throughout their entire educational careers. It is important for students to not hide those dreams away at the close of educational chapters such as graduation, or in the conclusion of a senior thesis.

When imagining what kind of a research project this could be, panic and fear plagued the formation of many of my ideas and choices that I thought I would have to

make. What if students said exactly what I was thinking about power struggles in the department? What if I was forced to say things that made people feel uncomfortable? Would I only be adding to the problems and become a source of more division? Eventually, I began to understand how powerful asking questions can be—how talking about problems can begin to change the landscape of our department and create more ownership within the department. A conversation that I had with Judy Howard, the Chair of the department, comes to mind. A group of fellow students and I met to discuss undergraduate peer facilitation in the Women Studies Community in Colloquia class. Exhausted, I asked, “Isn’t it okay for the department to explicitly value student participation?” Judy smiled warmly and answered with, “You’re just trying to be a feminist within a bureaucracy”. That’s where our discussion ended and my near total disconnection from the department began. I was hurt and discouraged then, but realize now that I never addressed the powerlessness that I felt as a student. My work and effort was undervalued, and no amount of empathy could prove any different to me. Times in my education where I’ve been blessed to meet a radical-feminist advisor like Tamara Myers, or other powerful educators such as Cricket Keating, has shown me that creating community and breaking down powerful roadblocks of coercion, while difficult, is always a worthwhile struggle.

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APPENDIX I
SAMPLE E-MAIL TO POTENTIAL SUBJECTS

Hello,

My name is Anna Heaton and I am an undergraduate in the Women Studies department. I am currently working on my Women Studies thesis, which addresses the concept of community among undergraduate Women Studies students at the University of Washington. I hope to learn more about the importance that students place in the quality of community within the Women Studies Department, if at all. Furthermore, I am interested in what factors promote or inhibit community building and/or the maintaining of community relations. I would like to interview a variety of Women Studies undergraduates, alumni and present students, from the department to serve as an initial assessment of undergraduate departmental concerns. I would be interested in talking with you about your experiences within the Women Studies department. If you would consider being interviewed, please reply to this email. I cannot assure the confidentiality of any information sent by e-mail.

Thank you,

Anna Heaton

APPENDIX II
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM
It depends on what you mean by community: Barriers to community building
among undergraduate Women Studies students at the University of Washington

Investigator:

Anna M. Heaton

Student

Women Studies Department

Telephone (206) 985-9861

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Investigator's Statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I will ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent'.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

I want to better understand the concept of community among undergraduate Women Studies students at the University of Washington. I hope to learn what barriers exist surrounding building/maintaining community relations. I would like to interview a variety of Women Studies undergraduates, alumni and present students, from the department to serve as an initial assessment of undergraduate departmental concerns. Though you may not directly benefit from the interview, the research will be available to future students within the Women Studies department, including faculty, staff and graduate students. Ideally, the end product of my research will add to the building of community and undergraduate-faculty/undergraduate-graduate student communication. Furthermore, the specific study of particular undergraduate Women Studies students at the University of Washington may add to the increasing body of knowledge about Women Studies programs and the challenges they face.

PROCEDURES

If you choose to be in this study, I would like to interview you about your experiences in the Women Studies Department at the University of Washington and the importance, if any, that you place on community and community building within your department. The interview will last about one hour and will focus on how you see community within your department. For example, I will ask you, "How do you define/understand community in the context of the Women Studies Department?" "Is community an important aspect of academic life?" "What factors promote community development?" You do not have to answer every question.

I would like to audiotape your interview so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you give me. If you agree to participate in the study, however, you may

either accept or decline to be audio taped. If you consent to be audio taped, only I will have access to the audiotapes that will be kept in a secure location. I will then transcribe the interview tape and destroy the tape within three weeks of the interview. All links to your identity will also be destroyed along with the audiotapes three weeks after the interview is conducted.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the section below. Some people feel self-conscious when they are audio taped.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. Information about you is confidential. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your real name nor will I include any distinguishing characteristics.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact Anna M. Heaton at the telephone number or email listed on the previous page. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division: (206) 543-0098.

Signature of investigator	Printed Name	Date
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Subject's Statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research I can ask Anna M. Heaton, the investigator. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

I give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview as described above in this consent form

Yes _____ No _____

I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of subject	Printed Name	Date
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Copies to: Investigator's file & Subject

Appendix III

Research Questions

1. How do you define/understand community?
2. How do you define/understand community within the context of the Women Studies Department?
3. What is the purpose of community, and is/should it be an important aspect of academic life?
4. In what ways can community best be facilitated within an academic setting?
5. In what ways can community be developed so as to be truly open to diverse interests and goals?
6. Is addressing the diverse background, values and relationships within the department important to strengthening community?
7. What factors promote community development? What barriers work against community development?
8. If there are barriers to community development, why do you think students have encountered those barriers?
9. What do you think is necessary to improve community relations within our department? How can such changes be implemented?
10. What role can undergraduate students take in creating the community they desire? In addition, what role can alumni, graduate students and faculty take in creating community?